**The Kingdom of Heaven is Like…**

November 25, 2018

Matthew 13:24-50

Key Verses 13:43 “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

King Jesus was rejected and was crucified by sinful men, but he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. He will come again to set up his kingdom on earth. We are living in the interim phase of the kingdom, where the kingdom is in the hearts of men, but the King is absent. Today Jesus teaches six parables to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like in the interim phase. Viewing these six parables as 3 pairs, we can find 3 characteristics of the kingdom of heaven: First, the parables of the weeds and the net show that the righteous and the wicked coexist in the kingdom of heaven. Second, the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast show that the kingdom of heaven starts small but has growing, transforming power. Third, the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl show that the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than all we have, and is worth investing our life.

**First**, in the interim phase of the kingdom of heaven the righteous and the wicked coexist. The two parables of the weeds and the net are essentially the same. Look at the Parable of the Weeds in verses 24-30. “Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. “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?’ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 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.’”

In this parable, Jesus teaches us that the children of God and the children of the devil must coexist. So the children of God cannot expect a paradise in this world because they have to coexist with the children of the devil. The children of the kingdom of heaven must patiently wait until God deals with the children of the devil. Jesus is saying an amazing thing. He is saying, “In this form of the kingdom, not everybody believes, not everybody is genuine, not everybody is bearing the fruit of righteousness.” The Old Testament prophets saw no such form of the kingdom, no such mingled kingdom, no such kingdom with good and bad tolerated. They didn’t see that. They saw a kingdom of righteousness, a kingdom of holy glory where unbelievers were devastatingly judged, punished, put out, destroyed.

In this parable, Jesus is drawing us a picture of God’s mercy. God doesn’t just go out and pull up the weeds. Here the weed is a bearded darnel. It is a poisonous grass, almost indistinguishable from wheat. Sometimes we just can’t tell a weed from the wheat, no matter how hard we try. When we see that immature sprout, we don’t know what fruit it may bear as it grows. People don’t usually wear signs identifying themselves saying, “I am a weed.” That person who looks like a weed, just might produce some beautiful flowers if given enough time and attention. It would be nice to be able to label with little name tags: ‘HELLO, I’m a weed.’” Or to look at students and know which ones are bad seed and which ones will produce fruit. But it’s not that easy. The same is true with our Bible students. Even though he or she may look like weeds, they may turn out to be wheat. Therefore, we should give them the benefit of doubt and be patient. It is a lot easier to plow under a bad crop and start over. But God’s concern is not so much to “separate the wheat from the weed,” but to preserve the “wheat” so that none of it may be lost. Also their roots are so intertwined that pulling the weeds will harm the wheat. This is not the age of judgment. Jesus was patient with Judas Iscariot. He did not burn him in the fire. This is the time of patience. Jesus was gracious. This is the time of grace. When you are angry with injustice and evil people, please do not forget the fact that we were once a darnel, and God is patient. God knows they need time enough to become wheat. If we go out condemning everybody, we may be totally out of line with God’s plan. If we act as a church against the ungodly of the world, we would be interfering with God’s patient, gracious waiting for those people to come to Him in His good time. That’s not our calling. We are not to do that. We are not to pray that God would destroy them. We are to pray that God will save them, that God will redeem them. That is the only proper attitude.

The parable of the net is very similar to the parable of the weeds. But this parable focuses on the separation between the righteous and the wicked at the time of God’s judgment. The kingdom of heaven is like a net, and you can see the vividness of this imagery. That net moves through the world. It is invisible to those around who can’t yet see it. People live in this world imagining themselves to be free, moving about, fulfilling their own desires, going here and there as they will, with little knowledge that the net comes closer and closer and closer. People float about in the freedom of the wide deep sea of life, not knowing the invisible lines of judgment move closer and closer and closer. And each time they are touched by it, they move a little further away. Finally, they are dragged into shore and face God’s judgment. And that’s how it is. Men may not perceive the kingdom, they may not see God moving in the world, but He is moving. They think they are free, but all men are gathered in the net. All men eventually face inevitable judgment. God with his angels will separate good fish from bad fish.

**Second**, the kingdom of heaven starts small but has growing, transforming power (31-33). A mustard seed is the smallest seed among all seeds. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, when it grows it is the largest of garden plants. This is a beautiful allegory of how Christianity starts small like a mustard seed, but grows like the largest tree. Jesus teaches us from this parable that from very small beginnings, very insignificant, the kingdom is going to grow, in spite of the opposition, to ultimately influence the whole wide world. For example, the kingdom of heaven on earth began through the baby in the manger. The baby in the manger is Jesus. Jesus was helpless compared with Caesar Augustus, who was sitting on the throne of the Roman Empire. But Caesar’s name has become a name of salad and pizza. On the other hand, Jesus, the baby in a manger, was nothing but a small baby. But there was the life of God in him. So he grew and conquered the world with the love of God. As of the year 2018, Christianity has more than 2.4 billion followers, out of about 7.5 billion people. The faith represents one-third of the world’s population and is the largest religion in the world.

Our one to one Bible study ministry is very small. We are invisible on campus. Nobody recognizes us. But we have the life of God through Bible study. Then we can grow to be a giant oak tree. Now this parable is meant to encourage us, but sometimes I get discouraged. I just think that no matter how hard we try we always seem to be crushed and crowded out by the evil world around us. I sometimes feel like we will always be small. But Jesus says, “It is going to start small but it is going to end big.” We are going to win in the end. The kingdom is going to stretch across the face of the earth and on into eternity forever and ever, and we are going to be a part of that eternal kingdom. May God raise up 120 Bible teachers among University of Toronto students and restore this nation as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Look at verse 33. 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.” Yeast used in baking is nearly unseen. Yet when a woman mixes yeast into a lot of flour, it can change or transform the whole batch of dough, causing it to rise. The amount of flour indicated here could feed 100 people from the bread that would be made. Yeast is the kingdom in the world. The massive dough is the world and from the inside it begins to bubble and boil. We are like yeast, very small, but Christianity will win, Jesus will reign, evil will be destroyed.

**Third**, the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than all we have (44-46). Look at verses 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. “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.”

It was very common to bury their treasures under the ground in Jesus’ time because they had no banks. The man who found the treasure sold everything he had, including his house. His wife thought that he was crazy. But it was worth it. Selling everything he had was not a pain, but joy, because it was a temporary sacrifice to obtain the priceless treasure.

From these parables, we can learn several lessons. Firstly, the kingdom is priceless in value. This treasure was more valuable to the man than anything in the world. This was also the testimony of St. Paul after finding Christ. He had been a man proud of his own achievements and credentials, which he could have boasted about. Yet he wrote in Philippians 3:7-8, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

Secondly, the kingdom is made personal by a transaction. In both of these cases, the word buying or bought is involved. There is a purchase transaction in salvation. It isn’t money. It isn’t human works. The transaction is: You give up all you have for all He has. I give up all I have and God gives me all He has. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Salvation is an act where I exchange me for Him as ruler of my life. We exchange ourselves, our sin, our will, our control of our lives for Christ’s leadership. By this transaction, the kingdom of heaven becomes personal. Otherwise, the kingdom is just an abstract concept. In the words of the hymn writer: “All to Jesus I Surrender, All to Him I Freely Give; I Will Ever Love and Trust Him, in His Presence Daily Live. I Surrender All, I Surrender All. All to thee, My Blessed Savior, I Surrender All.”

Thirdly, the kingdom is not superficially visible. The treasure was hidden. And the pearl had to be sought. It isn’t just lying around on the surface. The treasure is not obvious to men. The value and the preciousness of the kingdom of heaven, the value and the preciousness of salvation is not viewed by men, they don’t see it although it stands there and looks them in the eye. The kingdom is valuable. But the kingdom is also hidden from the superficial lookers who do not want to look deeply to the truth that is hidden in the Word of God. The man in the field, most likely, was not looking for treasure. He was going through whatever routine he went through, working, or plowing a field, or building something, or preparing some of the soil for whatever. And he was in the field and he was going along seeking sustenance for his life, doing what he did and he stumbled across a fortune. But the merchant was looking for fine pearls intentionally.

Charles Spurgeon, when he was young, attended church out of duty. But he didn’t know Christ, and he wasn’t seeking Christ. One New Year’s morning, he thought it would be proper to go to church. There was such a blizzard of snow that he was not able to reach the church he was in the habit of attending. Instead he came to a little Methodist church. The preacher who was supposed to conduct the service couldn’t come because of snow. One of the elders had to conduct the service with a congregation of 15 people. Spurgeon thought that the preacher was really stupid. His sermon text was, “Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 45:22 KJV) And he just kept repeating it because he didn’t have anything else to say. Something about young Spurgeon caught the preacher’s eye. “Young man, he said suddenly, “You look very miserable. Miserable in life and miserable in death, you will be if you don’t obey my text.” And suddenly he literally shouted, “Young man, look to Jesus, look, look, look.” Spurgeon testified, “I looked. And then and there the cloud was gone and the darkness rolled away and that moment I saw the Son.” He wasn’t searching for anything but it got him anyway. He stumbled into a fortune. Nobody has ever affected so many souls as Charles Spurgeon. We don’t know who that stupid preacher was that just kept repeating the text, but it was of God.

In conclusion, look at verse 43. “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Jesus had many fierce enemies who were bad weeds and bad fish. But Jesus did not despair. Jesus sowed good seed in the world by proclaiming the message of the kingdom through raising disciples. Jesus had hope and faith that those who have the treasure of the kingdom will shine like the sun in the kingdom of heaven. Do you have this treasure? If so, are you helping anyone to find this treasure? Are you investing your time, resources and effort in eternity or in temporary, fleeting things in the world? May the kingdom of heaven be the real treasure of your hearts and lives through Jesus Christ.