

Parables of the Kingdom  
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

If you were to summarize Jesus' teachings in one sentence, how would you do it? Well, don't strain too hard; someone has already done it for you. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus went about preaching, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Well, Matthew was an observant Jew and was uncomfortable saying "God." Really serious Jews feel that that is being sacrilegious. So, Matthew renamed it the Kingdom of Heaven. But it is the same thing. So Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus' message was "Get ready for the great changes that are about to take place, as God's kingdom comes into this world."

What is the Kingdom of God? Jesus told us in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom comes, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The Kingdom of God on earth is a group of people doing God's will on earth. They are people for whom God is the Lord of their lives. God rules in their hearts. They are committed to doing God's will.

And Christ has told us what God's will is: to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love your neighbors as yourself. Wherever people love God with their whole heart and love people as much as they love themselves, God's kingdom has come on earth.

The Kingdom of God is more or less the Church. It's not exactly the same thing as the Church. We know that there are people outside the Church who love God and love their neighbors. We also know there are some people inside the Church who don't love God with all their hearts and don't love people. The Church is like a net dropped into the sea by fishermen. There are good fish and worthless fish in the sea. The net doesn't catch all the good fish. It catches some of the good ones and some bad ones. They pull the net to the shore and they separate the fish, keeping the ones that are good for eating and throwing away the bad ones. And Jesus says that's the way it will be on the Judgment Day, when the angels will determine which church members are citizens of the Kingdom of God and which aren't. Now, of course, we have to wait until the Judgment to find out. We don't go around pointing at church members and saying, "That's a good one. That's a stinky one." Nobody knows until the Day of Judgment.

How does the Kingdom come? It grows. It's like a little mustard seed, which is planted and grow into a huge plant. Jesus is the mustard seed. The Church started with one person—an extraordinary person, granted, but one person nevertheless. Now, one-third of the world call themselves Christians. That is over one and a half BILLION people. That's quite a bush.

But, even more important than that, the Kingdom is transforming the whole world. Jesus tells us that the Kingdom is like yeast which is placed in a portion of flour. It will transform that flour into dough. And the Church is transforming the world with the message and the Spirit of Christ. Before the coming of Christ, the world was a terrible place. People thought they had a duty to love their own people and hate everyone else. They took pride in hating people from other families, other tribes and other

nations. But then Christ came along with the revolutionary idea that we are all children of God, and that we have no right to hate any of our brothers and sisters. We are to love everyone, including our enemies. We do not have the right to hate anyone.

Slowly but surely the world is learning that lesson. Not all have learned it. But the world is a much better place than it was 2,000 years ago. More and more people understand that they are to love their neighbors. And the Kingdom is transforming the world.

The Kingdom is in the world because it dwells in people's hearts. And Jesus tells us the Kingdom comes to different people in different ways. It catches some people by surprise. Jesus tells us that some people are like a hired man who is plowing a field. Suddenly he feels the plow hit something hard. When he checks it out, he finds a box, and inside the box is a treasure. Now, this was not so far-fetched. In those days, before banks, people literally did bury their money in the ground. And every now and then someone would accidentally find buried treasure. Well, this farm worker did. And he goes out and sells everything he has and begs, borrows and steals the rest until he has enough money to buy the land and own the treasure legally.

Some people do stumble into the Kingdom by accident. I'm thinking of C.S. Lewis. He was a writer, a scholar, and an atheist. Then, one day, he was running in a subway car, minding his own business, when suddenly he was overwhelmed by a sense of the presence of God. It changed his life. He became a writer of religious books and novels with Christian themes, including "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" series. One of his books was titled, "Surprised by Joy," in which he talked about how the Kingdom caught him by surprise.

Other people are looking desperately for the Kingdom. They are like a merchant who loves pearls. He spends his life looking for the perfect pearl. Finally he finds it, and he sells all his merchandise to buy that one pearl.

Some people spend years struggling to get into the Kingdom. I can certainly identify with them. At the age of fifteen I decided I had to find God. After five years of desperate seeking, God found me and invited me into the Kingdom.

Some find the Kingdom accidentally. Some find the Kingdom after a long search. But all the citizens of the Kingdom have one thing in common: They gladly give up all they have to remain in the Kingdom. If you are to love God with all your heart, you have to empty your hearts and your lives of all the other gods in your life. You can't hold back anything. That's what repentance is all about.

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

You are citizens of the Kingdom of God. Because of you the Kingdom continues to grow, and the Kingdom is transforming the world through you. Go and be the Kingdom of God on earth.

Dr. Wesley Welborn  
Senior Pastor