

Theme: - Parables of the Kingdom

These parables of the Kingdom, which I'm speaking about today all include the words, "the Kingdom of Heaven." And for the "Kingdom of Heaven" we could write "Kingdom of God." They are both interchangeable and refer to the same thing.

Verse 31 contains the parable of the mustard seed and contrasts its small beginnings with its eventual greatness emphasizing the power of God in action. And leads me straight into thinking about a small baby in a manger who grew up to be our Lord and Saviour who gave his life on the cross so that we might live and who became our great advocate before God in heaven.

However, this parable also offers hope and encouragement that small beginnings, and initial struggles will eventually amount to great outcomes. Like the small seed planted in good soil can bring about thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold, the parable of the Sower. Our growth as Christians starts with small steps and lasts a lifetime, and during that time there will be encouragements and setbacks, and it is often the setbacks which create the greatest growth.

But our mission to take the gospel to all nations still seems overwhelming, especially in the light of the dwindling numbers attending church in this country today, and our limited resources seem too few. But Jesus promises that the power of God's Holy Spirit makes everything possible. Indeed, the beginnings were small with just 12 disciples, and they were soon met with serious opposition, not only from individuals, but also from nations, and it is clear that Christianity today only exists through God's power. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 27 St Paul wrote, "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." It has been ordinary folk, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, who have passed their faith on from generation to generation.

Referring now to the parable of the yeast, when my children were young my wife Jill would share a large sack of flour with Gillian our neighbour and, long term member of our church when she lived in Sandhurst, and both Gillian and Jill used to make bread, buying fresh yeast from a local bakery. It only took a small quantity of yeast to make a large loaf, and if you knew that you would run out of yeast then you could save some of the leavened dough and use it to leaven even more dough. The point is that it only took a small quantity of yeast to make a large number of loaves; and it is the same with us; it only takes a small number of Christians to bring large numbers of people to Christ.

This parable encourages us, not to seclusion, but to involvement in the world. Leaven can do its work only when mixed into a large quantity of flour, and Christians can only bring other people to Christ if they mix with other people. You may say, "But I'm not an evangelist, I don't know enough to bring others to Christ; but most of us can at least ensure that our children, and if possible our grandchildren go to Sunday school and have a Bible

at home that they can read, and generally giving them encouragement to know Christ. And don't be discouraged when as teenagers they stop going to church, because one day what they learnt as children they may well treasure as adults.

We skip now to verse 44, which reads, "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." Verse 44 leads me to ask a question, and that is, who is this 'someone' who bought the field? Is he or she in fact an unknown person or could it possibly be Jesus talking about himself. In which case it was Jesus who found the hidden treasure, which of course is all of us, we are his treasure, and that the field he bought was the world, and that he had bought it from his old enemy Satan, who once tried to give it to him if he would only fall down and worshiped him. And of course, the price Jesus paid was everything he had, because it was his life he gave, Jesus gave his life to redeem the world. 1 Corinthians 6:20 reads, "For you were bought with a price."

And in verses 45 we read, "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. And in verse 46 we are told that finding one pearl of great value, the merchant went and sold all that he had, and bought the pearl." Verses 45 and 46 speak of a merchant who is looking for pearls and he finds one of great value; the question here is who is the merchant, Jesus leaves it up to us to put names to these two people.

In verse 44 I made Jesus the 'someone' who bought the world in order to have all of us, and now let us assume that it is us who is represented by the merchant, and therefore in this case the pearl is Christ. Now there is nothing more valuable than finding Christ, and surely once we have found him we would give everything we have to keep him, and hundreds of people have given, and continue to give everything they have which ultimately is their lives. Christ is the greatest treasure anybody can possibly have, so we need to stay as close to him as a child stays close to its mother. The point about verses 44 to 46 is that our love for Christ should measure up to Christ's love for us, because Christ's greatest treasure is us, and our greatest treasure is Christ. It was with joy, not duty, which drove Jesus to act in redeeming the world at the price of his own life, and who continues to redeem human beings today. Jesus did not sell everything to buy his treasure because of duty, but through joy and his love for us, and joy and love are two elements of the kingdom of heaven.

In presenting the Gospel, we would do well to emphasize the joy of the Good News of the gospel of Christ, not because we feel we have to but because of the joy of doing so. And that I suggest is also typical of our journey of faith in God, it is joy and love which will make our faith grow. Our faith starts with the discovery of Jesus and the Christian faith, and as we progress in our faith we begin to experience the joy of knowing Christ; and through our joy and love for Christ we are naturally compelled to talk to others about the joy we get from knowing Jesus.

The disciples also gave a price for following Jesus, because in their case the disciples left everything, their businesses, and in the case of St Peter his family, to follow Jesus; see Matthew chapter 4 verses 18 to 22. And Paul who wrote in Philippians chapter 3 verse 8 these words, “More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Verses 47 and 48 reads, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind, when it was full they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into the basket but threw out the bad.”

Jesus then goes on to say in verse 49, “So it will be at the end of the age.” The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous. So, while it is Jesus who catches people, it will be the angels, under the supervision of Christ, who will sort people out. See Matthew 25:31 which reads, “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him.” who will at the end of the age separate the Righteous from the others.

In villages around the Sea of Galilee, fishermen sorting their catch and discarding inedible fish and unwanted fish would be a common sight. Fishing nets gather undesirables as well as desirables into the net, but this parable tells us that this is God’s way. But we are not to judge other people, remember what Jesus said, “Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye.” See also Matthew chapter 25:31 to 46 which deals with the final judgement. We are not to judge because some undesirable people may well grow into disciples of Christ, and some who seemed promising in the beginning may well betray God in the end.

God does not make us responsible for keeping people out but delegates the separation of the evil from the righteous to the angels at the end of time. Our joyful commission must be to bring people into the church not to try and keep people out. Jesus’ great command is clear. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

And finally, please remember that we are all Christ’s treasure. And Christ is our treasure.

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