

# The Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

02/02/2020

Today is our third and final week digging into Matthew 13.<sup>1</sup> There is still a lot for us to learn from these Kingdom parables. In fact, we still have a bunch of parables left: The Parable of the Mustard Seed, the Parable of the Yeast, the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value, and the Parable of the Net. Although, I'm sorry to say that we won't have time to talk at all about the Parable of the Net in this sermon. So, each of us will need to dig into that one during our own personal time. One thing that we should note, about the parables we have left, is that Jesus doesn't explain any of them. In our first two sermons, Jesus gave us a detailed explanation of the Parable of the Sower and of the Parable of the Weeds. But He leaves all of these other parables in Matthew 13 up to us. We are kind of on our own, and yet we are blessed to have the HS available to enlighten us and lead us. That said, take a minute right now to bow your head and pray, asking God to help you understand His Word in today's transcript.

Please open up your Bible to Matthew 13:31.<sup>2</sup> Today, we'll consider 3 key characteristics of The Kingdom of Heaven. First of all, **The Kingdom of Heaven...**

**1 ...starts small, and then it grows and grows and grows!** Matthew 13:31-32 begins, "He (Jesus) told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." There is both a global and an individual aspect to this growth.

First, the **Global**. The Kingdom of Heaven had its initial, small startup, in and around Jerusalem, during Jesus earthy ministry. Since then, its geographical area of influence has grown and grown and grown! That's why Jesus uses this illustration of the mustard seed. It seems so tiny, so harmless, so unassuming at the start. But the Kingdom of Heaven is actually designed to grow into something HUGE.

Over the course of my study this week, I read one author who was somewhat negative in his commentary about the small beginnings of the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, he quoted another theologian who said, "The Lord opens his reign with a feeble and despicable commencement..."<sup>3</sup> While on one hand, I think I get his point, on the other hand I'm troubled by any description of God's Kingdom as "feeble" or "despicable." Just because something starts small, that doesn't make it "feeble." Much to the opposite, the strength and magnitude of this small seed is clearly revealed in its incredible growth and impact! That's the point that this parable is making. I much prefer the

<sup>1</sup> Today is our 3rd week of taking a look at Matthew 13's Kingdom Parables: The 1st week we learned about the Parable of the Sower, which helped us think about the condition of soil of our hearts. Last week, Pastor Eric taught about the Parable of the Weeds, which helped us understand how the Gospel answers the problem of evil in our world. Those sermons can be found at [www.efcbemidji.org/watch-read/sermons](http://www.efcbemidji.org/watch-read/sermons)

<sup>2</sup> It is helpful to *back up to Matthew 13:1, which* begins with the phrase "That same day." In other words, this implies that Jesus told all of the parables in Matthew 13 on the same day that something else had happened. (D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 346.) What happened that day? Why did Jesus teach these particular parables on this particular day? The answer is found back in Matthew 12. You may want to take time to read through these verses. Even as we skim over the main headings, we'll discover some important context. That same day, in Matthew 12:22-37, Jesus was accused of driving out demons by the power of Satan. You'll note in verse 23, that the people are astonished by Jesus power and begin to wonder who He is. They are asking if He is the Son of David, that is, the Messiah. By contrast, you'll note in verse 24 that the Pharisees declare that Jesus is most certainly NOT the Messiah. In fact, they declare that Jesus is no one special and that the only reason that Jesus has the power to drive out demons, is that He is doing it by the power of Satan. That same day, another thing happened in Matthew 12:38-50. Here the Pharisees ask to see Jesus perform a sign. That is, they wanted to see a special miracle that would prove that Jesus was the Messiah. (*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1613, footnote on Matthew 12:38.) But the only sign that Jesus would give them was the sign of Jonah, which foreshadowed Jesus death, burial, and resurrection 3 days later. 3 days just like the 3 days that Jonah spent in the belly of the huge fish. (Consider Luke 16:31.) Jesus calls them a "wicked and adulterous generation" who resist repenting of their sin and who won't listen to His teaching. This gives context for Matthew 13:15, "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." THIS is why Jesus teaches His Kingdom Parables, because many of the Jewish people were rejecting their own Messiah. They were REFUSING to allow the Kingdom of Heaven to be planted in them. The events of this day, set up the context for the Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13. (That's why Jesus began with the Parable of the Sower. It showed how hard, calloused hearts won't allow the seed to be planted in the soil. This hardness toward God was keeping them from hearing and seeing the truth that Jesus was teaching. But, for those of us with soft, teachable hearts, each of these parables has something to show us about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. In the words of Matthew 13:12, "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance.")

<sup>3</sup> See the full context for Aaron L. Garriott quoting John Calvin in the article, "The Mustard Seed and Leaven" from Tabletalk Magazine, "The Parables of Jesus," February 2020, pp. 5-6.

commentary by a guy named Craig Blomberg: “We don’t have to remain feeling like... a beleaguered minority. God will preserve his church, but he wants to do far more than preserve it. He wants to grow it wherever it appears as a tiny influence, into a powerful force for good in our world. [Blomberg then goes on to ask a relevant question] Will you pray for God to show you what that might look like in your life, in your little niche in his grand scheme of things?”<sup>4</sup> Amen! Now we’re talking! I much prefer anticipating the potential of “small” beginnings to any “feeble” understandings of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>5</sup> No matter how tiny its beginning, when God gets to work building His Kingdom, nothing can stop it!<sup>6</sup> In fact, since its early beginnings, the Kingdom of Heaven has now spread to every continent. It is reaching into more and more “unreached people groups” every year. Bible translation work continues to expand into more and more languages. If you weren’t here for church back on December 8, you probably didn’t get to hear from our Global Partner’s, Andy/Heidi Kellogg. They gave an exciting announcement about another significant milestone in Bible translation. Both locally and globally, the Kingdom of Heaven is on the move!

The growth of the Kingdom of heaven also has an **Individual** aspect. We saw this clearly back in the Parable of the Sower. The soil of our human hearts determines whether the message of the Kingdom can be planted in our individual lives. So, let me ask a very important, initial question here: Has the Kingdom of Heaven started in your life; has it begun, even in the smallest, tiniest way? The Kingdom of Heaven begins by softening our hearts toward God and letting His message be sown in us. Let’s not miss this simple, vital fact: The Kingdom of Heaven is only meaningful to us IF the seed has been planted in us. If our heart is hard, the seed will bounce right off. None of this Kingdom teaching will make any sense to us. It will have no real bearing on our lives. So, the first thing that anyone reading this message needs to do is to make sure that God’s truth has entered their heart. This means that we need to repent of our sin; turn around and stop living our own way. We need to place our faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. This is how the Kingdom of Heaven begins to take root in someone’s life. Once we have genuinely turned from our sin and believed in Jesus, then, and only then, will Kingdom life begin for us.

And then, once The Kingdom of Heaven has even just a small start, it grows and grows and grows! The Kingdom of Heaven starts small in a Christian’s life, but it is NOT meant to stay small. So let me ask you: Are you growing? If we could stand you up against the doorframe and measure your spiritual height and growth, could we see your progress? If a Kingdom seed has been planted in you, you should be getting spiritually taller! The Kingdom seed in us doesn’t slowly fade, it builds to an encore! The Kingdom of Heaven starts small, and then it grows and grows and grows!

Jesus reinforces and expands on this idea with the parable of the yeast. Not only does the Kingdom grow, but it also...

**2 ...permeates every nook and cranny.** Matthew 13:33 says, “He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” Using yeast as an illustration, might be confusing for us at first, since yeast is often associated, in the Bible, with evil. But that is not always the case.<sup>7</sup> And that’s not the case here.<sup>8</sup> Here the yeast emphasizes positive, “intensive transformation.” It’s not so much about the yeast growing, as it is about it permeating every nook and cranny. This happens “despite the small quantity used.”<sup>9</sup> Anyone who has ever baked bread knows that you don’t typically take the packet of yeast and dump it into the whole bag of flour. Usually, you measure out a portion of the flour, and then add the right amount of yeast just to that portion. But, in



<sup>4</sup> See Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> In the words of Zechariah 4:10, “Who dares despise the day of small things? ...”

<sup>6</sup> See Matthew 11:12. Let’s not confuse the small beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven with feebleness or weakness. The greatness of the Kingdom of Heaven probably seemed far too small and insignificant for the Jews living in Jesus day. It probably shocked the Jewish teachers of Jesus’ day to hear Him compare the Kingdom of Heaven with a mustard seed and a little yeast. (See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1958 footnote on Matthew 13:31-33) They had expected a triumphant, mighty warrior to sweep in and conquer the ruling Roman government. But the Kingdom came in a different way. By a different means. But it was by no means “feeble.” Soon they would come to see the immensity of its size and influence.

<sup>7</sup> See Leviticus 7:13 and discussion in D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 9: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 366.

<sup>8</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1615 footnote on Matthew 13:33.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 9: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 366.

this parable, not only does this woman have a significant amount of flour (60 lbs!) but she mixes the yeast into ALL of it. Not part of it, but ALL of it!<sup>10</sup> What this illustrates for us is that the Kingdom of Heaven is like that yeast. Over time, as it mixes in with all 60 lbs., it will influence every nook and cranny of this huge planet. And, it will permeate every nook and cranny of our personal lives. It will permeate our friendships, our families, our schools, our workplaces, our community, and our world. It will have an impact on our financial priorities, our political decisions, our sexual ethics, our job performance, and on all of our other priorities in this life.

The Kingdom of Heaven does not allow us to make a separation between the sacred and the secular. In the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no separation between the spiritual growth and worship that we experience on Sunday mornings and our experiences at work and school Monday-Friday. There can be no differentiation between our Kingdom conduct and our conduct over the weekend at whatever parties or other events we attend. Even though the Kingdom of God may seem small<sup>11</sup>, it's designed to permeate, to saturate every part of our lives. Brother or Sister in Christ, let's embrace this Kingdom growth: in our world and in our own personal lives! Let's allow the Kingdom of Heaven to mix in down deep into every corner.<sup>12</sup> This is all part of becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together!<sup>13</sup>

A 3<sup>rd</sup> characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven is that it...

**3 ...is worth everything we have.** Jesus uses 2 parables to illustrate this. The 1<sup>st</sup> one is in Matthew 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." As one writer notes, this man... "doesn't even stop to do the math... The beauty and glory of the kingdom are such, that the one who finds it and knows what he has found, reacts out of instinctive joy, sacrificing it all and counting it no loss, in order to obtain the [Kingdom]."<sup>14</sup>

I can remember a painful conversation that I once had, a long time ago, with a brother in Christ. We were working on a ministry project together over at his house. We had stopped to take a break and got talking about a time when he had gone away for a year to work overseas. While he was there, he was having a powerful influence sharing his faith with lots of people who had never even heard about Jesus. However, as that year stretched on and on, he began to feel very homesick. He missed his family and friends, and he became very lonely. He also began to really miss the comforts and privileges of life in the U.S. So, when his 1-year assignment came to a close, he immediately returned home. However, as we were sitting there in his living room together, he admitted to me that he had been invited to stay overseas longer. More importantly, he had clearly heard God telling him to stay there and not return home. The fact is, he disobeyed God; and, he knew it. As he was telling me this story, it was now a few years later, and the opportunity was no longer there. It was too late to go back and seize the opportunity to do the thing that God had clearly called him to do. He had treasured his life back in America more than the Kingdom of Heaven. And he was miserable for it.

You see, sometimes we forget that the Kingdom of Heaven really is worth it; it's worth everything we have. We forget it... OR, we intentionally ignore it; we push it out of our minds. We lose that initial willingness that we first had, when the Gospel seed was first planted in us. We slowly drift from that certainty that Jesus and His Kingdom is worth everything to us. At the initial point of our salvation, each one of us came to a place of complete surrender. In essence, we said to God, "YOU are worth everything to me!" And when we said it, we meant it. But, over time, we can lose our resolve, our

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<sup>10</sup> That is a LOT of bread! If the average loaf of bread uses 1 lb. of flour, that's 60 loaves of bread! <https://www.thenourishinggourmet.com/2013/05/how-much-do-you-save-by-baking-your-own-bread-52-ways-to-save-money-on-a-healthy-diet.html>

<sup>11</sup> There's an old song that goes something like this, "A little is a lot if it's in the right spot, a little is a lot if you really have got it." Matthew 13:12 says, "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." All you need is a little. A little is powerful.

<sup>12</sup> Once it is thoroughly mixed in, once it works its way through all of the dough, it will have a powerful impact. Once that dough rises, there's no way of sifting the yeast back out.

<sup>13</sup> The Kingdom of Heaven grows in influence, permeation, and saturation. The Kingdom of Heaven's impact is thorough. We might try to resist it, but it will eventually have its way and rise up in every part of our lives. This can be unsettling, but we will either allow the Kingdom to have its way in us, in every part of our lives, or we will be miserable as we turn away and exclude God from our lives. This may sound invasive, but this is the nature of yeast and it's the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven: it is all or nothing. When you have time, listen to the powerful song by the band Jesus Culture, "You Won't Relent." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mM4RigRyieQ>

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Keene, "The Treasure in the Field and the Pearl of Great Price," Tabletalk, "The Parables of Jesus," Feb. 2020, p. 22.

spiritual steadfastness. We can drift and slowly get lulled away from full devotion. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure is a reminder for us today that “The kingdom of heaven is worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship, and those who know where the treasure lies, joyfully abandon everything else to secure it.”<sup>15</sup> It’s not about the COST, it’s about the WORTH. Sacrificing everything we have for the Kingdom of Heaven is something that we do with joy. We don’t do it with sadness or with a sense of resignation or even duty. ESPECIALLY when we remember its true value. The reason we give up everything we have, is because we know that it’s worth it!

The 2<sup>nd</sup> parable that Jesus uses to illustrate the worth of the Kingdom of Heaven is in Matthew 13:45-46, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” Can you imagine how many pearls a merchant probably bought and sold in the course of his career? He had likely been negotiating the sale and trade of pearls for years. It was his business to drive a hard bargain, in order to get the best quality for the best price. But we should take note, that in both of these parables, there is no hesitation at the price tag. This merchant doesn’t negotiate the price. This is just weird behavior for a merchant though; this guy is a terrible businessman! He doesn’t even pretend that he is reluctant to pay so much, in order to get a better deal. (Most of us would admit that we do this.) Instead, He responds with a total buy in. He liquidates every asset he has and pays the full amount. The Kingdom of Heaven is valued so highly, that we’re not even given a figure for how much this guy actually paid. All that we are told, and all that we need to know, is that he bought it with everything he had. He sold everything he had, including every other pearl he owned, because he was SO excited to get this one single pearl.<sup>16</sup>

One writer asks: “Why did the merchant sell everything to become the (homeless?) owner of a single pearl? For the love of this pearl. For...the joy of it...not for the hope of greater income but for the simple joy of possessing the pearl. These parables thus call us to consider our [own] love for the kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> Brother or Sister in Christ, do we truly realize the value of the treasure that we have found in Christ?! Do we believe that the Kingdom of Heaven is our greatest treasure? Are we willing to sell everything we have to purchase this one single pearl of great value? Just so we’re clear, this parable is not talking about buying a literal pearl. And, for most of us, it isn’t about literally SELLING everything we own. But this parable is calling us out. It is causing us to take stock of the importance of having a Kingdom perspective on our possessions and our priorities. The Kingdom of Heaven calls us to abandon all of the things of this world, in order to joyfully pursue the ONE far greater thing. As we continue to experience the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven, let’s continue to live lives that demonstrate the value that we place on that Kingdom. Brother or Sister in Christ, we’ve found it! The Kingdom of Heaven! And it’s worth everything that we have!

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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<sup>15</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 376.

<sup>16</sup> Can you picture this scene? There's this guy standing there with just the clothes on his back and one pearl in his hand. He's telling his friends, "hey guys, check this out! Look at this incredible pearl!" His friends gather around him admiring it, "wow! That's a real beauty!" But then they ask him, "what did you pay for it?" The man excitedly replies, "everything." His friends do a double take, "what do you mean by EVERYTHING?" The man says, "I mean everything. My home, all my extra clothes, my camels, my donkey, all of my other pearls, EVERYTHING else I owned." His closest friend leans in, "what does your wife think about all this?" Without any hesitation, the man answers, "she feels the same way. She owns the pearl too!" The friends ask him, "well, how much did she pay for it?" The man replies, "the same as I paid, everything. Her home, all of her dresses and jewelry, everything she owned." His friends are all quiet for a minute or two. Then, in a whispered tone, one of them dares to ask the question that all of them were thinking: "are you sure that that one pearl is worth all that?"

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Keene, "The Treasure in the Field and the Pearl of Great Price," *Tabletalk*, "The Parables of Jesus," Feb. 2020, p. 22.