



WEEK ONE: WHY PARABLES?

Read: Luke 3:2-6, 16-22

We're all familiar with the parables of Jesus to the extent that we don't always dig deep enough to find out what it is that Jesus is trying to teach those in New Testament times, and us today. Generally, these are regarded by scholars, as authentic sayings which we can confidently ascribe to Jesus. Careful reading shows that all the major themes of Jesus' preaching can be found in them. These are:

Love – Forgiveness - God's Kingdom – Prayer – Redemption - End times

Parables sometimes left listeners puzzled or confused, however, Jesus often used them to relate to the coming **Kingdom of God**. We will look at this specific aspect later in this study. One writer gives three reasons why Jesus taught in parables:

- *Parables were easy to understand. A lot of spiritual discussions revolve around abstract concepts and ideas.*
- *Parables are easy to remember. It's not enough that Jesus' words would be easy to grasp; they needed to be memorable.*
- *Parables reveal the hearts of the listeners.*

Matthew's Gospel tells us that Jesus spoke in parables ***because the people did not see, hear, or understand***. Put like that, it seems strange that he should speak in this way. However, the reason for their inability to comprehend was ***their rejection of Jesus***. They listened but their minds were already closed to his truths.

- Are we guilty of this? Do we close our minds when the Bible talks about things we don't want to hear or do because it's inconvenient for us, it doesn't fit with what we want to do.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

This phrase occurs more than eighty times in the New Testament, and it is central to the teachings of Jesus. But what does it mean? One definition is:

"The concept of a Kingdom of God is not primarily one of space, territory, or politics, as in a national kingdom, but instead, one of kingly rule, reign, and sovereign control. The kingdom of God is the realm where God reigns supreme, and Jesus Christ is King. In this kingdom, God's authority is recognised, and his will is obeyed." Another

Theology Professor gives this definition: "God's present spiritual reign over His people (Colossians 1:13) and Jesus' future reign in the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20)."

Read: Colossians 1:13 and Revelation 20

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,..

Perhaps this definition is the simplest: **"God's people in God's place under God's rule."**

Whenever we pray the *Lord's Prayer*, we say:

Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

- What do we think this means for us?
- Is it easily achievable?

Read Matthew 3:2 and 4:17

John the Baptist, in chapter 3, preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Then, in Matthew 4, Jesus began to preach: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Another writer says: *the "kingdom of God" represents the earthly domain that Jesus' opponents such as Pharisees thought they resided in, while the "kingdom of heaven" represents the truer spiritual domain of Jesus and his disciples.*

The Hillsong website says this: *The Kingdom of God is not a physical kingdom. It is a transformation of heart and mind, a way of believing and living in preparation for eternity. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then your citizenship is no longer "of this world" – you are a citizen of heaven.*

The kingdom of God refers to God's reign on earth and consequently, in our hearts. It is about His kingship and our obedience to His rule. In His kingdom, the first shall be last, the broken are blessed, we look out for our neighbour, and we rejoice when the lost are found. His kingdom comes as each of us bows the knee and confesses that He is king and live our lives as loyal citizens.

But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Saviour, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him. (Philippians 3:20-21 MSG)

There can be no Kingdom of God in the world without the Kingdom of God in our hearts.
– Albert Schweitzer

One must remember that at this time, the Jews were very much concerned about the Roman rule under which they were living. I believe Jesus was trying to get them to

refocus on more important issues than earthly kingdoms. He was concerned about where their hearts were. ***Read Matthew 6:33***

- Does this challenge us to review our own lives and the focus of them?
- How might we reset the compass of our lives?
- What, for us, is the most important thing (treasure) in our lives?
- Do we think the standards that Jesus set are too hard for us to achieve? We will come back to this question at the end of this study series to see whether we still think in the same way.
- What do we make of that comment: *“There can be no Kingdom of God in the world without the Kingdom of God in our hearts.”*
- If that comment is true, then how important are we in helping grow God’s Kingdom on this earth?

With that in mind, let us look at the words of the Lord’s prayer:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Let’s pray this together

