

Seeking the Kingdom

Matthew 13

Series: The Kingdom Project

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Last week we started this series, *The Kingdom Project* and I am asking you to dream with me in this series and ask the question, “What would it be like if every member of Champion Forest (and let me put this in what is sometimes called the “prophetic you” if you...if I) woke up every single day with an intense and burning desire in our heart to advance the Kingdom of God in and through their life that day?

What would happen if we made the decision to filter how we live and filter EVERYTHING we do...if we used the skills, passions, intellect, education, and spiritual gifting God has entrusted to us to advance and further his kingdom.

I really believe if we did this, our own lives would be transformed because we would be experiencing the abundant life Jesus talked about in scripture AND we would see our own communities changed and transformed...we would see massive Kingdom impact.

As citizens of the kingdom of God, we are a mixture of heaven and earth (created from the dust with God in us)...and living the kingdom-centered life means that we live in such a way that we bring heaven to earth, giving people a foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God that is already here but will be finally and fully fulfilled at the coming of Jesus.

Now, I know that's A LOT and my encouragement to you is if you missed this introductory message, please go back and listen because it explains this idea of the Kingdom in detail and as always in this series, these messages build on top of one another.

Last week, we talked about how to become a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

- It doesn't happen just by being a good person and breathing in air...
- It doesn't happen by joining a church or taking some kind of class...

In fact, Jesus said in **Matt. 7:21a** – “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven...**”

Becoming a citizen involves MORE than lip service, it requires as Jesus said TWICE in John 3, “You must be born again!” This was the thrust of last week's message. How to be born again so that one could become a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

This week, we are going to talk about the importance of...and this is the title of today's message: **Seeking the Kingdom**

In the first and longest sermon we have of Jesus preaching – it's called the Sermon on the Mount because it took place on the side of a mountain. We'll look at some of this sermon throughout

this series because if you want to know what Kingdom Living looks like, study this first message Jesus ever preached – that’s what the whole thing is about.

At one point in Jesus’s message, he tells the crowd that has gathered...this is recorded in Matthew’s gospel.

Matt. 6:33a – “But seek first the kingdom of God...”

The context is such that like us here today, Jesus knew that the people he was talking to had worries and anxieties in life. Maybe in a much greater way, they were worrying about where their next meal would come from or how they would afford clothing for their family - these people Jesus was talking to were extremely poor and in a lot of ways being taken advantage of not just by the Romans that were oppressing them, but their own religious leaders (the Pharisees) weren’t really looking after them and leading them well either.

And so, Jesus whose entire ministry was about showing and sharing with the people that his arrival on the scene meant the Kingdom of God – what they had been told about and waiting on their entire lives, has finally arrived, and he tells them to make the priority of their life the Kingdom...seek first the Kingdom of God.

Now, we defined the Kingdom as: **The realm of God’s rule and reign through his people.**

One of our members emailed me this week and said he’s always defined the Kingdom as God as God doing what he wants and people doing what God wants. That’s a pretty good definition!

What I want you to remember and really think about as it relates to the Kingdom (and this is why I say you have to listen to last week if you missed it) when we say Kingdom of God or Kingdom of heaven, they are used interchangeably...don’t think this is sometime in the future when we all go “up there”!

Scripture teaches that as God has brought “up there” down here – that was the point of Jesus coming! And when citizens of the Kingdom...those of us who have been “born again” exercise and live under the rule and reign of Jesus, the kingdom is advanced and people get to see a glimpse of what reality will be in the future kingdom to come.

Jesus tells us in this Matt. 6 passage, we are to seek his kingdom...his rule and reign first...above everything else in life!

THIS – “seeking the Kingdom” is to be the priority of our lives.

Let me pause right here, and just ask this question: Does this describe you? I mean really. Are you seeking the rule and reign of God NOT just in your heart, but exercising that rule and reign in your daily life? Is the Kingdom of God the ultimate priority of your life?

Illus. Ouachita – As I was at Ouachita though, it was such a formative time in my life and I think I saw this image for the first time when I was in college and it just made sense to me. It's originally from Campus Crusade for Christ. It's the self-directed life vs the Christ-directed life.

For our terms today, I'd say it's a real-life game of thrones. Look at these and tell me which best describe you. **(SHOW IMAGES)**

When self is on the throne, generally there is chaos and discord in life. When Christ is on the throne, it doesn't mean things are perfect, but if we keep him there and make it the priority of our life for him to stay there, then typically we will feel more peace and a bit more harmony in life.

Now, let's move to Matthew chapter 13 and I want us to see both **WHY** we should make seeking the Kingdom the priority of our life as well as discover **HOW** we can seek the kingdom.

We are given seven parables in Matthew 13, and **ALL** of them have to do with the Kingdom of God. We'll look at just a few of them, and I'm going to work this from the end of the chapter back to the beginning.

Jesus as part of his teaching ministry spoke **OFTEN** in parables. A parable is simply an illustrative story that communicates a spiritual truth. The word parable comes from this idea meaning to "set alongside".

So, Jesus used parables as a teaching tool – he told a story...an illustration...that "set alongside" a truth he wanted to communicate. Speaking in parables is also a fulfillment of prophecy for Jesus – the Old Testament in places like (Ps. 78:2) mention the future Messiah King speaking in such ways.

In what we are looking at today, Jesus wanted to communicate to his disciples what the Kingdom of God was like and so he used some common everyday illustrations and images to "set alongside" this truth, and in reading this, we are going to see **WHY** we should make seeking the Kingdom of God **THE** priority of our life.

Matt. 13:44-46 – **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. 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, ⁴⁶who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."**

The **FIRST** reason seeking the Kingdom of God is important and should be the priority of our lives is because of its: **VALUE**

It was a common practice in the days of the Bible especially during times of war if someone had something that was precious to them and didn't know if their home was going to survive, they would bury that which was special in a place where they could come back and find it.

Evidently, this is what happened in this case and a man who is perhaps working a field for someone...we're not given the exact context other than he finds this treasure – we don't even know what the treasure is!

BUT – it was SO incredibly valuable, this man goes and liquidates his entire worth in order to get it.

Same is true with the merchant finding ONE pearl. It's so valuable...it's so precious, he goes and sells all that he had to buy it.

Jesus says, THIS is the kingdom of God! When we understand what we are dealing with and what the kingdom is all about, it's worth giving it all to make sure we have it and are a part of it...and make no mistake God has to show us...reveal to us the kingdom!

Notice the contrast between these two parables. In the first one, a man simply comes up on the treasure! He wasn't looking for it that we know of...he didn't even know it was there!

And for some of you, this is your story! Like you are here today and you are not looking for the greatest treasure in all the world – the kingdom of God! You weren't even aware it existed or what it was!

It's just kind of come up on you! This is the grace of God, that you are hearing the message of the kingdom and all that it means (gospel – king – kingdom) and the Lord by his power like we talked about last week (the wind blows) is blowing through and some for the first time, you're getting it!

And when you get it, you say, "I have to have it!" I'll sell anything to make it mine...it brings such JOY just like it did to this man. He sold everything because he knew what he was getting in return was worth so much more.

Illus. Hosting CCS (550 students) – devotional “remember” – speaking of joy!

There's a contrast though. While some of you found the kingdom and weren't even looking for it, others of you are like this merchant.

You are on a search for something valuable...something that would give your life meaning and purpose and fulfillment. And because you have been looking and nothing has done it, when you come up on the kingdom, you AGAIN, ALL by God's grace realize THIS is what I've been looking for!

This PEARL is worth selling everything I have – and here's the deal...whether it's the treasure in the field OR the pearl the merchant finds, these two people see the VALUE and know its worth giving everything for!

- Why should we be seeking the kingdom above all?
- Why should it be the priority of our lives?

Jesus says just consider its value. His rule and reign in our life NOW (living under his kingship – sins forgiven, made right with God, expanding his rule and reign now through our life), and ultimately our reign with him in the future kingdom to come (i.e. heaven) there's nothing worth more.

It's the greatest treasure in all the earth. The kingdom of God and all it entails...the blessedness of the kingdom is priceless!

The SECOND reason seeking the Kingdom of God is important and should be the priority of our lives is because of its: **POWER**

This is **Matt. 13:31-33** (remember, we're working our way back through this parable) – **“He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants 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 leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”**

Now, I want you to remember the context of what is taking place right now. Jesus is teaching his disciples about the kingdom. This is NOT an easy concept to explain because what was in their mind was a physical kingdom...a military takeover.

Remember, this is one of the reasons the people rejected Jesus. Because he didn't fit the preconceived notion they had in their mind about what a king and kingdom was.

And so, Jesus is educating them (reeducating them) about the kingdom and in this parable, he teaches them about its power.

You want to know why your life should revolve around the kingdom?! It's because there is NOTHING more powerful in all of the world! He illustrates this once again with imagery that would be familiar to them.

In an agrarian culture like Israel, the people knew the mustard seed was the smallest of garden seeds...and yet over time it could grow to be fairly large. In this case, Jesus says it grows to become like a big tree.

Jesus says, “this is like the kingdom”. It's going to start small...with just me and my disciples. But it's going to grow into a very large tree one day.

And check this out, every time we use our gifts and talents and abilities to bring heaven to earth through our actions...and every time we share the message of the gospel with someone, and they hear it (whether they receive it or not) the kingdom expands and grows and advances.

Same truth is applied with the leaven...or yeast. A little bit of yeast is mixed in with the flour and water and baked...and over time, that yeast works its way through the entire batch OR loaf of bread.

You can't hardly see it...don't hardly notice it, but what a difference it makes!

We're going to get into this in later weeks - our specific role in the kingdom. This is the entire idea behind this series, *The Kingdom Project* – we want every single person at our church knowing their kingdom purpose and finding a kingdom ministry.

Allow me to whet your appetite for some future weeks when we get really personal about all this. This is a lengthy quote, but I think it paints a beautiful picture to the truth Jesus is communicating here regarding the power of mustard seeds and leaven – what seems so small and insignificant had incredible power and impact!

New Testament scholar, **Simon Kistemaker** – **“The yeast parable further illustrates that this obedience to Christ entails Christianizing every sector and segment of life. The follower of Christ...alleviates the suffering of the poor and afflicted; he champions the cause of justice on behalf of the oppressed; he demands honesty from those elected or appointed to rule the nation; he elevates the standards of morality and decency; he defends the sanctity of life; he upholds the laws of the land; he requires integrity in business, commerce, industry, labor and the professions (medical, legal, religious)...Christ’s follower makes the teaching of Scripture relevant everywhere. That this yeast of the rule of Christ in human hearts, lives, and spheres has already exerted a wholesome influence in thousands of ways, and that this influence is still continuing, is clear to all who have eyes to see.”**

Scottish theologian, A.B. Bruce said these two parables together represent the extensive and expansive growth of the kingdom.

The kingdom is extremely valuable...incredibly powerful...and we see these two attributes culminating in the first parable Jesus shares with them in Matt. 13.

So, working our way back to the beginning. I want to read this parable AND then I want to read Jesus's interpretation of the parable and as we read it, we will see WHY we should be seeking the kingdom.

As we read let the words we've looked at today, VALUE and POWER be at the forefront of your minds.

Matt. 13:3-9 – **“And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.⁷**

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”

Now, if we had time to keep reading, the disciples come to Jesus and ask, “Why are you teaching in parables! Just tell us plainly.” And it’s one of the few times we have in scripture where Jesus explains the parable – if you noticed, he didn’t explain himself in any of the parables we just mentioned. He just lets it sit...and that is the point of a parable.

For those that really want to know, they will work to understand what Jesus is teaching, and if you do this God by his grace will reveal the truth he is attempting to get across. For others, that just keep reading, fly on past it, the truth will remain concealed.

Jesus here interprets his parable and let’s listen in to the master-teacher. Again, be thinking “value and power” and WHY we should be seeking the Kingdom.

Matt. 13:18-23 – “Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Now, forever I have heard and even have taught this parable with eternity in mind...to me, I’ve always seen it to be about believers and unbelievers. And yes, there is an element of truth to this.

But let’s put our Kingdom Project glasses on...and let’s not read this with the idea of a future kingdom, but the kingdom of God here and now.

There are sons and daughters of the kingdom that hear a message like the one I’m preaching today and ultimately when we talk about value and power – the message of the kingdom, should it fall on good soil which as Jesus taught represents the hearts of men, this message WILL produce fruit...A LOT of it! (v. 23) – in some cases 30, 60 and 100-fold – that’s BIGTIME production!

Talk about value and power! The way to a productive and fruitful life is this message of the Kingdom falling on good soil.

But, this same message, it’s so powerful and valuable, the enemy doesn’t want it taking root, so what does he do? He’ll come and snatch it away from your heart as fast as I can lay the seed out there!

He'll distract you...he'll discourage you...he doesn't want the message of the kingdom (he knows it's worth! He knows it's power!) – he doesn't want this taking root in your heart, so he'll snatch it away when you least expect it.

You'll leave here, saying, “that was great, I want to learn more, and then you'll get in our parking lot to go home...and be sitting at that light at Cypresswood and that seed is gone!

OR you'll take this message and you receive it with joy (v. 20) but as we will see in a few weeks, the way the Kingdom advances – are you ready for this? Primarily through service and suffering!

And when this happens (v. 21) some fall away because you think, “I didn't sign up for this.” I'm living for the kingdom but I didn't know it was going to cost me this, and you're out!

Incidentally...well, not incidentally...providentially, this is WHY Jesus shared the parable about the treasure and the pearls. He wanted to highlight and underscore for his disciples the WORTH of the kingdom...the VALUE of the kingdom because it's tough when your life centers and revolves around it.

- It will cost you your reputation sometimes...
- It may cost a business deal sometimes...
- It may cost you a relationship...
- It may cost you some sleep...

Listen: Living for the Kingdom is NOT for sissies!

There are others that hear this message of the kingdom (you are a son or daughter of the kingdom) and yet your life is not productive or fruitful BECAUSE (v. 22) life's worries and riches and pleasures are choking the message of the kingdom out!

My inclination is this is where MOST live...right here. You want the kingdom of God, but you want the pleasures of another kingdom as well...and these dualling kingdoms in your life - a real life game of thrones is going on and it's preventing you from bearing fruit.

You are “unproductive...unfruitful” (v. 22c) because in the words of Jesus elsewhere in scripture, you are “lukewarm”. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, they are choking the message of the kingdom out!

See, the kingdom message is powerful, but only when we fully submit our lives to it. Only when we sell everything and “go all” in...only when we seek it first will it change us and those around us.

So, how do we seek the kingdom? We've talked about WHY seeking it is so important: it's value...it's power...HOW do we make seeking the kingdom the priority of our life?

Let me borrow from the parable of Jesus here in Matthew 13, specifically from the parable of the sower. If we are going to seek the kingdom it will involve our head, our heart and our hands.

Let's start with our: **Head**

To live for the kingdom is first and foremost a mindset. It's a shift in the way we think. It begins by every day waking up and realizing that we are a part of a very real battle. There is a battle going on between the kingdom and light and darkness.

Satan knows how valuable the kingdom of God is and will do anything he can to lull you asleep so that you don't!

I want you to think of your life as a soldier. We see this imagery in scripture over and over again. I want you to think of the church as a battleship, NOT a cruise ship. We are here to advance the kingdom as people and as individuals and we have to continue to retrain our minds in this way.

And the seed of the kingdom – where this kingdom is reinforced is in his word and so we must give our minds to God's word.

We take every thought captive (2 Cor. 10:5) and as we live, work and play, we begin to train ourselves to think, "Am I representing the KING and kingdom for which I am a citizen.

We've got to sow God's word – and this message of the kingdom in our minds over and over again.

Secondly, our: **Heart**

In this parable, our heart is represents in soil. And the only way our lives are productive and fruitful is if our hearts are good and fertile. If we are to seek first the kingdom, we need soft hearts FOR the kingdom, and this comes mainly by prayer AND good deeds.

We're going to spend an entire message on "praying kingdom prayers", but let me just say this...we will never seek the kingdom if we don't have a heart for the kingdom. And prayer is what protects our heart from being carried away by life's worries and riches and pleasures.

Prayer is what keeps the enemy from stealing the seed that falls on the soil of our hearts. Prayer is like water that softens a hard ground...we know a little about water here in Houston! This past week...good grief!

So, pray. Pray for God to give you a heart for the kingdom. Pray and ask God to show you the worth of the kingdom. Pray and ask God for boldness to forsake all for the kingdom.

And here is what else softens hearts – good deeds...and this leads to the third and final application of how to seek the kingdom.

Our: **Hands**

Listen, the only way I know to fertile soil, is to plant seeds and cultivate soil. God has to water it...that's why we pray...but we can cultivate our hearts and make them soft by using our hands and doing good deeds in the name of Jesus.

Illus. Ouachita – big head, small heart

The only law of the kingdom is love. And when we do good deeds in the name of Jesus and we see God using us to advance his kingdom forward, it does something in us AS it does something in others!

Our service and love will cause people to want to be in the kingdom of God and as we serve them in Christ's name and see the Lord and experience the Lord using us to advance his Kingdom, we will want to seek his kingdom more and more and more in the future and make it the number one priority of our lives.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.