

“PROMISES OF THE KINGDOM”

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b, Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

July 29 & 30, 2023

“There is an old story about a social worker who could not get a slovenly family to clean up their house.” She had tried encouragement. She had tried threats. Even the city had given them a citation for the condition of their house and property. Yet they could not be persuaded to clean up their surroundings. Nothing this social worker did could get the family going.

Finally, “one day she brought a beautiful plant and left it in the family’s living room. It was such a contrast to the room that the family cleaned that room up. That made the other rooms in the house look so filthy that they could not stand it and so they cleaned the whole house. Then the outside looked so run-down they decided to paint it, and to improve the yard.

“Pressure could not get any results, but a little beauty that opened the family’s eyes” to what was possible “worked a miracle.

“This is the way God works. This is the nature of the Kingdom of God” - to open up the eyes of people so that they might see the wondrous possibilities that obedience brings. “This is the method of Christ. He shows a little bit of treasure”, a little glimpse of goodness and joy and hope and love, “and in our desire for it we find the meaning of our life and the redemption of our souls.”¹

In order to change our society, we need to present the beauty of loving God and obeying His commandments through faith in Jesus, in ways that expose the messiness of any other lifestyle. In order for the world to get a glimpse of the glory of the Lord, we have to become like that beautiful plant, standing out so drastically different from the rest of its surroundings, that those around us want what we have, and begin to make the changes necessary in their lives to find God’s blessings in them, too.

In His day, Jesus used parables in order to introduce the people to the nature of God’s Kingdom. We as human beings get so caught up in the here and now that we forget that our time is temporary, but that God’s time is infinite. We are often so caught up in ourselves that we are all we see. The self-

¹ (Gerald Kennedy, THE PARABLES, *Sermons on the Stories Jesus Told*, [New York: Harper Brothers 1960] pg. 213)

focused life is our own environment, our own world, and it's all we see, just me, Me, ME. It's all about the one, and nothing else is important or matters outside of that one.

“C. S. Lewis spoke one of being awakened in the middle of the night during his bachelor days and not being able to go back to sleep. It was totally dark and utterly still in his bedroom at Magdalen College. There was no way to perceive anything there outside himself. It was as if he were alone in a vacuous black hole. Suddenly he sat bolt upright in bed, for it dawned on him that such isolation was the logical end of a self-centered life. ‘What if,’ he found himself asking, ‘we get in eternity exactly what we’ve lived for in time?’ This means if we’ve truly loved others and beauty and ideas and causes beyond ourselves, we shall continue to participate in that realm of richness. But if we’ve lived only for ourselves - if every thought and concern has revolved around the self and the self alone - could it be that all we shall get will be ourselves and nothing else?

“Such a condition would amount to total isolation, which is similar to that worst of all punishments, short of capital punishment - namely, solitary confinement. Such a fate cuts across the very heart of what we human beings are and need...”² It is close to the reality of Hell itself.

But when we begin to recognize that we are not the universe on our own, that we were made to be in community with others, we begin to open up our minds to see that God is necessary in our life - that the love of God is for us to share, beyond just the one, but to so many others around us.

Jesus gives us the parable of the mustard seed for us to open our eyes to the greater gifts of God. Listen to the parable. (READ Matthew 13:31-32) Jesus’ introduction to the Kingdom of God is like that small mustard seed, barely a sand-grain in size. As we take notice of this small-seed sized concept of God, and begin to let it grow in our hearts, it opens up our eyes to the marvelous wonder of God’s world, and God’s Word and His love for us gets so large that it overwhelms our own personal lives, and begins to open us up to include others such that they, too, can enjoy the miracles of God’s love for us.

Something so small grows into something so enormous all because we enabled it to grow in our

² (John Claypool, *Stories Jesus Still Tells: The Parables*, [New York; McCracken Press, 1993] pg. 13-14)

hearts. The Kingdom of God is so massive that we are not able to take it all in. Yet when we become a part of it, it's beauty manifests itself in our lives and we are able to let it show out from us into the rest of the world, so that they might see it and also become changed by it. It goes beyond the self to incorporate everyone around us. With such small mustard seed sized beginnings, as we engage God and let Him become a part of us, the wonders of His love grows exponentially within us.

That's the mindset of our lesson from Psalm 105. The psalmist instructs us, "*Give praise to the Lord, proclaim His name; make known among the nations what He has done. Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.*" As we let that little seed of God grow within us, He begins to open up our eyes to see the marvelous works that He has done for us, and our love for Him grows tremendously.

And Jesus gives us another parable to help us to fully grasp the concept of having Him within us, and letting Him grow through us. Listen to the parable of the yeast. (READ Matthew 13:33).

As we let God move in and throughout our lives, He begins to change us and enable us to do more than we can do all by ourselves. As we work God into our lives, like the yeast into the dough, He becomes intimately involved into every part of our lives, and we begin to see His excellent work as we conform to His desire for us. The yeast of God's awareness and God's presence within us presses us to grow more and more so that we become fulfilling and nourishing beyond ourselves, reaching out into the lives of others. As yeast causes the bread to rise and become tasteful, so God works within us to change our lives from flatly self-focused to fully living and open individuals.

But it's more than just God and self. While it is good for us to be intimately involved with the Lord God so that He can move in us deeply and marvelously, it's more than what God can do just for me. We're called to see God for all that He is, and to set our focus upon His will and His ways and to let them become so a part of our lives that we are filled by Him. In seeing the Lord as He is, we begin to grow closer to Him and desire to be in His presence merely for the sake of being with Him. We begin to experience the real joy of the Lord, and desire to live in His presence with us.

John Claypool give a great example of this. He says, “I was hard at work in my study early one morning when my four-year-old daughter quietly slipped in - still in her night clothes - and without a word, climbed up in my lap and laid her head on my shoulder.

“I’m really glad to see you,’ he said to her. ‘What can I do for you? What do you want?’

“She paused for a moment and then said, ‘Nothing. I just wanted to be close to you, that’s all.’

“The memory of that moment is still golden to me,’ John says, ‘for she wasn’t there on any utilitarian mission - just the wonder of being with and sharing time with her daddy! That experience gave me such satisfaction that it pains me to realize how few times I’ve gone into God’s presence in that same spirit - without any purpose except to say, ‘I simply want to be with You and glory in what You are, not in what You do for me.’”³

Well folks, that’s what worship is all about, glorifying in all that God has done for us and spending time in His presence. As we work God into our whole lives, we become acutely aware of His presence with us every minute of the day and every step on our journey. As we spread the yeast of God’s love throughout our whole life, we begin to see how God lifts our spirits, fills our minds with His goodness, and pervades our hearts with the desire to do His good work in all we do and say. And we begin to see how He blesses us unexpectedly with astounding opportunities.

Listen to another of Jesus’ parables about the beauty of God’s kingdom (READ Matthew 13:44).

The parable of the hidden treasure is real for each one of us. Imagine the excitement and pure amazement of the man who found that hidden treasure. Farmers didn’t normally have such riches, but as he is working the ground of that field, he crashes into treasure hidden there in the ground. Now, the field is not his own, so he could not take possession of that treasure, since it rightfully belonged to the owner of the field. But this man covers it back up and then goes out and sells everything that he has in order to obtain that field, and thereby also gaining the hidden treasure. The treasure became so precious to him that he was willing to do whatever was necessary in order to obtain it.

³ (John Claypool, *Stories Jesus Still Tells: The Parables*, pg. 16-17)

Now, it was not unusual for the land of Israel to reveal such hidden treasures. You see, being squarely in the middle between Assyria and Egypt, the people of the country were always on the lookout for the next invading army passing through. The only safe place to keep the valuables of the family were to hide them in the ground, with the hope and expectation of being able to return and pick up right where they left off, recovering the family fortune. However many never made it back to reclaim their hidden treasure, so the land was spotted with unrevealed riches still hidden in the ground until someone stumbled upon it. So joyous was this farmer at discovering this treasure, that he was willing to give up everything else that he had in order to get that plot of land so that he could gain that treasure.

The same is hopefully true when we discover the vast riches of having Christ Jesus as Lord of our lives. When we discover all that the Lord has for us, hidden until we come upon it suddenly, we have two options - 1) to cover the treasure back up and forget that you ever came upon it; or 2) do whatever is necessary to obtain that treasure.

If we build off of the first two parables of Jesus today, and allow that mustard seed sized faith to begin to work in and through us, like the yeast in bread dough, we begin to recognize the enormous treasure available to us as we claim the Lord Jesus as our Savior. He becomes the exposed hidden treasure for us and that leaves us the decision what to do next. God's desire for us is to be willing to let go of everything else of value in our lives so that we obtain Jesus and then rejoice in His richness.

His treasure is so great that really nothing in all this world can measure up to the richness of His glory. The benefits we have by selling all our worldly treasures in order to obtain Jesus Christ goes way beyond anything that we could ever imagine. Once revealed to us, it is up to us as to what we will do with Him as our treasure. By putting all other things aside and letting Jesus become the joy of our hearts, our lives become so blessed that we will also have the greatest of joy in us.

And the best part of this treasure is that no one can ever take it away from us. There is no need for us to hide the treasure of Jesus Christ, because there is nothing in all this world that can take it away. We need not fear any enemy, so we need not hide our treasures in Jesus.

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, not life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (8:35, 38-39). Once we find the treasure of Jesus Christ in our lives, there is nothing that can take Him away from us.

However, we can give that treasure up. Though no one can take it away from us, we can give up on Christ and turn away from Him, thereby rejecting all the possible blessings from our lives. When we deny that Christ has made any difference in us, that after we once experienced His blessing and beauty and love and we say “Enough!” and turn away from Him completely to worship other things as gods, only then do we lose the rich treasure that we once found in Jesus.

But the treasure is for us to receive and delight in. Yet, it demands that we put all other things aside in our life in order to receive the greatest blessing. We must pursue Christ with our whole life.

And that is the purpose of Jesus’ next parable, the parable of the find pearl. (READ Matthew 13:45) When we come to recognize that there is nothing in all this life better than Jesus, like that fine pear of great price, it is our tendency to want to pursue Him with all our mind. He becomes our sole focus, and as we grow deeper in Him, the more we become convinced that He is the most important person or thing in our life. And we pursue Him with all that we are.

Jesus invites us to let Him become the #1 thing in our lives. And we can’t do that all by ourselves. He gives us the Holy Spirit to empower us to begin doing His work and following His ways. So like the merchant seeking the best quality of pearls, we are called to seek Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And when the merchant finds the greatest and best pearl, greater than anything else he has ever seen, he sold all he had to gain that finest of all pearls, so that it could be his.

And Paul tells us again in Romans 8, *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*

And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (8:26-28).

This, then, changes our life so that all that we are, and all that we have, becomes available to bring God glory and honor. We have given up our pursuit of everything else and have become the people of God, giving of ourselves for the sake of God, rather than for our own sake. We come to the end of ourselves and we find the joy of being filled with Christ Jesus, encouraged and guided by the Holy Spirit to be the servants of God.

One last parable of Jesus about the promises of the Kingdom brings all of these lessons to the focus of God's desire for us. This is the parable of the dragnet. (READ Matthew 13:47-48)

The fishermen have gone out in pursuit of fish. They put forth the effort to gather a catch of fish, and they pull their nets through the water collecting whatever might be in its path. And when they arrive at the shore, they sit down to evaluate their catch, and they discover that both good and bad fish have been caught. As they go through the catch, they hold onto what is good and get rid of what is bad.

This is to be our process in life, too. As we encounter various things in our lives, we need to evaluate them to see what is good and what is bad. And when we have the fullness of God in us, when we have the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit working in us, then we can see clearly that which is good and that which is bad according to God's perspective. We then are invited to have the courage to get rid of the bad and hold onto what is good and healthy and beneficial to keep us doing the work of the Lord.

But Jesus puts a little different perspective on this parable. He relates this kind of action taking place at the end of the age when God will sort out the peoples of the world. (READ Matthew 13:49-52)

Because our lives are limited here on the earth, we have only a short time to determine what we are to do with Jesus Christ. IF God opens up our hearts to His fullness, and we begin to grow in His love to become witnesses of all God's goodness, and we receive the treasure of Jesus Christ into our

lives as Savior and Lord, and then pursue Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, when our lives end here, we will have an eternal home with the Lord our God, since we are His people, called by His Name. God will take us to be with Him, and our reward for our faith will be so much more than we could ever imagine. The richness of His Kingdom is astounding, and we who have put our trust and faith in Jesus will be given it.

But IF God shows us a little bit of His goodness, and we despise it, and turn away from it, and determine to go our own way and do our own thing in rebellion to what God has called us to do, we will find ourselves like the bad fish collected in the fishermen's nets. Without God in our lives, if we are self-focused and self-centered, we will be cast away from His presence and find ourselves in the hell of our self-isolation. God has no place for those who reject Him and refuse to follow His Will and His Commandments. Jesus tells us plainly, "*The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 13:49-50). By our own selfish living, by our own rejection of the Way, the Truth, and the Life found in Jesus Christ, we determine where our eternity will be spent. ETERNITY, people! Never ending punishment and agony for those who have cast away the things of God to live for their own, and eternal life for those who give up on the earthly pleasures in order to have Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Jesus asks each one of us, "*Have you understood all these things*" (Matt. 13:51)? If we say yes, then we are expected to live out our faith in Jesus on a daily basis, for the glory of the Lord God as His servants, using all of the things of the world to bring honor and glory to Him.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for showing us the mustard seed of Your goodness. Help us to receive it, to let it grow within us, so that we might pursue You with all that we are. Guide us by Your Holy Spirit so that we might find Your strength to live as beautiful witnesses to Your love so that others might see it in us, and make the necessary changes in their own life to come to follow Jesus, too. Give us a heart to seek You and grow closer to You every day, for we pray this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.