

As regulars will know – we are great believers in starting a new sermon series by placing the theme within the big picture biblical framework, So I want to spend a few minutes doing just this with the Parables of Jesus.

Because here’s the core context we need to grasp.

All of Jesus Parables are about Jesus giving us spiritual wisdom about what for Him, is THE most important thing.

And it’s crucial we understand what is **most important for Jesus** because only then can we understand how important this has to be for you and me.

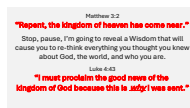
If you had to summarize in one sentence what Jesus most spoke about - what would you say?

What was Jesus’ whole deal in one sentence?

Luckily, we don’t have to think too hard because both Matthew and Luke give us the answer right at the beginning of Jesus ministry. And here’s the important context.

Jesus has just emerged from his 40-day-40-night wilderness experience. Without question THE defining moment for Jesus. Having undergone a sever spiritual testing, he now has clarity on the true nature of his own mission calling. Why he is here and who he must be.

And the first thing He declares is this.



“Repent, *the kingdom of heaven has come near.*”

Stop and pause says Jesus, because I’m going to reveal to you a Wisdom (that if you are open to it) will cause you to re-think everything you thought you knew about God, the world, and who you are.

In Luke’s Gospel Jesus confirms His mission. 4:43 **“I must proclaim the good news of the *kingdom of God because this is WHY I was sent.*”**

2 things to immediately make clear.

When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of heaven, he isn't talking about somewhere you go - He's talking about somewhere that's coming here. Think the Lord’s prayer we say every week. **“Let your kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Secondly to reiterate what I said last week. In scripture the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven mean the same thing. Matthew’s gospel tends to go with Kingdom of God. Luke’s - kingdom of heaven. Two different terms for the same reality.

As I also said last week, the kingdom is present when the God flavours and God colours are sovereign in our hearts, minds and in all situations.

This is the Heavenly Wisdom that is more precious than rubies; the wisdom that will guide you down delightful paths. A wisdom that is the tree of life to all those who embrace it and hold on to it tightly.

As I said, this Wisdom of the Kingdom is the most important thing for Jesus and so it must be for all who would claim to follow.

The Gospel of Matthew is thirty pages long and if you read through, Jesus talks about the kingdom of God/Heaven 1.5 times per page. Nearly fifty times in thirty pages

It's what Jesus lived, breathed and talked about more than anything else. It's the main heartbeat of his mission and his message - and in His teachings and how he lived - Jesus reveals to us what this alternative Kingdom vision looks like when lived out.

The Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes are often called his Kingdom manifesto.

But the other major part of Jesus revealing this Kingdom vision is done through the Parables.

Which is why we want to spend the next 3 weeks exploring a few of them.

The Parables is Jesus giving us Heavenly wisdom for our earthly lives.

The real power of the Parables is that they invite us in to use our imaginations.

The parables invite us to open our eyes to the different layers of meaning and truth contained within them.

So let's take the first one.



“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, when it grows, it becomes the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

In this parable the core wisdom Jesus gives us about *how* Kingdom reality works – is very encouraging.

All the good fruit and life-giving harvest of the Kingdom Way - can start very small - but with God's enabling power can grow into huge transformative expressions that enable life to flourish. St Paul mirrors this wisdom truth when he tells the church of Corinthians ...



I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. ⁷ It's not important who does the planting or the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. Both are God's workers, God's field and God's building.

The biggest example of this Kingdom truth of course, is that Jesus own ministry started with those first words in the small town of Galilee - and through seeds being planted and watered grew into an immense worldwide presence - that has influenced and impacted nations and individuals. It changed the course of human history.

How encouraging can this wisdom be for you at this moment?

How encouraging is it to know that from the small seeds of our small deeds (in our seemingly mundane lives), a difference can be made. The seemingly insignificant can be surprisingly fruitful. In the fabric of our everyday lives, we actually live a Mustard Seed Hope.

You may feel at this moment that your faith feels small, but the Way of the Kingdom means even the smallest faith can grow into something significant and life changing.

**All of you will have experienced this truth in different ways
and I have my own witness to this truth.**

7 years before Kim and I even started attending an Alpha course at St Martins church in Birmingham to very tentatively explore the Christian faith, we were on holiday in Cornwall UK with the kids.

One day there was some organised family activities happening on the beach and we let the kids take part. I soon realised it was some sort of Christian Beach Mission.

And because at that point I was pretty anti-organised religion with no Christian upbringing whatsoever, my negative defences kicked in a little.

But I was soon disarmed by the warm and winsome way they approached this. I remember saying to Kim... **“I really like how they’re doing this. It just has a wholesome nourishing flavour to it.”** And the kids were having great fun.

Towards the end the lead co-ordinator thanked us for being there and said they were having a BBQ, and they invited us all to stay on and join them.

I distinctly remember turning to Kim and saying... “This the point where they try to hook us in and then hit us with a bit of Jesus and the bible, so lets get our excuses ready and leave.

Sure, enough a smiley guy came over really friendly and gracious and asked us to join them. I very politely said no thanks, but I do want you to know, we really enjoyed this time.

Being a good soldier of Jesus, he didn’t take no for an immediate answer, kept up the respectful persuasion but we stayed steadfast and left.

Here’s the important truth of this story.

With the wisdom of hindsight, I can see this quite clearly as a moment when a Kingdom mustard seed was planted in our hearts. Something about their grace, good humour, warmth and hospitality made an imprint. And this seed has gone on to grow into something much larger and life-giving.

This seed has been watered by many other people since that moment, and I can see quite clearly how God’s beautiful healing Grace has taken all of this and grown it. And continues to do so daily. I now have a whole different perspective on how I want to live my life.

I want to cultivate this Wisdom of Jesus that is more precious than rubies; and the tree of life to all who embrace it and hold on to it tightly.

I don't know for sure, but that Beach Mission guy may have seen both Kim and I as ones that *'got away'*. But this is the mysterious wisdom of how the Kingdom works in all our lives.

Every one of you will have had a Kingdom seed moment planted by someone somewhere. And every one of you will have planted and watered a seed in someone else's life that you don't even know about.

And Jesus keeps up this theme of God's often invisible unnoticed quiet expansion of His Kingdom ways in his second 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.”

Once again Jesus gives us words of wisdom and encouragement for our own daily endeavours.

Like the Mustard Seed. A tiny amount of leaven can transform a large mass. 60 pounds of flour is a lot of flour. The kingdom starts small and hidden, but grows from within, ultimately transforming everything it touches.

God's transforming yeast works from the inside out, affecting hearts and cultures.

I mostly see this Parable as a beautiful example of how the kingdom works in the life of a church community. Both the community of St Martins in Birmingham and this community of St George's have been incredibly formational for Kim and myself.

The Holy Spirit is the Kingdom yeast shaping God's presence among us. But we too, can be the yeast in the dough to each other. At this point I want to invite Beth and Gary to share their experience of this Kingdom truth.

BETH AND GARY



In summation

The most important thing for Jesus - was to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. The alternative vision of what it means to be truly human. **Heavenly wisdom for our earthly lives.**

And all of his teaching and the Way HE lived His life - was to reveal the spiritual wisdom of what this looks like so that we can live it out too. As Jeremy will explore next week, the real treasure on which we build our lives.

This is at the heart of our desire as a worshipping community. To shape and form our lives into the shape of Christ.

There's no doubt that culturally, people are searching for something deeper.

You may have seen the recent report observing that New Zealand's **“social fabric is fraying at the edges with growing isolation, financial stress and institutional distrust prime factors.**

People are turning to Faith and Church communities to find meaning and connection. We at St George's want to respond well to this need.

As we mentioned last week in the Newsletter, we had an inspiring Staff meeting to brainstorm our own thoughts into an embryonic document called '**Catching the Wind**'.

It captures all the beautiful life-giving expressions of God we're already witnessing in our community but also explores how we can shape and galvanise a more cohesive response to the Spirit's movement among us.

It's very much about discerning the Spirit's promptings and moving forward with wisdom and humility.

• What might it look like for you this coming week to help plant and water life-bringing Kingdom seeds here at St George's and beyond? Confident that it is always God who will do the growing.

• If you are new/newish to St G's and keen to feel more connected Jeremy has put a QR code in the newsletter which will take you to our website to register.

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