
So far in the Lenten Journey we are in, we have learned how to uncover a vital and energized faith in the community through the Beatitudes in the first book of Matthew's Gospel (3:1-7:29). Last Sunday we saw how this faith leads to action as we examine the criteria Jesus used to select his first mission team—the Twelve, in the second book of Matthew's Gospel (8:1-11:1). Today we will look at the third book of Matthew's Gospel (11:2-13:53), particularly Matthew 13 which forms a bridge from Jesus' ministry in Galilee to his long-march to Jerusalem, the cross, and the resurrection by providing the third major teaching of Jesus—The Kingdom of Heaven.

This kingdom is not defined in geographical, spatial, physical, temporal, or territorial. It is not a domain, but the dominion of God. It means a condition of the heart and mind and will where God is Lord of all. Jesus does not teach that the kingdom will come suddenly. Instead, Jesus teaches in parables about the *secrets* or the *mysteries* of the kingdom. In his teaching of the kingdom, Jesus spoke four parables to the crowds first, and then three to his disciples.

Here I would like to stop for a moment to get your feedback. I have prepared three sermons today: (1) a \$100 sermon that lasts five minutes, (2) a \$50 sermon that lasts fifteen minutes, and (3) a \$1 sermon that lasts a full hour. Which one shall I deliver in this morning? ☺

- Parables for the Crowds
 1. **13:3-9, 18-23** **The Parable of Sower**
 2. **13:24-30, 36-42** **The Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat**
 3. **13:31-32** **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**
 4. **13:33** **The Parable of the Yeast**

- Parables for the Disciples
 5. **13:44** **The Parable of the Treasure**
 6. **13:45-46** **The Parable of the Pearl**
 7. **13:47-50** **The Parable of the Net**

Due to the limited time this Sunday, we will review only three parables for the disciples. A primary motivation for coming into kingdom of heaven is joy which is also the theme for the fourth Sunday of Lent—*Laetare* Sunday.

Like last Sunday, I will throw some questions for you to ponder. So, please put your thinking cap on!

The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl (13:44-46)

Let me read these two parables.

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Both parables involve men who find something valuable and do whatever it takes to have it. One man finds a treasure by accident. He was not looking for anything, but finds something of great value. In the second parable, however, a man searches intently for a pearl of great value.

With these two stories the point is made that the gospel of the kingdom is available for everyone who recognizes its value. It is there for those who stumble on to it almost by accident (the Gentiles), and for those who have spent their life in a spiritual quest (the Jews). The only requirement is to recognize the value of what is found.

How was it that you came to know Christ? Did you stumble on to the Christian faith? Or did you find Jesus and his kingdom after a long, careful search?

The two men are more than happy to pay the price for the treasure and the pearl. They change their life priority because of the *joy* in finding something of great value. **What part did joy play in your coming to know Christ? How joyful are you?**

Let me share another way of reading this parable. The story begins with the kingdom small and hidden—but it does not remain hidden. The traditional interpretation of these parables is that when we hear the message of the kingdom, we should be so full of joy that we are willing to give up everything else as we elaborate earlier. That is true.

But we can never “buy” the kingdom or earn our salvation. Rather, in these parables (like other parables in this chapter 13), it may be that **Jesus is the main character**. He is the one who sees hidden treasure in his people (the field), and gives everything he has to purchase his founding treasure—YOU and ME! Jesus considers you and me as the treasure... as the pearl. In order to earn you and me to his kingdom, he gave up everything for you and me... even his life. He died for you and me to offer the joy of salvation! In this sense, you and I are God’s kingdom!

The Parable of the Net (13:47-50)

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is a very brief parable of the last judgment. ***This parable places its emphasis on the end: the final judgment of God.*** The Hebrew word for judgment means *to separate*, or, *to discriminate*. The Greek word for judgment (*krisis*) means, literally, *to divide* or *to separate*.

The kingdom of Heaven captures both good and bad people. The message is given to both. They live together and are given a chance to change and grow. God loves both and gives time to adjust their lives to be good. Eventually the time comes when judgment is made, and God keeps the good only. That is what the kingdom of God is like.

When Jesus described the kingdom, he did not describe the world after his return. Rather, he described the world here and now... in which we hear the gospel, choose to respond, and choose to be faithful. Today is the day to experience the kingdom of heaven. Today is the day to adjust our life priority for the kingdom sake.

Let us enter the kingdom of heaven by accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Let us stay in the kingdom by being faithful to our God and bear fruit for the kingdom by restoring the joy of salvation in our heart, mind, and soul. The kingdom of heaven is here and now. Amen.