

## **Matthew 13: 31 - 33, 44 – 52**

31 He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

33 He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with\* three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

44 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' 52And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

## Would You Recognize the Treasure?

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

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There is an old story about an antique dealer driving through a small town. Outside an old farmhouse, he noticed a cat drinking milk from an old porcelain bowl. At first glance it looked ordinary, but the antique dealer recognized that it might be an ancient Chinese bowl worth thousands of dollars.

Trying not to reveal his excitement, he knocked on the door. "Would you sell me your cat?" he asked. The owner shrugged. "Sure. Twenty dollars." The dealer gladly paid. Then he smiled and asked, "Would you mind throwing in the bowl? The cat seems to like it." The owner laughed. "Oh no," he said. "That bowl has helped me sell twelve cats already."

The story makes us smile because both men understood something about value.

One recognized the bowl's true worth. The other simply recognized its usefulness and how to take personal gain by the use of the bowl.

The difference was **not** bowl itself. The difference was the ability to recognize its true value. Value is not determined by appearance. It is discovered by those who know what they are looking at.

Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like that. It is often right in front of us.

Some recognize its priceless value and gladly give themselves to it. Others see only what they can get out of it. Still others walk right past it without ever noticing its value.

The Kingdom is hidden—not because God wants to conceal it—but because it often comes in ways we do not expect. That is what all six of today's parables have in common. They teach us to see differently. Before we delve into this week's parable, let's review: For the past two weeks, Jesus has been teaching us about the Kingdom:

First, the parable of the sower taught us that the difference between belief and faith is found in the condition of our hearts, True faith receives God's word, allows it to take root, and bears fruit in a transformed life.

Then last week, the parable of wheat and weeds taught us the Kingdom grows with God's patience. We are not the judges of the field. We are cultivators.

Today Jesus asks another question: **When God's Kingdom is right in front of you, will you recognize its true value?**

Jesus begins with two small pictures. A mustard seed and a little yeast. Neither seems impressive. A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds a farmer could plant. A little yeast almost disappears into the dough. Neither attracts attention.

Yet Jesus says change everything. The mustard seed becomes a great shrub where birds find shelter. The yeast quietly transforms the entire loaf. Together these parables reveal two dimensions of God's Kingdom.

The mustard seed speaks of unexpected growth. The yeast speaks of quiet transformation. One becomes visible over time. The other changes everything from within.

God's Kingdom does both. It rarely begins with headlines. It usually begins quietly. One child learning to pray. One conversation that brings someone back to faith. One act of forgiveness. One church faithfully worshipping week after week. One person choosing hope instead of bitterness.

Most of God's greatest work happens beneath the surface. We live in a culture that celebrates what is big, fast, and visible. Jesus celebrates what is faithful. Never underestimate what God can do with small beginnings.

Then Jesus tells two of the shortest parables in the Gospel; A man discovers treasure hidden in a field. A merchant finds a pearl unlike any he has ever seen. Both sell everything they own.

Notice what Jesus does **not** say. He does not say they felt obligated. He does not say they reluctantly gave everything away. They do it joyfully. Why?

Because they know they are receiving something infinitely greater. This is the heart of today's Gospel. The Kingdom is worth everything because what we receive is infinitely greater than anything we surrender.

Christian faith is often misunderstood.

People assume following Jesus is mostly about what we have to give up.

Our time.

Our comfort.

Our freedom.

Jesus tells a different story. The Christian life is not centered on what we lose. It is centered on what we find. When we discover Christ, we discover the greatest treasure. Everything else finds its proper place.

Discipleship is not an exchange of equal values. It is letting go of what cannot last in order to receive what lasts forever.

John Wesley helps us understand why some people recognize this treasure while others do not. Before anyone recognizes the treasure, God has already been at work.

Wesley called this **prevenient grace**—the grace that goes before us. God's grace opens blind eyes. God's grace softens resistant hearts. God's grace awakens a hunger we did not know we had.

The man did not create the treasure. He discovered it. The merchant did not make the pearl. He recognized its value. We do not stumble upon the Kingdom by accident. We discover what God has already been preparing us to see.

Faith always begins with grace. Before we ever choose Christ, Christ has already come looking for us. The Kingdom is God's gift before it ever becomes our decision.

The final parable may seem to interrupt these joyful stories. Jesus speaks of a fishing net gathering fish of every kind. Only afterward does the sorting begin. As in last week's parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus reminds us once again that final judgment belongs to God.

Our calling is not to decide who belongs.

Our calling is to cast the net.

Our calling is to invite everyone to discover the treasure we have found.

Then Jesus asks the disciples, "Have you understood all this?" They answer, "Yes." I wonder.

Because understanding the Kingdom is much more than understanding six stories. It is learning to tune up with God and see life through God's eyes.

To see hope where others see failure. To see grace where others see weakness. To see possibility in small beginnings. To recognize the priceless value of God's Kingdom.

Matthew added that Jesus finishes with one final picture.

A scribe trained for the Kingdom is like the master of a household who brings out treasures both old and new.

The old promises of God are not discarded. They are fulfilled in Christ. The old story of God's faithfulness continues in new ways.

The Kingdom never abandons God's past. It brings God's promises to completion.

Sometimes we maybe discouraged because we are a small church. Sometimes we wonder whether our ministry really matters. Jesus would probably smile and point to a mustard seed.

God has never depended on size. He depends on faithfulness.

We know something about mustard seeds.

We have seen ministries begin with only a handful of faithful people. We have watched children grow into adults who continue to walk with Christ. We have prayed prayers whose answers came years later. We have offered acts of kindness whose fruits we may never fully see.

Every prayer matters.

Every child matters.

Every visit.

Every meal.

Every word of encouragement.

Every act of mercy.

These are mustard seeds.

This week our church experienced one of those mustard-seed moments. For months we have been praying for God's direction—for ways to move beyond simply maintaining what we have and begin investing in the ministry God is calling us to fulfill.

Then, unexpectedly, someone gave a generous gift to help us take that next step.

Some might see only a donation. But when we look with the eyes of faith, we recognize something more. We recognize the quiet work of God's Kingdom.

We recognize that while we were praying, God was already preparing someone's heart to respond. We recognize that God is opening a new door for ministry—not so that our church can become bigger over night, but so that more people can encounter the love of Christ.

Homebound members will be able to worship with us. Families searching for hope will be able to find us. Lives we may never meet in person may still be touched by the gospel.

That is what Jesus is teaching us today. The Kingdom often comes quietly.

It looks like a mustard seed. It looks like yeast hidden in dough. Sometimes it even looks like a generous gift placed into God's hands.

The question is not whether the Kingdom is at work. The question is **whether** we have eyes to recognize the treasure when it is right in front of us.

And when we recognize the treasure, what are we going to do about it?

## **Response**

Gracious God,

We thank you for the gift of your Kingdom, which is often hidden in small and unexpected ways. Forgive us for the times we have overlooked your work because it did not appear impressive or immediate.

We thank you for the ways you are already at work among us—for prayers you are answering, for doors you are opening, and for the lives you are preparing to touch through the ministry of this church. Make us faithful stewards of every opportunity you place before us. Amen