

Sermon - St Francis Church
26th July 2020

Parables of the Kingdom

Illustration

It's been a busy week....helping friends clear house..in the loft we found....shirts....110! We'd hoped for more exciting things ..old books...antique vase...a priceless painting maybe....hidden forgotten treasure! We continued searching and eventually we did find some very grimy but beautiful little ornaments that were hidden around loft. One by one we collected them together to make an attractive collection....so lovely, such a shame that they were left forgotten in the loft. It wasn't exactly priceless treasure but it was good to bring it out so that someone may buy and use them.

Introduction

Today we're thinking about small beginnings and priceless treasure in two pairs of parables.

1. Parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (yeast).
2. Parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price.

The last is the parable of the net which really fits alongside the parable of the wheat and the tares and what will happen at the end of this age on the day of judgement.

This chapter is about the Kingdom of God, Gods Kingdom here on earth and what it's like. We see glimpses of the Kingdom now but at times like this, with the coronavirus affecting virtually the whole world, we often find ourselves longing for God's Kingdom to come in all its fullness, to take away all pain, suffering injustice and replace it with eternal love, joy, hope and peace, all the things that are promised for all who are followers of Jesus.

The birth of Jesus was the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

It didn't start in a loud dramatic way with fanfares, trumpets and flag-waving, it began quietly in a meek and lowly stable in the little town of Bethlehem.

It began with two people and a baby and it wasn't until Jesus was age 30 and his cousin John the Baptist began to announce the coming of the Kingdom, that people began to think that maybe the Messiah really had arrived.

People became excited as they dared to hope that at last the prophecies in the Scriptures had come true. As people believed and became disciples, the Kingdom of God began to grow albeit in very small ways initially, but grow it did and Jesus gradually found a band of faithful followers.

To begin with, not surprisingly, they were confused about who the Saviour was, they thought that he'd come to overthrow the Roman rule by force and Jesus had to teach them about who he was and what he was really about.

Today we're going to consider what Jesus was meaning when he spoke these parables and what relevance they have for us today.

Context

Jesus had a long day, he'd been teaching and healing, engaging in disputes with the Pharisees when they accused him of breaking the Sabbath laws. It was clear that the Pharisees didn't understand Jesus and their hearts were far from him. Their words revealed cold and uncaring hearts and they were totally unconcerned about the suffering of people or whether those they'd accused were guilty or innocent.

Later that day Jesus began teaching the huge crowds. He spoke to people in parables, stories that help to explain in vivid meaningful images, why Jesus came and what he was doing, enabling people to look at the world in a whole new way. Most importantly, the parables were there for all those who had ears to hear, those with open hearts.

The Parables - Let's have a closer look.

V31 Jesus says "*The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed.*"

V33 he then goes on to say "*The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast.*"

The first pair of parables about the mustard seed and the yeast are really everyday miracles.

When a mustard seed falls to the ground it germinate straight away. It's just a weed but its good for medicinal and culinary purposes! If you put mustard seeds into a casserole or some other dish that you're making you don't need many seeds before a fiery and overpowering heat is produced!

It's significant that Jesus chose this seed as an example, it was the smallest seed in the middle East but it tended to take over wherever it was wanted or not. It's a plant that quickly gets out of control. It becomes a huge bush that attracts birds into cultivated areas where birds aren't wanted.

If you've ever used yeast, you'll know how a small quantity will work through a large amount of flour turning the dough from something not so good into something that is absolutely delicious when it's cooked. I love fresh baked bread don't you? Flat bread is not quite the same!

Everyone knows how mustard seeds and yeast work and how amazing it is that something so small can have such an effect..... **But have you ever thought of the Kingdom of heaven like that?**

What is Jesus saying? 'Don't despise the small beginnings of the kingdom. What I (*Jesus*) am doing is planting seeds. They may not look much at the moment but they're going to grow and when they do then you'll be surprised at the birds that come to roost.' Many people have interpreted this as a reference to people from other nations, coming to share in Israel's privileges.

Regarding the parable of the yeast, in the same way as the yeast makes the whole of the dough rise, the kingdom work that Jesus was doing, maybe seemingly small and insignificant he probably never travelled more than a couple of hundred miles and he probably only met a comparatively small number of people, he didn't go and preach before kings and important people, he didn't write any books or have any television appearances to spread his message yet from those small beginnings the yeast that he stirred into the work of the kingdom has woven itself into the whole world. **Now world history is dated in relation to his birth! That's quite an acknowledgment!**

These two parables describe how the Kingdom of heaven grows from something almost invisible to the human eye and grows at a surprising rate despite its unremarkable beginnings. It attracts people from all walks of life and everyone is welcome regardless of colour or creed.

Maybe you're thinking 'but God's Kingdom is huge, it's everywhere, it's not something tiny working inconspicuously.' Actually the Kingdom of God is not about place, it's about relationship relationship with God.... knowing him, loving him and serving him, spreading seeds of the gospel wherever we go even in the places where its not wanted, among people who may be classed by some as the undesirable and not worthy of a place in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God offers words of promise that create new hope and expectation. It causes people to change or leave jobs, to share the hope of the Kingdom. People have left behind their old ways to live in it. The Kingdom of God is an exciting dangerous place, you don't know where it will take you, don't know what God will call you to. Even if you think what you have to offer is little, insignificant, remember God doesn't discount small things. He knows what you're capable of He knows your potential, the gifts he's given you and entrusted to you to help to build His Kingdom here on earth. Don't waste them, don't leave them sitting in the 'loft' to get dry and dusty!

Let's have a look at the second pair of parables, the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value:

V44 - *Jesus says "the Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field..*

V45 - *Jesus says 'Again the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.*

This next pair of parables have a more personal message, more about the Kingdom of heaven and 'me' rather than a broad brush stroke about humankind throughout the world.

The parables are about the experience of every true believer of God, our family, our neighbours. People the world over are seeking for something that will make them happy and content...often they don't know what it is they're looking for.

The man in the field was looking for treasure...did he stumble across it, was he actively seeking treasure...did someone tell him about it! We don't know, we're not told but the point is, it isn't how the discovery was made but the effect the discovery had on the two men.

It's about value and cost, value is determined by how much something is desired, whereas cost depends on how much someone is willing to pay or give up to acquire the thing that is so precious to them.

The men who found the treasure and the pearl of great price were both willing to sell everything they had to get what they wanted. In Genesis 29 Jacob was willing to work for 14 years altogether in order to be able to marry Rachel, the woman he loved. Rachels Father Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his firstborn daughter Leah before he would allow him to marry his first love. Rachel was so precious to Jacob that gave up everything for her and worked for her Father despite the trickery and deceit.

One commentator said, "to find the Kingdom of heaven is to find the one treasure that outweighs all other valuation."The men in the parables were willing to give up everything they had in order to get the one thing that they desired more than anything.

Some people are willing to risk even their own lives to obtain what they want! In fact a diver lost his life in the 30's when he found the largest natural pearl in the world.

In Philippians chapter 3 v 7 the apostle Paul says *"but whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for his sake I have lost all things."*

For Paul nothing was better than knowing Christ Jesus, Paul was willing to give up everything to follow Jesus and to spread the good news of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God to anyone who would listen. Paul suffered tremendously but it didn't deter him from giving his all to Jesus.

How valuable is the gospel to you?

Today God is looking for people who have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts of compassion that long to see an end to the problems of this world, he is looking for people who are prepared to be kingdom builders, people who are prepared to give up all their treasures and buy the one that he offers. Jesus is saying 'give up the small collection of pearls which have meant so much to you, here is the biggest, finest one you could ever imagine.'

Finally, don't bury your treasure in the ground or hide it in the loft, bring out whatever you have no matter how small and see what amazing things God can do through you to make a difference in this needy world. You might think that you are too old, too young, too

insignificant, feel that you have nothing to offer, but you have, if you have faith, even faith as small as a mustard seed, God can use you!..... Just give Jesus your heart and experience the joy and the privilege of walking hand in hand with Him into something new and seeing the Kingdom blossom and grow in the people around you.

Amen