

# THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM (MATT 13.10-17)

## *Kingdom Stories: The Parables of Jesus*

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. As a church we are committed to pursuing God's presence and his purposes for Kansas City. Said differently, we long to see more of the kingdom of Christ established in our own lives, in our families, and in our city. This is an essential part of what we believe it means to fulfill the mission that God has given his church: *to give witness to his kingdom and expand its boundaries*.
- B. The concept of the kingdom of God was *central to the message and ministry of Jesus*. Three of the four Gospel writers summarize Jesus' entire message as the proclamation of the kingdom breaking into the world. Jesus also taught that the powerful outworking of his ministry was evidence of the kingdom's presence at work in the midst of this world.

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1.14-15)

<sup>28</sup>But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matt 12.28)

- C. Yet, many believers are often confused about the nature of the kingdom of God and what it means to live in it; what it means to give witness to the kingdom; and exactly what entails partnering with God's grace to see the kingdom established in our world.
- D. For the next ten weeks we are going to look at many of the stories that Jesus told to give shape to his followers' understanding of the kingdom. As we look at these stories together, my prayer is that they will give us glimpses of what our work will be like in the world until the time Jesus returns to consummate his kingdom.

### II. THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

- A. Throughout Jesus' ministry, it was most common for him to talk about the kingdom by using parables. In our passage, we are told of the moment the disciples come to him asking why he used parables in his instruction on the kingdom.
- B. Jesus' answer gives us an important framework for understanding these stories and their use within our pursuit of his kingdom. His answer consists of two broad realities — the *gift of revelation* (Matt 13.11-12) and the *purpose of parables* (Matt 13.13-15).
- C. *The Gift of Revelation*: Jesus begins his answer about his use of parables by highlighting the necessity of revelation in understanding the purpose of God and the reality of his kingdom.

"And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secret of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup>For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." (Matt 13.11-12)

- 1. *Given*: Jesus highlights the fact that understanding of the kingdom is only given as a gift by the Lord. To rightly perceive, understand, and respond to the teachings of Jesus concerning the kingdom requires the revelation of the Spirit to give us eyes to see and ears to hear and understand.

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." (Matt 11.25-26)

2. *Mysteries of the kingdom*: Jesus says that what has been given to his disciples are the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven.” The word “secrets” can more rightly be translated “mysteries”, and is a word used of God’s purposes and plans that cannot be known apart from his revelation. In other words, these realities are not “mysterious” in the sense that they are mystical or esoteric, but rather that they are truths that could not be deduced by the “natural man” whose mind is clouded by sin and unrighteousness.

<sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup>But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory... <sup>8</sup>as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” — <sup>9</sup>these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>10</sup>For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>11</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. <sup>12</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. <sup>13</sup>The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (I Cor 2.6-14)

3. Throughout the Scripture there is a dynamic relationship between the hidden things of the Lord and his glorious power to reveal his purposes to his people.

<sup>20</sup>Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. <sup>21</sup>He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; <sup>22</sup>he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. <sup>23</sup>To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we have asked of you, for you have made known to us the kings matter. (Dan 2.20-23)

<sup>2</sup>It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out (Prov 25.2)

4. *To the one who has*: Jesus concludes the initial portion of his answer by showing that the one who has the gift of revelation (earlier: ears to hear) will be given an abundance of understanding. However, those who do not have revelation, even the understanding they believe they have, will be shown to be foolishness and taken from them.

D. *The Purpose of Parables*: Jesus concludes his answer by outlining the purpose of his teaching in parables. Essentially, Jesus teaches in story form because these parables have the ability to both reveal and conceal. These stories are invitations to pursue greater understanding by the Spirit, while they also serve as a catalyst for further rejection for those who do not follow Jesus.

<sup>13</sup>This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup>Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” <sup>15</sup>For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. (Matt 13.13-15)

1. *Seeing they do not see*: Jesus highlights further the reality of the need for revelation in understanding the purposes of God and the reality of his kingdom. He states that those who are not his followers will look right at the truth, but they will not see it, they will hear the words but not truly hear and understand. This speaks of the hardness of the heart that is captured and enslaved to sin.
2. Jesus quotes from a passage in Isaiah 6.8-13 when the prophet is commissioned to preach in such a way that the people will be hardened to God’s word. This demonstrates the profound reality that God’s word is never received in a neutral way in the human heart. At times, God will use his word to bring forth further hardness in the hearts of those who have turned from his ways.
3. *Their eyes they have closed*: This passage shows the responsibility upon the one receiving God’s word — they have closed their own eyes from seeing, demonstrating the hardness of their hearts to God’s ways.

### III. THE KINGDOM OF THE PARABLES

A. *Definition: the kingdom of God is the reign of God realized by men in the world.*

B. From the beginning of creation, God determined to express his reign over all things through mankind. Genesis 1-2 outlines the truth of God's intentional care to create the heavens and the earth in order to give mankind dominion over his creation as his representative (image) in the world.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..." (Gen 1.26-28)

C. Adam's sin brings profound curses into the world with regards to mankind's ability to live in relationship with God but also excludes him from his ability to rightly fulfill his commission to subdue the earth under the righteous rule of God.

1. Adam abdicates his responsibility and hands dominion over the earth to Satan and his rebellious principalities.

<sup>4</sup>In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers... (2 Cor 4.4)

2. Adam and his descendants multiply and fill the earth with wickedness, perversion, and sin.

<sup>1</sup>When man began to multiply on the face of the land... <sup>5</sup>The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen 6.1, 5)

D. God does not leave mankind without hope and without a promise to bring full redemption. From the earliest moments of Scriptural history God begins to give promises for a *coming Savior* who will bring forgiveness for sin and restore mankind's communion with God as well as promises for a *coming King* who would judge God's enemies (reclaim authority over the earth) and realize God's rule over all creation.

<sup>10</sup>The scepter [royal rule] shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (Gen 49.10)

E. Through the Scripture, we see four stages of the kingdom of God with regards to his unfolding purposes:

1. *The Kingdom Promised:* Throughout the Old Testament, God promised that he would one day send a king from the line of David who would establish the rule and reign of God over all the earth. Throughout the Old Testament, the kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven) was to be comprehensive over all the earth — subduing every enemy, expanding to every nation, and encompassing every sphere of life.

<sup>13</sup>I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup>And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Dan 7.13-14)

2. *The Kingdom Established:* In the ministry of Jesus, we see God inaugurate his kingdom reign as Christ comes to bring salvation (forgiveness, restored relationship, liberty from sin) and reclaim authority over the earth by defeating Satan.

<sup>28</sup>But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup>Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (Matt 12.28-29)

3. *The Kingdom in Part*: Now, having all authority in heaven and earth, Jesus commissions his church to fill the earth and multiply by giving witness to his Lordship (evangelism) and instructing his disciples to live under his Lordship (discipleship). This work will grow and bring forth fruit *in part* until the time Christ returns.

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28.18-20)

4. *The Kingdom in Full*: At his return, Jesus will place every enemy under his feet (the last enemy is death) and bring forth the full restoration of all things. This will include the eternal judgment of the wicked and the perfect (comprehensive) establishing of his kingdom in every corner of the cosmos.

#### IV. RESPONDING TO THE MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM

- A. Throughout our time in the stories of the kingdom, I want to invite us to respond to the Lord with two specific postures.
- B. If we are to be those who rightly understand, receive, and order our lives around the teachings of Jesus related to his kingdom, we must be those who receive the gift of revelation in humility by *coming to Jesus* again and again with great need.

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. <sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11.25-30)

- C. Second, we must be willing to *be converted* in the whole of our thinking, seeing, and understanding as it relates to God's purposes and his plans.

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1.14-15)

1. We must let Jesus' presentation of the kingdom *convert our temptations to apathy and lethargy in pursuing the things of God*. Jesus did not save a people to simply get us out of hell, give us a list of regulations, or make our lives a little better. Jesus came to redeem a royal priesthood from every tongue, tribe, language, and people group in order that we might be invigorated by the glorious purpose for which he created us — walking in the good works he prepared for us in partnership with his glorious grace.
2. We must let Jesus' presentation of the kingdom *convert our temptations to minimize the work of God* in our own lives, in our families, in our vocations, and even in our surroundings. Often, the church is tempted to siphon off parts of our own lives or our pursuits, thinking that the gospel does not speak to those areas. However, the gospel of Jesus is the message of a king and a kingdom — one that demands wholehearted allegiance and will one day press out to the farthest edges of life.
3. We must let Jesus' presentation of the kingdom *convert our temptations to pursue worldly means in establishing noble ends*. One of the primary reasons for the parables is to retrain our imaginations in understanding *how* Jesus is going to establish his kingdom in the world. Yet, we often get excited about the reality of seeing God's name glorified and established yet fall into the temptations of pursuing that end by worldly means. Jesus kingdom purposes include both the glorious vision for the outcome as well as the patterns and mechanisms by which he works in the world.