



**KINGDOM
COME**



STUDY GUIDE

AUGUST 1 – WEEK 1

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND SOILS



We are going to begin to look at, consider and get in touch with what it means to be a Kingdom builder. We will be looking at five different Parables found in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Today we come to look at the Parable of the Sower.

MATTHEW 13:1-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." NIV

As Chapter 13 opens, Jesus is still speaking to the crowds, but he begins to speak in parables. There are eight parables in this chapter. Six of them begin with the phrase, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like...", and the entire chapter gives those who have ears to hear clear instruction on what it's like when the Kingdom comes.

He begins with the well-known parable about a sower. After he talks about sowing seeds, the disciples want an explanation. Jesus then gives the explanation and the warnings in regards to what can keep the kingdom builders from building. We, too, need to take notice of this and do all we can to build and grow both as citizens of the Kingdom and as builders of the Kingdom. We learn here from Jesus the following points:

1. The Kingdom will be different (13:1-3a).

As Jesus pushes off from the shore He's speaking to people who want to be followers - Kingdom builders - in language they can understand. Kind of like Wesley moved to preaching outside and using plain words to convey plain truth—Jesus is outside the synagogue (the turf of the Pharisees) and begins speaking to his people in language they can understand. The Kingdom is no longer about following religious rules. The Kingdom is not about someone sitting on David's throne and kicking out Rome. The Kingdom is organic. The Kingdom is personal. The Kingdom is about seeds and soils—wheat and weeds—mustard seeds and yeast—a treasure buried in a field and a pearl of great price—and a net that captures all kinds of fish. By the time Jesus was done with this chapter not only were the Pharisees plotting against him, his hometown of Nazareth rejected him. Such it is with the Kingdom. It's not for everyone as it forces us to choose.

- What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
- What are some of the choices we need to make when it comes to God's Kingdom?

2. The Kingdom faces obstacles (13:3-9).

Every person in the crowd had seen what Jesus is describing—seed cast on four types of soil. Before we get into the soils and their meaning it is important to understand that Jesus is seeking to make those listening understand that they will face obstacles. The bottom line is that whenever the seed of the Kingdom is sown in our lives there is going to be opposition, there is going to be distraction and there will be obstacles.

- What obstacles have you faced in your faith journey as the seeds of the Kingdom have been sown in your life?
- How did you overcome those obstacles?
- How do you continue to overcome them?
- How do you see or understand God's activity in the midst of the obstacles you face?
- How might the group help you in overcoming the obstacles you come up against?

3. Kingdom builders look for understanding and solutions (13:10-18).

The disciples came to Jesus on the side and asked, "Why do you teach in parables?" It becomes a reminder that it's never wrong to ask questions. That's what Kingdom builders do, they ask questions, they look for more understanding, and they look for more solutions. May we never lose our inquisitive spirit. Jesus tells us that those who are in his Kingdom family are given the privilege of knowing its secrets. He wants us to know that the more we seek, the more we will receive. For those who have not been awakened by the Spirit to the prompting of Jesus, the Gospel makes no sense, it seems like mere gibberish. On the other hand, when we are awakened, when we accept Jesus, and when the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside of us, we can ask and will receive. When we seek, we will find. We when we knock the door of understanding is opened to us. The call is for us to never stop asking, seeking, and knocking.

- Can you recall a time when the things of God, the scriptures, the way of faith seemed like gibberish?
- What do you hear God saying here concerning asking, seeking and knocking?

4. The evil one can keep a Kingdom builder from building (13:19).

“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.”

First, Jesus explains the seed that fell on the path. We need to understand that we have an enemy of our souls whose sole purpose for existence is to rob us of the seed of the Kingdom in our life. He will work to keep the path of your heart so busy with other things, many of them good things, that the greater things of the Kingdom won't have time to take root.

- What things tend to clutter up your life in a way that they allow Satan to steal them away from you?
- How might the enemy of our souls be using “good things” to keep you from pursuing the Kingdom? What might be some examples?
- What is God saying to you concerning the things that are cluttering your life?
- What are you willing to do about it?
- How can the group help?

5. Trouble and persecution can keep a Kingdom builder from building (13:20-21).

“The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”

Next, Jesus explains the seed on the rocky ground. Life is not easy, and living a life of faith will cause persecution in our lives. It is one of the signs we are faithfully following Jesus. After all, Jesus did say, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). That said—when we find ourselves constantly under fire because of our faith—it can prevent our roots from going very deep.

- Can you recall a time when you faced trouble or persecution because of your faith?
- What did it feel like and how did you deal with it?
- What effect did it have on your faith?
- What did you hear God saying to you in the midst of it?
- What steps can you take to prepare for it in the future?

6. Worries and wealth can keep a Kingdom builder from building (13:22).

"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

Next, Jesus explains the seed sown among the thorns. When we allow a consumer-based, prosperity-driven, watered-down version of "religion" to dominate in our hearts, it chokes out a Gospel that asks us to lay down our lives, care for the poor, live with an open hand—and remember, it's easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Historically, the Kingdom has flourished among the poor, and been resisted by the rich. Jesus' primary opposition was from the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews (including the Chief Priests) because he healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate with sinners, touched the unclean, and made sure the poor had the Good News preached to them. They believed the reason those folks were sick, hungry and poor was because they were sinful and unclean. Be careful not to allow the lifestyle to which you've grown accustomed to choke out the seed of the Kingdom.

- Can you recall a time when you allowed worries to overcome your faith?
- Can you recall a time when you allowed possessions to get in the way of your walk with the Lord?
- How did you overcome these times?
- What do you hear God saying to you concerning worries and wealth/possessions?

7. Receiving, hearing, and understanding will keep a Kingdom builder building (13:23).

"But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Finally, Jesus explains the good soil. Do you want the fullness of all God desires to do in our life to flourish? Then remember—we never arrive—we are never done receiving new "seed"—we are never done hearing new truth from Scripture—we will never be done increasing in our understanding of grace. When we become a lifetime student—and lifetime disciple—a lifetime follower—the Kingdom flourishes in us.

- What steps can you take to be a lifetime student and follower of Jesus?
- How can the group help?

AUGUST 8 - WEEK 2

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND WEEDS



As we continue to look at, consider and get in touch with what it means to be a Kingdom builder we will be looking at five different Parables found in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Today we come to look at the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds.

MATTHEW 13:24-30; 36-43

24 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 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. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where 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. NIV

As we look at and consider this parable we find that as Kingdom builders it reminds us of the importance of finding opportunities to plant the Kingdom as well as harvest the results. But as we do we find that all too often we have both wheat and weeds. The reality that we must deal with is that good and bad coexist. Our initial response is to pull out the weeds, to get rid of the bad, doing so at any and all costs. However, Jesus teaches us that He is willing to let both coexist in order that no damage comes to the Kingdom. In other words, allow the bad to coexist with the good in order for the kingdom to grow and not be damaged. As Kingdom builders, we recognize that there is evil all around us. We recognize that people have the ability to be both good and bad. However, the answer is not to cut out people but to allow people from all walks of life to grow and experience the kingdom. As kingdom builders we must be willing and patient enough to create the environment for growth to take place.

- What thoughts do you have concerning this?
- What makes it difficult to accept the fact that good and evil coexist?
- What gives you hope in the midst of this reality?

- What do you hear God saying to you concerning Kingdom building?

Points to consider concerning this parable:

1. Kingdom building takes consistent persistence (13:24).

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field."

The sower in this story does exactly what he's supposed to do. He sows seed in the field. He is obedient in carrying out his task. If we are going to help build the Kingdom we need to be consistent and persistent in sowing seed with our lives. Often times we seek to live our faith out in front of our families, our friends, our neighbors and co-workers, but to no avail as it seems like no one notices. The call is for us to live it out anyway. Why? Because every word we speak, every action we take and every habit of our lives is sowing seed into another's life. And someday they may ask us what the difference is in our lives. Peter tells us that when they do we are to: "Always be prepared to give an accounting of the reason for the hope you have—but do so with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). This form of obedience is what Eugene Peterson calls discipleship—"A long obedience in the same direction."

- Why is consistent persistence so important when it comes to Kingdom Building?
- What makes it difficult at times? What makes it easy?
- How can you be prepared to give an accounting of the hope you have?
- If asked about the hope you hold onto, to how would you respond?

2. Kingdom building can be attacked (13:25-26).

"But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared."

It's important for us to remember we are not the only ones sowing seed into people's lives. There are all kinds of influences at play, and once again, the enemy of our souls is always looking for an opportunity to sow some weeds among the good seed of the Kingdom. This is an important word for anyone who desires to build the Kingdom. We need to understand that we will never have a "pure" field growing in front of us. Good seed is growing in our midst as well as the not so good seed. The temptation is to want to weed them out, but the reality is it not only damages them to root them out, it hurts the good seed that's growing.

- What are some instances of weeds being sown into our society?
- How do you feel about leaving the weeds alone for the time being?
- What gives you hope in the midst of knowing that weeds are growing amongst the good seed of the Kingdom?
- What do you hear God saying to you concerning this?

3. Kingdom building can be unpredictable (13:27).

"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'"

Sometimes the identity of the "weeds" will surprise us and other times we'll not be able to tell who is who until the end of our lives. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 25 in the parable of the sheep and the goats. He says that we will be separated by the fruit our lives bear (caring about and for the things and people Jesus cares about). Regardless of how unpredictable the enterprise of sowing the seed of the Kingdom may be, even at times in the face of incredible opposition and competition for the ground in front of us, the key is not to stop.

- With the knowledge that Kingdom building can be unpredictable and that weeds abound, what becomes the encouragement for you to continue to be a faithful seed planter and kingdom builder?

4. Kingdom building seeks growth over perfection (13:28-30).

"An enemy did this," he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

For those of us who tend to be perfectionists, we find ourselves struggling with this teaching of Jesus. We want the weeds gone, we want the garden perfect. The reality is that no matter how hard we try the weeds will come. The lesson we need to learn is that all God asks of us is that we give our absolute best effort. He does not expect perfection. What matters most is, at the end of the day, the end of our lives, or the end of the age, it is our effort to sow seeds and grow the Kingdom that matters most to God. The call is for us to do our best understanding—something Paul knew all along. One plants, another waters, but ultimately the work of growing the Kingdom is God's work. We just get to faithfully partner with him.

- What does it mean to you to give your best effort? How do you know when you have done so?
- What needs to happen in your life in order to be the best Kingdom builder you can be?
- What do you hear God saying to you in this lesson?
- How can the group help you?

AUGUST 15 – WEEK 3

THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST

As we continue to look at, consider and get in touch with what it means to be a Kingdom builder we will be looking at five different Parables found in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Today we come to look at two Parables - the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast.

† MATTHEW 13:31-35

31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." 33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." 34 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world." NIV

In these two parables Jesus describes how the kingdom grows. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed Jesus illustrates how a tiny seed that can barely be seen grows into a large tree in which birds can perch. There is a sense of invisibility/now and not yet as a small mustard seed that is difficult to see to begin with is buried under ground. He uses the same type of example through yeast in bread. The yeast when added to the dough produces food and nourishment for so many. It takes faith and patient waiting, but the outcome is glorious. As kingdom builders, we must look for opportunities to take the smallest of acts or opportunities and use those as the beginnings of something strong and beautiful that can help others.

Lessons from the Parable of the Mustard Seed:

1. The Kingdom begins small (13:31).

Jesus often uses images of smallness when describing the heavenly kingdom. This two-verse parable uses the mustard seed which was among the smallest of all the seeds found in a Middle Eastern marketplace. Those who heard this parable knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. The work of the Kingdom begins small. Like the mustard seed it is almost unperceivable when it is first cast. The same holds true for us. When the seed of the Gospel is first sown into our lives, it seems like a small thing. It is a surrender of our will. When God begins moving among a group of people, it seems like such a small thing. It can be a decision to hold onto and bring the best out in each other. When God begins to usher in revival among his people, it seems like such a small thing. A commitment to engage in Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Extravagant Generosity, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, Radical Hospitality, and Contagious Faith Sharing.

Like the Jews of Jesus' time, we would like to see the Kingdom as something spectacular that cannot but convince everybody of its truth. But Jesus speaks of a tiny seed that will eventually grow into a tree that offers shelter to the small ones. The Kingdom-the life-changing, world-altering work of the Kingdom-begins small. The call becomes for us to ask for light to

see the many mustard seeds that inhabit our lives and world so that we may grow in trust and readiness to commit ourselves more fully to the Kingdom.

- How can we begin to see the many mustard seeds that inhabit our lives and the world?
- What steps do we need to take individually and collectively to see that they both grow and are brought to fruition?
- What do you hear God saying to you about the Kingdom and your relationship with Him?

2. The Kingdom has exponential potential (13:32).

Through the wonders of creation, God provides water and sunlight so that a tiny mustard seed can grow over time to become 'the greatest of shrubs' firmly rooted in the ground providing shelter for the many birds that rest in its branches. This is a reminder—the Kingdom has exponential potential. Jesus' words describing the Kingdom exude optimism: the kingdom is a small seed, the smallest one that grows into a big tree.

- Do you think we share the same optimism of Jesus, based on faith? Do we see the potential of the Kingdom all around us? Or do we allow our doubts and fears to get the best of us causing us to lose sight of what God is doing all around us?
- How might we begin to become people who see God's Kingdom potential?
- What changes need to take place? How can we gauge our growth?
- How can the group help?

Lessons from the Parable of the Yeast:

3. The Kingdom appears to be invisible (13:33).

Jesus draws upon a common household image that would have been known by everyone around him, especially the women of each house responsible for making and baking bread. Yeast is invisible, but its presence is eminently noticeable once it begins to do its work. The quantity of yeast is small, yet its effect is much bigger than its size. In order for the yeast to have its full effect it must become one with the dough. Even the smallest of separations renders it ineffective. In order for the yeast to fulfill its purpose we find that it in essence must lose its identity. In a very real respect the same is true for the church and its mission. It is when we are actively engaged in our schools, our workplaces and our neighborhoods that the Kingdom begins to expand and reach its potential. The call is for us to be working while living like Jesus, acting on behalf of Jesus and loving like Jesus.

- How have we fallen short both as individuals and the church in being like yeast in helping the Kingdom grow and find its potential?
- What are some ways that as individuals we might become like yeast in helping the Kingdom grow and find its potential?
- What are some ways as the church we might become like yeast in helping the Kingdom grow and find its potential?
- What do you hear God saying?

4. The Kingdom fulfills scripture (13:34-35).

The fact that Jesus speaks in parables is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. It's a reminder: God never calls us to be or do anything that is contradictory to the truth of Scripture.

From the parables Jesus told we can see how much He valued stories as a way of revealing "what had been hidden from the foundation of the world." In the two parables He tells in today's reading He speaks about the wonderful workings of the Good News of God's love and providence in the life of those who believe in him. The way Jesus leads us into his love will always be slow and gentle, for it depends on how ready and willing we are to accept or believe in it.

- What obstacles get in the way of allowing you to be ready and willing to allow Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to guide you, to grow you and use you for the sake of the Kingdom?
- What needs to happen in your life in order for you to become a Kingdom builder?
- What do you hear God saying to you concerning being a Kingdom builder?
- How can the group help?

Often times we believe that what we have to offer just isn't enough. Stop and think about it for a moment. Moses used his staff. David used a sling and a stone. A young boy let Jesus use his five small barley loaves and two fish. A woman used pure nard and her tears. A widow let Elijah use a little flour and oil. A widow used her last two coins. It is not the size of the gifts or abilities that matter the most, but rather, the heart of the giver. We need to always remember that little is much when God is in it.

- What's in your hand?
- What do we have to offer?
- How willing are you to offer it?

How is the need for yeast in making bread true for the Church and its mission? When I say church, I'm not talking about when we gather for worship or in our small groups—I'm talking about when we are scattered in our schools, workplaces and neighborhoods. We often do our best working while living like Jesus, acting on behalf of Jesus, and loving like Jesus. The Kingdom begins to expand and reach its potential when we live this way. I pray the Church may grow closer to the Kingdom, to fulfill its mission of bringing the Good News in all circumstances. Notice how Jesus spoke about small things, how he found significance in what might easily be overlooked. Let Jesus look at your life—even at your humble tasks—to see if he might not lead you to wisdom, insight and truth. These are comforting of parables, because they show the kingdom of heaven as organic, with its own life-force: growing by trickling increment beyond all our expectations, inviting all sorts of birds onto its branches; and growing secretly like yeast in a loaf.

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AUGUST 22 - WEEK 4

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND PEARL OF GREAT PRICE



As we continue to look at, consider and get in touch with what it means to be a Kingdom builder we will be looking at five different Parables found in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Today we come to look at two Parables - the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price.

MATTHEW 13:44-46

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. NIV

In these parables we find a challenge to the heart. As a result of kingdom builders who have been building, what happens when we stumble upon this beautiful kingdom? How do we respond? When the hidden is finally revealed, what do we do? The first parable is a "passive" find that led to someone selling off everything all for the sake of experiencing lifelong joy through what he found. The second parable is an "intentional" find that led to someone selling off everything in order to buy and own this joy and kingdom.

These parables challenge those who passively or intentionally find the kingdom of God with the question...now what? How do we respond? What does the kingdom compel us to do? One experienced joy when he found the treasure and sold everything in order to keep that joy. One was a merchant who found what he was looking for (fine pearls) and invested in it. Do you need joy? Do you need to become a kingdom builder?

Points for consideration:

1. The Kingdom is hidden in plain sight (13:44a).

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field."

Russell Conwell, the founder of Temple University, once gave a well-known speech titled "Acres of Diamonds." The supposedly true story is about an African farmer named Ali Hafed who heard stories of fortune by other farmers. These farmers discovered diamonds on their land and became rich beyond their wildest imagination. Ali Hafed became discontented with his own life and desperately desired the same fortune. He eventually sold his farm and left his family to begin a quest for land that would lead him to riches. He searched through many lands far and wide. Eventually as an old man he became depressed and despondent. He threw himself into a great tidal wave to his death, never to be seen again.

The successor of his land, another farmer, one day strolled along a creek that ran through the property. He noticed a blue flash from the creek bed, knelt down and sifted through the water until he pulled a crystal object from the mud of the creek. He wiped it off, took it home and left it on his mantel above the fireplace, where he quickly forgot about it.

Several weeks later, a visitor stopped by the farm and, noticing the crystal on the mantle, picked it up. Instantly he became excited, as he realized he was holding a diamond in his hand. The farmer protested at first and the visitor reassured him that it was indeed a diamond. That farm eventually became one of the largest diamond mines in the world. Had Ali Hafed simply known how to identify and look for diamonds, he would have had the fortune he so desperately wanted. We're all standing among our own acres of diamonds.

In 1998, a man named James Hill found a small cave full of emeralds on his family's property in North Carolina. The total weight of the emeralds was about 3,300 carats. It turns out that Mr. Hill's emeralds were some of the best quality emeralds in North America. When they were cut and polished, they were worth millions of dollars. Was this a big hidden treasure? It sure was, and it was right in the man's own backyard!

Now, let's turn to Matthew 13:44 and read what Jesus said about hidden treasure. Jesus told a parable about a man who found something in a field that he did not own. We're all standing among our own acres of diamonds or emerald mine. To use the language of Jesus, the potential treasure of the Kingdom has been planted in us—we are hard-wired for relationship with God—God's Spirit causes people to sow the seeds of the Kingdom in us—but we keep searching elsewhere for what God has already made possible within us.

- How often is the Kingdom right in front of us but we miss it because we are looking elsewhere?
- What are some things that put blinders on us that keep us from seeing the Kingdom?
- What needs to happen in order to remove them?

2. Kingdom builders do whatever is necessary to discover it (13:44).

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

The Kingdom of God is worth far more than anything else. When we become aware of what God has made possible in our hearts, we want to "sell" or divest ourselves of other distracting "treasures" so we can devote our primary time and attention to discovering and uncovering the treasure of his grace in our hearts and lives.

We need to understand that these parables are not a plea for us to sell all we have in order to obtain the kingdom, for we truly have nothing to offer God (Ephesians 2:5-9). Instead, they are a call for us to desire the kingdom above all else. Consider the words of missionary Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." The emphasis is not on what we give up, but on the unfathomable new life that is being offered to us.

- Do you think that we believe that the Kingdom of God is worth more than anything else?
- Do you think we live our lives in such a way that demonstrates that belief?
- How much of our time/our very life do we dedicate to seeking the Kingdom?

3. The Kingdom is sought after (13:45).

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls."

Pearls were especially valuable in Jesus' day. Treasure seekers searched the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean to find oysters with pearls inside. Not every oyster has a pearl, and not every pearl is big or round. The man in Jesus' parable found a very valuable pearl. This story is very much like the first parable. But in this parable, the man was actively looking for the treasure. This man was like the people who had listened to God's promises of long ago, and were waiting for the Messiah, the Savior, to come. Even though these people had been looking for God's kingdom, when they found it, it was far greater than what they had expected. Just as in the first parable, the valuable pearl was a symbol of the kingdom of God. And like the first parable, the man gladly gave up everything he owned to get the pearl. He, too, knew that nothing he owned could compare to the great treasure he had finally found.

- What steps do you need to take in order to be more intentional about seeking the Kingdom?
- What do you hear God saying to you here?
- How can the group help you be more intentional in your pursuit of the Kingdom?

4. Kingdom builders sell whatever is necessary to secure its value (13:46).

"When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

The point of these two parables is the great value of being a part of God's kingdom. Jesus is not pointing out what we must give up to enter His kingdom. He is telling us that it is worth more than everything else. Both men gladly and joyfully gave up everything else to claim their new found treasure. Jesus makes it clear that we should not let anything keep us from entering the kingdom of God. And when we know the value of what we have as members of the kingdom, shouldn't we share it everyone we know?

Mr. Hill, the man who found emeralds in his backyard, hired guards to keep watch over his treasure. Why? As we can imagine, he was afraid that when people heard about his discovery, they would sneak onto his land and grab whatever pieces of emerald they could find. The problem with his emerald treasure was that there was a limited supply. But our treasure, our immeasurably better treasure, has no limit!

- What do you hear God saying to you in these parables?
- What do you need to give up or get rid of in order to secure the Kingdom?
- What distraction do you need to eliminate to secure what is the most valuable and important thing (the Kingdom) in your life?
- What priorities do you need to change?
- How can the group help you?

AUGUST 29 – WEEK 5

THE PARABLES OF THE NET



As we continue to look at, consider and get in touch with what it means to be a Kingdom builder we will be looking at five different Parables found in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Today we come to look at the Parable of the Net.

MATTHEW 13:47-58

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. 52 He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

53 When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. 54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. 55 “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” 57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” 58 And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

This parable reminds us that the Kingdom is in the business of allowing all people from all backgrounds to experience God’s grace. However, there is the reality that there will be a “separation” one day that cannot be avoided. Jesus then instructs the teachers to use all tools that are available to them, new and old, in order to cast out a net and share with as many people as possible about God’s kingdom.

Sadly, this section ends with a sad realization. Jesus goes home where people know him and they still don’t know him. Because of the whole community’s lack of faith, Jesus is not able to do many miracles. Jesus warns us that when a whole community lacks faith, the whole community misses the kingdom.

Points to consider concerning this parable:

1. Kingdom builders desire to reach all people (13:47).

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.”

There were different types and sizes of nets used in that time. The ones used in this parable were large, heavy nets with weights attached to the bottom. When dragged in to the shore they would invariably catch many fish, both edible and inedible, which had to be separated.

This is a reminder to us that all people will be caught up in the net collecting of the citizens of God's Kingdom at the end of the age. This makes sense. After all—the Gospel is intended for everyone. But not everyone gathered up in the net of God's Kingdom at the end of time will be "clean." Not everyone will have decided to accept the gift of grace and be part of God's Kingdom.

- When it comes to the Kingdom are we open to offering it to everyone?
- Do we tend to make judgments about who enters the Kingdom or do we leave that up to God?

2. There will be a day where good and evil are separated (13:48-50).

"When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This parable compares the harvest of both good and bad fish, to a time at the end of the age when there will be a gathering of all people. This is similar to the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. The "righteous" will be brought to God, and the "wicked" will be cast away. The "righteous" are not righteous from living a perfect life, but rather because they have been saved by grace through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The "wicked" are those who have not responded to God's offer of grace. This parable is a reminder that the day will come when time as we know it will be rolled up like a scroll and all who have ever lived will stand before our Creator in judgment for our sin. In that moment, the only standing that will matter is our faith or lack of faith in Jesus.

- Do you think we understand this?
- Do you think we live as though we do?
- How might we live our lives differently on a daily basis if we took this to heart?

3. Kingdom builders understand the importance of creativity (13:51-52).

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. 52 He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

This is a charge to those who are teachers, to those who teach and share the good news of the Kingdom—pastors, teachers, parents, grandparents—to be creative and persistent in sharing the Good News of the Kingdom—God's gracious invitation of relationship with the people God places in our lives. This is actually in the pattern of Jesus who taught in common everyday illustrations or metaphors (parables) to share the Gospel in simple and relatable terms.

- What are some ways that we might share the Gospel in simple and relatable ways?
- What gifts has God given you that you can use to share the Gospel? Share any ways that you have had opportunity.

4. People can know about Jesus and still not know him (13:53-57).

"When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. 54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

As this profound chapter comes to an end, we see who is in the crowd along with the disciples. Jesus is in Nazareth, his hometown. No wonder His mother and siblings were trying the "shush" Him at the end of chapter 12. The people have seen Jesus heal. They have heard Jesus teach. They have been told the parables. Even though they have witnessed all of this they still don't get it. The questions are raised, "Hey, isn't this Mary's kid? Isn't he Joseph the carpenter's son? Don't we know him? Weren't his brothers and sisters just here expressing concern over him?" This crowd knew Jesus, but in reality they did not know Him. I'm increasingly astonished when people who say they know, love and follow Jesus do things that are totally contrary to Jesus' example, will and way.

- In reality are people today any different?
- In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Jesus makes it clear that there needs to be a connection between the head and the heart. It is not enough to know about Jesus in our heads, we need to know Him in a personal way in our hearts. What are some of the obstacles that keep us from making that connection?
- As Kingdom builders do we take seriously the call to help people make that connection?
- How might we help people make the connection of head and heart?

5. A communal lack of faith keeps the Kingdom from coming (13:58).

And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. And they took offense at him.

Luke chapter 4 records an extended version of this encounter and tells us the crowd became furious with Jesus and wanted to throw him off a cliff for blasphemy when in reality they missed the miracle of God standing right in front of them. We are living in a challenging time to be followers of Jesus. The call is for us to be sure that we do not miss Jesus, that we do not miss the Kingdom and that we will do all we can to cast the net of the Kingdom wide and invite anyone and everyone we know to respond to grace.

- What are some things that we see taking place today that hinder the building up of the Kingdom?
- How might we as individuals help overcome these in order to build the Kingdom?
- What do you hear God saying to you?
- What do you believe God is saying to the church?

