

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 16: More Parables of the Kingdom -- Matthew 13:24-58

If the parable of the sower asked what kind of soil you are, the rest of Matthew 13 asks a bigger question still: what is this kingdom Jesus keeps talking about? He has come announcing that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, but it does not look like anything His countrymen expected. They were watching for a conquering king, a throne in Jerusalem, the boot of Rome thrown off. Instead Jesus tells stories about weeds in a wheat field, a tiny seed, a woman's hidden yeast, a buried treasure, a single pearl, and a fishing net dragged up on the shore. Seven snapshots, each opening a small window onto the most important reality in the universe.

Read them together and a portrait emerges that overturns our instincts. The kingdom does not arrive with armies and headlines; it starts small and grows quietly, like a mustard seed that becomes a tree or yeast that works invisibly through the dough. It does not produce a pure, perfected society overnight; wheat and weeds grow together in the same field until the harvest, and the dragnet hauls in good fish and bad alike. And it is worth more than anything else you own; a man sells everything he has for one treasure, one pearl, and counts himself the winner of the bargain.

This is good news and sobering news at once. Good news, because the kingdom is not a fragile experiment waiting to fail; it is the present, growing reign of Christ, established in His church and advancing in the world whether the headlines notice or not. Sobering news, because the field stays mixed until the end. Jesus is honest that there will be tares among the wheat, that not everyone who looks like a citizen of the kingdom truly is one, and that a day of separation is coming when the angels will gather out of His kingdom all that causes sin.

So slow down with these little stories. Do not let their familiarity rob them of their power. Jesus is telling us what He is building, how it grows, what it is worth, and how it ends. He is also gently warning us against the version of the kingdom we keep trying to manufacture, an earthly, political, here-and-now empire of our own design. The kingdom He describes is greater than that, quieter than that, and more precious than that. The question each of these parables finally puts to you is simple: is it worth everything to you?

Group Discussion: Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven with a string of small, surprising pictures: weeds in wheat, a tiny seed, hidden yeast, buried treasure, a pearl, a net. Taken together, how is the kingdom Jesus describes different from the kind of kingdom most people, then and now, expect God to bring?

Personal Reflection: Jesus says a man found a treasure and "in his joy" sold all that he had to buy the field (v. 44). Be honest with yourself: does following Christ feel to you like joyfully trading up for something of supreme worth, or more like a duty you are reluctantly paying for? What does your answer reveal about how you actually value the kingdom?

Study Questions

1. In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus lets both grow together “until the harvest” and only then sends the reapers to separate them (vv. 24–30, 36–43). What is Jesus teaching about the mixed condition of His kingdom in this present age and about when and by whom the final separation will come?
2. The servants want to pull up the weeds immediately, but the master tells them to wait (vv. 28–30). Where are you tempted to take judgment into your own hands, to root out the people you have decided do not belong, rather than leaving final judgment to God?
3. The mustard seed and the leaven both picture something that begins almost invisibly and grows or spreads far beyond its small beginning (vv. 31–33). What is Jesus teaching about how the kingdom of God actually grows in the world?
4. Jesus pictures the kingdom growing quietly, like yeast a woman hides in flour until it works through the whole batch (v. 33). Where are you tempted to despise small, hidden faithfulness because it does not look impressive or produce immediate results?
5. The treasure in the field and the pearl of great price both lead a man to sell everything he has with joy (vv. 44–46). What is Jesus teaching about the true worth of the kingdom and about the kind of response it rightly demands?
6. Jesus says the man bought the treasure “in his joy” (v. 44). Where in your discipleship have you been counting the cost grudgingly rather than rejoicing in the surpassing worth of what you have found in Christ?

7. The parable of the net, like the wheat and tares, ends with a separation of the righteous and the wicked “at the end of the age,” with the angels carrying it out (vv. 47–50). What do these parables together teach about the reality of final judgment and the present mixed state of the visible kingdom?
8. Many in Jesus’ day, and many today, expect or even crave an earthly, political kingdom that Christ would set up by power and force. How can the picture of the kingdom in these parables guard your heart against confusing Christ’s reign with any earthly empire or political program?
9. Jesus comes home to Nazareth and is met not with faith but with offense; “they took offense at him,” and “he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief” (vv. 53–58). What does this account, set against these glorious kingdom parables, teach about the kingdom Christ is building, how a person actually enters and remains in it, and why familiarity and unbelief can shut us out of what He longs to do?
10. Look back across all seven parables and the visit to Nazareth. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to value His kingdom more highly, to trust His timing in judgment, or to receive Him with faith rather than offense this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Daniel 2:44, the God of heaven setting up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed; Mark 9:1, some standing there would see the kingdom of God come with power; Acts 2:36–47, the kingdom established as the church on the Day of Pentecost; Colossians 1:13, God transferring us into the kingdom of His beloved Son; Philippians 3:7–8, counting everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.