

Four Parables, Two Truths, and One Kingdom Worth Everything You Have Matthew 13:31ff.

November 13, 2016
Steve DeWitt

How much is the kingdom of God worth to you? This gets at something I said early in our series; I think most Christians these days are largely unaware of the kingdom of God at all, much less its value and significance. Jesus said that it's so valuable that if we really grasped its worth, we would happily give up everything just to have it.

Today we are looking at four little parables. They are really small with really big truths. Remember what a parable is. Jesus encrypted spiritual truth in plain-sounding stories which allowed the spiritually awakened to understand. Others just heard a story. When we are done today, which will you be?

These parables are set in pairs by Matthew in chapter 13. These two pairs thematically reinforce each other and the truth Jesus wanted us to understand. Let's look at the first two.

Don't Measure the Kingdom of God by the Smallness of its Beginnings

"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. 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.'

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.'" (Matthew 13:31-33)

Like the size of these parables themselves, Jesus is emphasizing the smallness and apparent insignificance of the kingdom in its beginning. This is true in its historical expansion; it had a really humble beginning. It's also true personally, as becoming a disciple of Jesus often starts small but then absorbs our whole personhood.

He uses two very small things in first century Israel. A mustard seed and leaven. He calls the mustard seed "the smallest of all seeds." Some people apparently take Jesus to task because in the present world of horticulture, there are smaller known seeds than the mustard seed. Did Jesus know this? Yes. But the smallest seed his audience knew of was a mustard seed. That's the point of reference. How small was a mustard seed?



That's small, isn't it?

What is notable about the mustard seed is the size of the bush or tree that comes from it.



The mustard plant over time became a very large bush. It can grow up to 10-12 feet tall with spreading branches. It offers plenty of room for birds or even humans to get some shade.

What is Jesus' point? Really big things can come from really small beginnings. It would be very unwise to look at a mustard seed and say, *this seed won't amount to anything. Look how small it is.*

The point? Don't judge a tree by the size of its seed. Don't judge a kingdom by the size of its seed. The kingdom of God has very small, very humble beginnings. Actually, it started in a manger.

"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." (Verse 33)

Leaven in flour. In that culture, making bread was an everyday thing, especially for the women. Imagine the women in the crowd nodding their heads, *leaven in bread? I do that every day.* How small is leaven?



Not very big, is it? Jesus notes that you can take a little leaven and work it into three measures of flour. That's a lot of flour. That much flour could make bread for 100 people. Compared to the amount of flour, the leaven is very, very little. But the leaven's effect is very, very big. Don't judge the power of something by its size. That's something that those of us living in the age of the atomic bomb know well.

The mustard seed shows how little can become big. Leaven shows how little can be powerful. So how does this apply to the kingdom of God? It is the kingdom of GOD after all. Kingdoms of man can only go as far as man's cleverness and strength can take him. The kings of man's kingdoms have this nasty habit of dying and their kingdoms die with them. But the kingdom of God is empowered by almighty God who can take little things and make them big things; take little things and make them eternal things.

An apparently little thing like receiving Christ into your life by faith will change the whole course of a human life. One believing family member can transform an entire family and their eternity. In the hand of God, one family can leaven a whole neighborhood for the gospel. One church can leaven a whole community, something we dream and endeavor to do.

But the best example of this is Jesus himself. His whole story is one of apparent littleness and insignificance. *Who he was born to:* a poor couple. *Where he was born:* Bethlehem—even prophecy highlighted its smallness (Micah 5:2). *Where he grew up:* Nazareth. Remember Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" *Where he lived:* Galilee. The land of hicks and hillbillies. Cracker Barrels everywhere. It wasn't exactly where significant people started out.

How about his cabinet of top officials? Maybe that's where the greatness will come from. A handful of fishermen. A tax collector. A doubter. And a betrayer. Not exactly the A-team. Then Jesus leaves them. Ascends to heaven. Imagine the angels saying, *you left this all in the hands of those guys?* But what does the kingdom of God have going for it? It is the kingdom of GOD. In God's plan, God uses the common and ordinary. The little and the insignificant do his greatest work. We should ask why?

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

Why does God use the common and ordinary? The humble and meek? Who gets the glory when mustard seeds and leaven change the world? He does. Little seeds and leaven, that's the kind of person God typically uses. In other words, someone just like you and me.

The Kingdom of God is an Immeasurable Treasure

The second pair of parables are in Matthew 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.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

Have you ever had the fantasy of finding hidden treasure? Just finding a \$20 bill in an old pants pocket will make our day. What about a real treasure? Finding treasure in a field was not unheard of in the first century. They didn't have safety deposit boxes or home safes. So

what do you do with valuables when the walls of your house are made of dirt? People would bury and hide valuables in their fields.

This man isn't looking for treasure. Somehow he happens to find it. Maybe a little piece of gold was sticking up through the dirt. He uncovers it. He can't believe it! He covers it up again and then goes and sells everything he has and buys the field.

Notice his emotion. "*Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has.*" (Verse 44) We typically aren't joyful when we have to fire-sale all our possessions. He's not joyful to own the field itself. He's joyful because of the treasure that is in the field. Now it's his. Yes, it cost him everything, but his gain is far greater than his loss. The kingdom of God is like hidden treasure.

And it's also like precious jewelry. Ladies, do I have your attention?

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

This parable is different in that the merchant is actively seeking fine pearls. He's looking everywhere for pearls. One day he came across one pearl that was so perfect and beautiful that he determined he had to have it. So he sold all he had and bought the one pearl.

The first man sold everything he had and the treasure was his gain. The second man sold all he had and the privilege of possessing the pearl was his reward. Both of these parables get at the same truth. Both treasures cost them everything they had. Why would they willingly lose everything? Because the value of what they gained was far greater.

The kingdom of God is an eternal treasure. It's a pearl of infinite price. Having the kingdom of God is worth losing everything you own and even your life. How? Why?

If you have the kingdom of God, you "own/have"

- *Divine forgiveness of your sins* (Acts 3:19)
- *Forever reconciliation with a holy God* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)
- *Almighty God is your Father (and all his promises apply to you)* (Romans 8:15)
- *God's presence in your life – indwelling Holy Spirit* (Ezekiel 36:27)
- *Eternal life in a resurrected/perfect body on the new Earth* (1 Corinthians 15)
- *Jesus as King forever* (Revelation 17:14)
- *Much, much more*

What you DON'T have anymore

- *Sin/guilt/internal spiritual dissonance* (Romans 7:13ff.)
- *Emptiness of life apart from your Creator* (Ecclesiastes)
- *Dread of death/hopelessness* (Hebrews 2:14-15)
- *Eternal conscious punishment in hell* (Revelation 21:8)
- *Much, much more*

What would you willingly give up to NOT have these be true for you anymore? When we understand that the kingdom is not simply the losing of what we don't want but the gaining of everything we could ever want, what could we be but filled with joy?

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:7-8)

How many people are there who decide against faith in Jesus because they think they are losing something? Losing their freedom. Losing their secret sin. Losing their reputation with others. Losing their family's respect. Becoming a Christian can seem like a lot of losing.

Why would you do it? Why pledge allegiance to Jesus as your Savior and King? Because the gain of the kingdom of God so far outweighs any loss that the only appropriate response to the possibility is joy. Real true lasting eternal joy.

Allow me to give you a personal story that reflects the joy of gaining something valuable. Many of you know my father-in-law's career was in baseball. In 1985 he was a scout with the Royals organization when they won the World Series. He got a World Series ring with his name on it. It's a fancy ring as World Series rings are. Obviously, it is a highly valued item. He wore it all the time. He wore it when he walked Jennifer down the aisle. About a year ago, he lost it. My in-laws looked everywhere and could not find it. They finally resigned themselves to never finding it again. It was a real disappointment.

My brother-in-law Jim was especially sympathetic and decided to try and do something about it. He examined family pictures from last fall around the time they lost it. He discovered that one day at a public park in Kansas City the ring is on Dad's hand in one picture and not on the next. He thinks, *I wonder if the ring is somewhere at that park?* So this past June, eight months later, he bought a metal detector, went to the public park, and carefully scanned the ground. He goes over the ground. He hears lots of beeps. On one particular beep he digs down, and guess what he finds?



What are the chances? So we kept it a secret for a few weeks. In July we had a surprise party for my father-in-law's 70th birthday. And one of his presents was that ring. What do you call it when he opened the box? Joy.

To be a Christian is like finding a treasure in a field, only much better. In God's kingdom, Jesus is the power enabling common little people like us to grow the kingdom of God in the world, like mustard seeds and leaven. In the kingdom of God, Jesus is the pearl we give anything to possess. Jesus is hidden treasure we sell everything to own. And having Jesus is our joy. Having him forever is better than silver or gold, fame and fortune, power, health, or anything else. If Jesus is your King, then Jesus is your joy and treasure forever.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2016 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address (www.bethelweb.org) on the copied resource.