

THY KINGDOM COME

Pt 4: Kingdom Principles

Jesus came preaching, the gospel of the Kingdom. And he described the nature of that kingdom by telling stories. We all love stories. That's why we read books and watch movies. When people start telling stories, we give attention to that. Jesus came telling stories. We call them Parables. Jesus didn't invent this method of teaching, but he certainly perfected it. No body told stories quite like Jesus. And he would begin those stories with, "the kingdom of God is like," And with a story he would teach us what life in the kingdom is all about. Matthew 13 is a chapter of kingdom stories.

Matthew 13:1-23

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house^(A) and sat beside the sea. ²And great crowds gathered about him,^(B) so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And^(C) he told them many things in parables, saying: ^(D) "A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶but^(E) when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root,^(E) they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among^(G) thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some^(H) a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹^(I) He who has ears,^(a) let him hear."

How does the parable of the sower inform us about the kingdom of God? And I want to set up the context of this story. Turn back to chapter 12. We've looked at this passage before. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God and healing all manner of disease and casting out demons. Jesus had a message and a ministry. In chapter 12 – Matthew records of couple of miracles. Verse 1 – He gets in trouble with the Pharisees for working on the Sabbath. Verse 9 – He gets in trouble with the Pharisees for healing a man on the Sabbath. Verse 22 – He gets in trouble casting out a demon on the Sabbath. Jesus can't seem to keep himself out of trouble. And then we come to verse 1 in Chapter 13: **that same day**. A lot has already happened on that same day. So, in the context of the common people being amazed at his teaching and miracles, and the Pharisees throwing fits over all of it Jesus tells a story. I want to skip the story for a moment and go to verse 10.

¹⁰Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

Because, people love stories. Stories make the lesson memorable, understandable and personal. I may find it difficult to comprehend the concept, but if you can illustrate it with a story I not only understand it, I can remember it and apply it. Good teachers know how to communicate in ways that people can learn. And no body was better at this than Jesus. I had professors in college that were so intelligent it was mind boggling. And I couldn't learn a single thing from them because they didn't know how to bring it down to the level of small minded people like me.

The goal of teaching is not to show how smart the teacher is, it's to enable the student to learn. Jesus could have used some pretty big words if he wanted too. He could make up words if he wanted too. But He wanted us to learn. And so He spoke in ways we could understand. And yet, some of it never clicked with the crowd. Why?

¹¹And he answered them, ^(A) "To you it has been given to know ^(B) the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ^{12(C)} For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, ^(D) even what he has will be taken away.

Note: who is he talking too right now? He has just told a story for everyone to hear, but right now He's talking to his disciples. And who is he talking about? He's talking about the Pharisees who's right there criticizing everything He said and did.

¹³This is why I speak to them in parables, because ^(E) seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, ^(E) nor do they understand.

Jesus is talking to us about how we approach the kingdom of God. He who has ears, let him hear.

THE KINGDOM. . .

What is the nature of this kingdom Jesus talked about. First of all, it's a mystery.

CHARACTER: MYSTERY

Matthew 3:11; 11:2-6; 1 Corinthians 2:6-14; 1 Corinthians 4:1

In verse 11, Jesus says that the disciples have the secrets, some translations use the word, mysteries of the kingdom. A secret is something that I do not know unless or until you tell me. A secret is something I know that you don't know until I tell you. Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God and confused everybody. Why? Because for generations, even centuries, people had already developed a preconceived notion of what the Kingdom was all about. And it wasn't matching up. Turn back a couple of chapters to Matthew 11. John the Baptist having what some call a 'crisis of faith.'

^{2(A)} Now when John heard ^(B) in prison about the deeds of ^(C) the Christ, he sent word by ^(D) his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you ^(E) the one who is to come, or shall we ^(E) look for another?"

John had known Jesus personally, baptized Jesus, recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and now he sends his own disciples back to Jesus to make sure. And Jesus responds:

⁴And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

Note those two words: He had a message and ministry.

^{5(G)} the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers ^(A) are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and ^(H) the poor have good news preached to them.

And then he says this:

⁶And blessed is the one who ^(I) is not offended by me."

Or in other words, who understands me, who knows who I am and what I came to do. This was John's problem. He knew who Jesus was, he just didn't understand what he was doing. For centuries Old Testament prophets talked about God once and for all establishing a kingdom that would free them from the tyranny of their abusers.

John told the people: I'm baptizing you with water. But when the Messiah comes: He's going to baptize with fire. People were already looking for a Messiah that would deliver them from the oppression of Roman rule. Jesus wasn't talking about that. Jesus, where's the fire? You and I today, with the privilege of living in the Church age and the advantage of the completed Bible at hand understand that the fire is referring to the final judgment. But John didn't understand that. He, like all the other prophets thought the Messiah was going to overthrow human governments. But that's not what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to overthrow the dominion of Satan. Jesus came, not to usurp human sovereignty but to rule in the hearts of mankind. This is a spiritual battle.

1 Cor. 2:6-7 (NIV)

We speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. [7] No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

It was a secret or a mystery that just now in the sovereign plan of God that Jesus was beginning to unveil. And people had trouble getting it. John the Baptist didn't get it. The Pharisees certainly didn't get it. Jesus' own disciples spent three years following him around and still missed the core principle of the kingdom: it's not about the transition of human power but about the transformation of human hearts. I want you to think about it: How many times have you asked Jesus to change your world as opposed to asking Jesus to change your heart? Jesus isn't nearly as concerned about your circumstances as He is about your character. The message of the kingdom is neither obvious nor simple; it's a mystery that only those with ear of faith have revealed to them. It's a secret that when told has to be received.

CHALLENGE: RECEIVE

2 Corinthians 5:20

That's the challenge of the kingdom.

¹²(C) For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, ^(D) even what he has will be taken away. ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables, because ^(E) seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, ^(E) nor do they understand.

The disciples believed, to the extent they could understand, with the evidence they had – they entrusted themselves to Jesus, so, Jesus entrusted the secrets of the kingdom to them. Jesus never forced himself on anyone. This was another aspect of his mission that troubled his followers, Jesus spoke a message that could be rejected. And many people did. When you're after a person's heart, you can't it by force. A heart has to be offered. The invitation of love has to be received which means it can also be rejected.

Three Hindrances

Jesus talks about three characteristics of the spiritually unresponsive, namely the Pharisees and others who refused his invitation:

1. Pride

Verse 13: They see but don't see, they hear but don't hear. Do you have people like that in your life? He's talking about people who already know what they need to know.

Matthew 11:25-26 (NIV)

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

He's talking about the arrogance of the Pharisees as opposed to those who are humble enough to receive. Remember, chapter 12 – Jesus heals a man, casts out a demon; I don't know about you, but I think that would be pretty convincing. But look back in chapter 12 at verse 38, and again, this is all in the same day, the Pharisees say to Jesus after all of this: show us sign and maybe we'll believe. He just showed them a sign. They just witnessed two miracles. Have you ever been in an argument and you finally say, "I'm not talking about this anymore." Why? Because you're talking to someone who refuses, not unable, but refuses to get it. There is no greater obstacle to faith in the message of Jesus, to the understanding of God's kingdom than the pride of intellect – human wisdom.

2. Prejudice

Vs. 15 says, "Their eyes they have closed." New International Version simply says, "They have closed their eyes." The word prejudice means to pre-judge. This is not about the difficulty of understanding, this is a deliberate refusal to consider the evidence. Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up. It's like a child who refuses to try a new food. Parent's you've dealt with that. No persuasion will convince them of what they claim to already know. And so, you know what, they're the ones that miss out. The Pharisees found fault with everything Jesus did. They had prejudged him and no amount of evidence would convince them. Even though his teaching was amazing they rejected him outright as a common man from a no name town. And when he healed people of their oppression, right in front of their eyes they chalked it up as demonic activity. You have these people in your life. They've prejudged Christianity without an honest, sincere examination of the evidence. And Jesus said, if you're going to reject what I've given you, I'm not going to give you anymore.

3. Pleasure

Verse 15 also says, their hearts have grown dull. NIV says, they have become calloused. The Wycliff's translation says: their heart is enfattened. They've developed fat around the heart that slows down proper functioning. He's referring to indulgence. Jesus just talked about the soil that's distracted by the things of this world; a person who then, can't be bothered with the things of God. Jesus says the Kingdom of God is available to all, but only those with the humility and faith of a child, a child who is utterly dependant and willing to receive it can experience the content of the kingdom which is healing.

CONTENT: HEALING

1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2:6-16; Ephesians 3:3-6; 1 Timothy 3:16

vs. 15 if they would hear it, understand it, and turn, or repent, Jesus says, I would heal them. That's the mystery of the Kingdom, the reason why so many misunderstood it, even rejected it, is because it came in persuasion, not power. It came, not to topple human governments but to change the human heart. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

CALL: REPENT & BELIEVE

This is the call of the kingdom, to repent and believe the good news.

Matthew 18:3

And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why? Because children realize, actually I'm not sure they even realize their dependence on the one who cares for them, it's just a way of life, that's the world they live in, utter dependence on the one who cares for them. The simple faith of a child – that's the mystery of the kingdom. Jesus tells a story about seed falling on soil relating it to the responsiveness to the mystery of the kingdom.

Three Conditions of Good Soil

Jesus talked about four kinds of soil.

¹⁹When anyone hears the word of ^(Y) the kingdom and ^(Z) does not understand it, ^(AA) the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

The hard surface of a path illustrates a life that's closed and resistant to truth, a heart that is impenetrable.

²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately ^(AB) receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but ^(AC) endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately ^(AD) he falls away. ^(b)

Do you know people that shoot up like a rocket and then fall like a rock? This is a shallow heart that's impulsive and lacks stability. And Jesus says, the test of living in the kingdom is crisis. Jesus said, in this life you will have trouble. What does one do when things fall apart? Do they grow up or give up?

²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but ^(AE) the cares of ^(AF) the world and ^(AG) the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

This is a life that's distracted by the things of this world. Jesus said: no one suited for the kingdom puts their hand to the plow and looks back.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and ^(AH) understands it. He indeed ^(AI) bears fruit and yields, in one case ^(AJ) a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Jesus compares our lives to soil. I'm not a farmer. But I know a couple of farmers. And I think they'd tell me that the harvest has a lot to do with the soil. In this story the sower represents God. And the seed represents the gospel of the Kingdom. How receptive are you to the rule and reign of God in your life? Here are three soil conditions that are necessary to reap a harvest of life.

1. Open

The soil has to be receptive. Jesus said – to the one who has, more will be given. Why? Because the one who's smart enough to know he's not smart enough has just opened himself to get smarter. This is what you would call a teachable spirit. A know-it-all never knows it all but they don't know that. This was the problem with the Pharisees. It's not so much that God doesn't impart wisdom, it's their own spirit that is arrogant and proud that closes them to truth and keeps them from learning. Are you humble enough to realize your need for God, for truth, for wisdom from His Word? God gives to those open to receive. He cannot give to those who refuse. God doesn't reject those who accept Him. But if you're closed to Him, you're the one that limit's His presence and power in your life.

2. Honest

The soil has to have integrity. And at the heart of integrity is honesty. Question: how objective are you when looking at your life? Is the soil of your life conditioned to receive truth, correction and training in righteousness? If you're always looking for the circumstances in your life or the people in your life to justify whatever wrongful behavior you're choosing, then you're the one limiting the spirit of God from operating in your life?

3. Responsive

Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, everyone who hears my words and does them is wise. This is a principle of the kingdom, this is why the Pharisees missed out; only those who obey understand. You don't understand and then obey. You obey. And in your obedience truth is revealed to you.

Bottom Line: Do I Have Ears To Hear?

The kingdom of God with all its benefits is limited to you only to the extent that you are willing to believe.