

1. The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE.....The Keys/clues.....

In the Gospel of Matthew we have a cluster of seven parables. These are very succinct stories, using every-day descriptive language and familiar situations to which the hearers could relate. Such as the Sower of seeds, the Wheat and Weeds, the Mustard Seed and the effect of cooking with Yeast. The last three parables which are in our reading to-day, are about finding a rich Treasure; a priceless Pearl and a fishing activity.

In the preceeding verses, Jesus explains to his disciples, the purpose of using parables as a preaching vehicle, (Matt.13.10-13), stating that to them has been given the secrets or mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. However, the crowd that followed Him may not have understood the true meaning and missed the point. They heard the parables, but were not able to comprehend that their full meaning was relevant for their own lives and way of living. These were "earthly stories" with a "heavenly" or spiritual dimension.

Matthews' writing is often referred to as the Jewish/ Gentile Gospel comfortably relating to the two cultures around at the time. The "Kingdom of Heaven" is used more than the "Kingdom of God." However, it is generally understood that both have the same meaning, that of the sovereign reign of God and His Kingdom. There was good news for the poor and oppressed as well as some very uncomfortable truths for the religious hierarchy.

Recently we witnessed our own King Charles' coronation. A Kingdom has a reigning King, thus we have an understanding of what it is to belong to a Kingdom with its rights and responsibilities.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and shown all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor. The Tempter offered them to Him if he would just "fall down and worship him." All of this power, could have been His! Jesus' reply was, "It is written that you should, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.'" Overcoming this final temptation laid the foundation for the beginning of his powerful, miraculous ministry in and to the world. (Matt 4:8-11)

Jesus began his ministry in Galilee by proclaiming to the people, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. He calls the twelve asking them to follow him, as he teaches in the synagogues and proclaims the "good news of the kingdom". (Matt 4:23) Immediately He gives a clue as to what the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven is like and can be, for anyone who desires to attain it. (Matt 4:17-24). Here there is available, true healing of the body, soul and spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt 5:3-13).

There are differing locations of the "kingdom of God". Firstly, it is "near" then "among" you. Each exceeding the former, accompanied with miraculous healings and release for the captive. The blind see, the lame walk, and the infirm and broken hearted are made whole. (Luke 4:18) Later it is "within us" who believe.

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John develops this reality in his Gospel (Ch14: 12-23) where Jesus' life is now able to reside within humankind. (V:23) "For those who love me, we will come and make our home with them". This is after the Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit of God at Pentecost. (Acts 1:5 and Joel 2:28-29) (1 Cor. 3:16)

Jesus includes children's innocent trust and humility as being an example of entry into Kingdom life. (Matt 18:1-5) "Unless you turn (repent) and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

We are exhorted to "seek first the Kingdom of God" and His righteousness and we will receive ALL THAT WE NEED. Not our greedy desires but what is really necessary for an abundant life (Luke 12:29-31). This should be the priority of every one who desires to enter into the Kingdom. "Seek, and you SHALL find." A powerful promise for anyone who is sincerely searching, "wholeheartedly."

This was Jesus' reply to those who were filled with anxiety about eating, drinking and clothing. What "Good news" for to-day's society and all its fears... food crisis. (Matt 6:24-34) wars, climate change, money matters, health etc.

So how do we enter into the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven/God?

Paul writes in Corinthians, that the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power. (1 Cor.4:20). So talking will not get us in nor does it have anything to do with food, drink or clothing. -

So now we have a few clues that the Kingdom of God is much more than our bodily, earthly needs. It is a right relationship with God, beginning with a repentant heart, trusting the Lord with a childlike dependence, and an awareness of the Spirit of God at work, within us. Our earthly bodies are not fit for purpose other than to show the world the life of Jesus within us and his salvation grace. (John 3:1-6)

1st of the 3 Parables:- The Kingdom of Heaven is like:-

a treasure HIDDEN in a field.....Someone stumbled, or found it and hid it and sells everything to buy the field. He had much joy about the find and took the risk of selling all that was his, everything, so that he could purchase the land.

Compare this with the rich young ruler who came to Jesus wishing to know how he could attain eternal life. He justifies his life by saying that he had kept all the commandments. He had obeyed all the rules (law). Jesus goes straight for the issue, that of the status of his heart. - his earthly riches.

"Go and sell all that you own and FOLLOW Me and you will have treasure in heaven." (Matt 19:16-23). He departed sorrowfully for he had many riches. There is nothing wrong with wealth unless we are dependent on it for our total security or worse, harden our heart to the cries of the poor and needy..

The Kingdom of Heaven is like:-

A merchant goes in search of a valuable pearl. On finding it, he also sold all that he possessed and bought it. This person is deliberately searching for the most valuable pearl he could find. Jesus exhorts us to keep on seeking

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Him, and we will find and be rewarded in Him. (Matt 7:10) Luke also relates this to asking and seeking the Holy Spirit which will be given to us. (Luke 11:10/9-13)

The Kingdom of Heaven is like:-

A fishing net is thrown into the sea and catches all sorts of fish, all kinds. When the net is full, they go ashore, sit down and sort the good fish from the bad and unwanted. This is an "end of the age," a future scenario, when mankind will face judgement, a sorting out process. It is not so much about being good or bad, but whether we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, bought by the sacrifice of Jesus and sealed with His Holy Spirit.

Compare this with the Sheep and Goats story. (Matt 25: 31-40)

All the nations of the world come before the Son of Man and are separated according to how they ministered His Kingdom life to those in need.... This is the time when the people enter into their inheritance, the Kingdom. Those who have faithfully obeyed the call of Jesus by feeding the hungry, ministering to the sick, clothing the naked etc. Both spiritually and temporally. This cannot be done in our own strength but only if motivated by the love of God and His Spirit.

We show to all that we belong to the Kingdom of Heaven/God by:-

Extending His ministry to our community, our neighbours and our Church. This also means keeping alive our own relationship through, prayer, reading His word and obediently applying it to our every day interaction with this world that we live in. It is also in worshipping together that we live out the Kingdom of God in our midst. (John 4:23-24)

"To be above with the Saints we love.....that will be Glory,
To be below with the Saints we know, well that's a different story"

When the youngest of my children managed to jam her finger in a door, she really cried out in pain, I offered to pray and ask Jesus if He could help her. She replied that Jesus wasn't there and cried more. After a while, she then came out with an astounding revelation. "Mummy, Jesus is here. He has your hands and mouth."

We had a precious time together, all three of us. .

There is a cost for us to be a participant in the Kingdom of God. The giving up, leaving behind, the Kingdom of Self. Instead of ME on the throne, leaving the throne for King Jesus to rule and reign forever.

We pray every service.....Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Lord God, help us all to be willing participants in your Kingdom's presence, here and now. May the God of peace himself sanctify us wholly and may our spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory.