

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like Mt. 13

Introduction:

Last week we began an exploration of the kingdom parables of Mt. 13? There Jesus tells five parables that teach four great truths about the kingdom of God? I mentioned last week that these teachings were very difficult for the Jews, because they countered everything they had grown to anticipate about the kingdom over several centuries? Jesus was not the Messiah they expected, and he was not bringing the kingdom they wanted?

To help us fully understand the gap that existed between the Jew's expectations and Jesus' promise, Max Lucado asks us to consider how we might respond if Jesus came today? Suppose Jesus came to our church? I don't mean symbolically. I mean visibly? Physically. Actually? Suppose he came to our church?

Would we recognize him? It might be difficult. Jesus didn't wear religious clothes in his day? Doubtful that he would wear them in ours? If he came this morning he'd wear regular clothes. Nothing fancy? Just jeans and a tee shirt?

He would have a common name. "Jesus" was a common name in his day? Perhaps today he'd go by Joe or Bob or Jeff? Jeff.? I like that? Suppose Jeff, the Son of God, came to our church.

Of Course, he wouldn't be from Nazareth of Israel? He'd hail from some small spot down the road like Mountain Grove or Hartville? And he'd be a common worker? He was a carpenter in his day? No reason to think he'd change, but suppose he did? Let's say this time he came as a plumber? No grasp it. Jeff, the plumber, from Mountain Grove, claiming to be the Son of God, comes to our church this morning?

Rumor has it that he fed a whole football stadium full of people in Arkansas. Others say he healed the senator's son from Kansas. Some say he's the Son of God? Others say he's the Facebook hoax of the year? You don't know what to think?

And then this morning he shows up? About midway through the song service he appears at the back and takes a seat? After the song he moves to the front? After communion he steps to the platform and announces, "You are singing about me, I am the Son of God." He holds a communion tray? "This bread is my body? This juice is my blood? When you celebrate this you celebrate me?"

Would you be offended? The audacity of it all? How irreverent, a guy named Jeff as the Son of God? Would you be interested? Wait a minute, how could he be the Son of God? He never went to seminary, never studied at Bible College. But there's something about him?

It's easy to criticize contemporaries of Jesus for not believing in him? But when we stop and think about it, we can understand? Jesus didn't fit their concept of a messiah. Wrong background. Wrong pedigree. Wrong hometown? No Messiah would come from Nazareth? Small, hick, one-stoplight town? He came as one of them. He was Jesus from Nazareth? Jeff from Mountain Grove. He fed the masses with calloused hands? He raised the dead wearing bib overalls and a John Deere Tractor cap. He announced a coming kingdom with no fanfare, dirt under his fingernails, and holes in his blue jeans. They expected lights and kings and chariots from heaven? What they got was sandals and sermons and a Galilean accent? And so, some missed him? And so, some miss him still? What do you expect? Are you missing the message of the kingdom?

Last week we look at the first two of the four truths about the kingdom Jesus teaches us here in Mt. 13. The first was growth? The parables of the yeast and mustard seed make one simple point—the kingdom will grow. Jesus also taught a second truth that sets this first one in perspective? In the parables of the wheat and tares and the net, he taught that despite the kingdom's supernatural growth, that it will have to coexist along with those not in the kingdom? The growth of the kingdom is not a mandate for those in the kingdom to force it upon those not in the kingdom? Christians are to live peacefully with non-Christians. But there are two more important truths about the kingdom found in Mt. 13?

I. Judgement

The third great truth of the kingdom parables is the reality of judgment. Another way of putting it is this: the kingdom does not include everyone. The kingdom is exclusive, and when all is said in done, many will not be included. Last week, we talked about how here on earth the kingdom will exist side by side with those not in the kingdom. But that doesn't mean, they're a part of the kingdom. Jesus is very clear in these parables that when the end comes, he will separate out of his kingdom all that does not belong. Jesus will send forth his angels to judge the world. Jesus explains the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:37-43:

The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

He tells another parable with the same point beginning in verse 47:

⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away 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 fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

For a variety of reasons, we have watered down the message of judgement today. We've grown tired, we've grown lazy, we don't want to appear mean. But the cruelest thing we could do is not warn others about the judgement. If we want people to know the reality of heaven, they need to be aware of the reality of hell. Salvation implies that there is something we must be saved from. You don't throw a life raft to someone sitting on the beach.

Some have taken the parable of the yeast and misapplied them? They say that just as the yeast eventually changes all the dough, so the kingdom will eventually change all the world? They say this means that ultimately everyone will be saved, or that Jesus will not come back until everyone believes. They teach a universal salvation. Rob Bell created a stir several years ago with his book *Love Wins*, in which he flirts with the idea that in the long run, everyone will be saved.

But Jesus, time and time again, just as he does here in these parables, relentlessly focuses on the reality of a final judgment. The parable of the yeast does teach that the kingdom will work its way through all the parts of the world, as Jesus said, *“to the ends of the earth.”* But it doesn't mean everyone will become a Christian. It simply means, according to Revelation 5, people from every tribe and language and people and nation will become a part of this kingdom. The good news about Jesus has a universal appeal, and a universal power. God excludes no one because of the color of their skin, or their family tree, or where they're from. But not everyone will believe. Not everyone will be saved. How do we know this? Because of the truth of judgement that is taught in the parables of the wheat and tares and the parable of the net.

Let me share with you some key truths about Judgment that Jesus tells us here in these parables. I will deal with the first two together? The first is that the judgement comes at the end of the age, and the second is that it will be done by Jesus in his angels? Both parables specify the timetable of the judgement at the end of the age? Scripture teaches that we are living in the final age, and have been since Christ? The judgement will not come half way through, 1/4 way through, but at the end of the age? Secondly, Jesus tells who will do the judging, *“The Son of Man will send out his angels and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”*

The bottom line is this, and we talked about this last week— judgment is not the job of the church today. The church is on earth as an instrument of God's grace, not His justice? It is not the

church's place to get even, to conquer, to put in their place, but to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ. But, a part of that truth is that judgment is coming. Jesus is coming back just to save. He is coming back to set everything right. EveryTHING and everyONE. If we leave the truth of that judgment out of our message, we are not proclaiming the whole gospel.

A third element of the judgment Jesus emphasizes here is separation. The judgement is no mere divine scolding or cosmic slap on the wrist? Both these parables emphasize separation. The weeds separated from the wheat? The bad fish separated from the good. The saved and unsaved are headed to two, distinct, separate destinies? Both parables use two common images of hell: the fiery furnace and weeping and gnashing of teeth? These terms when used in Scripture always refer to a place of eternal torment? Moreover, this final separation is the natural consequence of separation from God?

Hell is not God being mean or vindictive, rather is the result of our own choices and actions in this life that separate us from God? Hell, ultimately, is God giving us what we want. In judgment, God says, "You wanna live your life without me? You wanna go your own way. Okay, here you go. Here is eternity without me. Eternal existence without God's life, God's love, God's goodness, God's mercy, it is existence truly on your on your own terms. God has done everything he could, including dying on a cross, to establish a relationship with us, but when we don't respond, we are ultimately separating ourselves from God, the source all good, the source of life, of peace of happiness. Hell is the absence of and separation from all that is God and of God. It is the ultimate godless existence?

Let me conclude the truth of judgement with some practical suggestions on how we as Christians can constructively speak of judgement to the world today? First, don't water down the concept of sin? Sin has become a dirty word today? What we call "only human" is despicable in the eyes of God? We can call it a mistake, a failure, an addiction, a weakness, or a sickness, but it doesn't change the fact that in the eyes of God it is sin? We don't make salvation more attractive by lessening the horrendous nature of our sin?

If a doctor examines a patient to find that they have cancer, and the doctor tells them they only have the flu, has the doctor done them a service? No? The patient will just feel better about herself as she dies? Too often the church offers a poor diagnosis so that the patient won't feel so bad. Now telling the truth about sin, doesn't mean we have to attack, or put down the sinner? The old maxim holds true "love the sinner, hate the sin."

Secondly, essential to loving the sinner and hating the sin is not being self-righteous? Nothing turns off a person more than a self-righteous, sanctimonious Christian condemning their sin? As you tell the truth about sin, include yourself? For we all have sinned??? Let them know you are no different, that

you are just as dependent on God's grace.

A third pointer is never separate God's judgement from God's love. Don't tell the truth about sin without telling the truth about forgiveness? Don't expose hell, without opening the door to heaven? The message of hell by itself offers only fear, but hell with heaven offers hope?

Fourthly, when talking about judgement, focus on God's goodness? Don't just focus on how bad we are, but focus on how good God is. We're not trying to beat them up. We're trying to lift him up. We must tell the truth about sin, yes, but only in the context of God's righteousness, holiness, purity, and perfection? When we focus on the goodness of God we draw people to Him?

II. Value

There is also a fourth truth about the kingdom taught in the parables of Mt. 13? It is the supreme value of the kingdom. The kingdom is a treasure of immense worth. It is to be valued over everything else we might pursue in this world.

⁴⁴ *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. 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 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

Like the yeast and mustard seed these are simple parables with a simple point? The kingdom of heaven is more important than anything else in life? The kingdom of God is so valuable it is worth sacrificing anything and everything to get.

People often think of religion as taking joy out of life, but a relationship with Jesus is like finding a rare priceless treasure? Many are afraid of becoming a Christian because of what they fear they might lose? But in both of these parables each man gained far more than they gave up? I'm not saying that you don't have to give up anything for Jesus, but what I am saying is that what you gain is far better? Jesus is so great, so good, so perfect, there's just not room for anything else to take priority?

There was a man who kept a rock in his pocket. He liked his rock? He had it since he was a child? He'd grown to know every detail and character of the rock? He had handled it so much that it had worn smooth and fit his hand perfectly? It had become his constant companion when he dealt with stress, was struggling to remember something or had to face some confrontation. He would stick his hand in his pocket and find his rock.

One day he found a large diamond. It was brilliant and it glistened in the light of the sun? It was perfect? It's worth was unimaginable? But the man was sad for he would have to throw away his rock to make room in his pocket for the diamond. Yes, if you receive Christ he will replace many things in your life, but what he puts in their place will be far superior?

But we need to understand and appreciate what Jesus is talking about when he mentions the kingdom. The kingdom is more than just our relationship with Jesus. The kingdom is our relationship with each other. Look around you. Look at the people sitting near you. You are looking at the kingdom. Right now, you are looking at what Jesus was talking about here. You are an incredible treasure of unimaginable value and worth in the eyes of our Savior. The church is God's kingdom on earth right now.

How do I know this? Listen to what Paul writes in Colossians 1:13, "*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption.*" When you gave your life to Christ, you were transferred from one kingdom into another. When you were baptized into him, your citizenship was changed. You became a citizen in the Kingdom of heaven.

Oh, how we miss the value of the kingdom today. It has become fashionable to bash the church. The internet is full of blogs of disgruntled Christians proclaiming they love Jesus but can't stand the church. I get it. I understand. I've been hurt by the church. I've seen Christians do incredibly unchristian things. I've seen the church make complete messes of things.

But I haven't given up on the church. I am unapologetic in my love for the church. I love her without condition, without equivocation and without question. She is bride of Christ. He loves his bride. He saved his bride, and he is coming to receive his bride. That has not changed. I love the church, because my Savior loves the church. I love her even when she is a mess, because I am a mess, and any church that wasn't messy wouldn't have any room for me, and it wouldn't have any room for you, so I love my messy church.

I love the church, because even in the midst of the mess, and because of her mess, she can be a beautiful thing. We all know what the church can be when she is at her worst, but let us not forget who the church is when she is at her best. When the church acts like the bride of Christ, there is nothing on earth more beautiful than the church.

She love unconditionally

She forgives immeasurably

She has power unimaginable

Wisdom incomprehensible

And truth unassailable

She has a faith that cannot be moved

A hope that cannot be discouraged

And a future that cannot be stolen
The church is a treasure because God built her
Jesus saved her
And the Holy Spirit empowers her.

She alone is the pillar and the support of truth. She alone can make known the manifold wisdom of God. The church alone is an ambassador of God's grace on earth. The gates of hell will not prevail against her. That's why I love the church. How about you.