

Kingdom Stories  
Week 3: Seeds and Birds

Doubled our number of monthly givers...thank you so much. And to those who tithe at both campuses.

You may think that the idea of a **kingdom is fanciful and pretend**. It's a romanticized version of bygone days when kings and queens were **noble in character, wise, benevolent, and good looking**. In the Old Testament, God **warned** the Israelites when they wanted a king that **they wouldn't like it**. They **chose a different** kind of kingdom. Be careful what you wish for. And it happened exactly as God said it would. **There were more evil, corrupt kings** then there were good ones who kept the people following the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**The problem is that they had the wrong king with the wrong kind of kingdom**. Those were based upon **power in the hands of flawed people**. The Kingdom of God, or Heaven, is different. **It is based upon power and love in the right hands**.

**You may have grown up and never heard** these parables or kingdom stories. In that case, you might have a **bias against this type of language**, because you were born in the west, in America, where we are a part of a **democratic republic**, based upon individuality. **The idea of a king is an antiquated idea because we are better being our own kings of our own little lives or kingdoms**. How's that working for you? I would challenge you to **have an open mind**. Look at what God's word says about it.

**If you have grown up in church** you have probably been taught that all of these references to the kingdom are really about **heaven, the sweet by and by**. Life is simply something that you get through as best you can after saying a prayer and punching your ticket to heaven. It's about getting off of a **sinking ship**. If that is the case, I challenge you to **lean in and see that the Kingdom of God is so much more than that**.

**Here are two phrases** we are using to frame what Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom through these stories or parables.

The Kingdom of God is a present reality and a future hope.

The Kingdom is the restoration of God's rule and reign here on earth.

Here is our theme verse for this series. <sup>10</sup> His disciples came and asked him, "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?" <sup>11</sup> He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but

others are not. <sup>12</sup> **To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.** <sup>13</sup> That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand. <sup>14</sup> This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.' <sup>15</sup> For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.' <sup>16</sup> **"But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. Matthew 13:10-17**

**Jesus is not saying** that he is making sure people don't hear his words and understand or see who he is and follow. **It's not about confusing people** so they don't understand. It's about seeing who, even though they don't completely understand, **wants to move forward and find out more.** They see that **there is something to this Jesus** and they want to understand. That is what it means to have ears that hear and eyes that see.

In other words...**Kingdom stories are a heart test for the crowd.**

**Why did I add "for the crowd?"** Keep in mind that people are following Jesus around, **watching him heal** people, challenge the Pharisees, and teach with authority. **The crowd, by definition, has not made a decision about Jesus.** They are trying to see if there is **anything in it for them.** Or at least some of them are. These stories that seem to always **take an unexpected turn**, or something that **seems backwards**, or not as it should be.

**The crowd in Jesus' time is looking for a king that will put them back on top by sending the Romans packing.** They want a king like their ancestors chose **when they rejected God** as their king. Then the Kingdom of Israel would return to its former glory under **David and Solomon.**

**But it's the same for us. These parables are testing our heart to see what kind of kingdom we are looking for.** So, to start off, let this story test your heart.

Today it's about **seeds and birds**; not really, it's about restoration of God's rule and reign through Jesus. <sup>31</sup> **Here is another illustration Jesus used: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. <sup>32</sup> It**

is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches."

<sup>33</sup> Jesus also used this illustration: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough." <sup>34</sup> Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these **when speaking to the crowds**. In fact, **he never spoke to them without using such parables**. <sup>35</sup> This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet: "I will speak to you in parables. I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world." Matthew 13:31-35

**There is no explanation of these two like there is of the stories of the soils and the weed with wheat.**

**These two parables may be small, but they are really effective at weeding out those who want a different kind of kingdom.** If someone is following Jesus in hopes that it will pay off for them financially, power or position then this is going to be a real put off.

**This is establishing for the crowd some basic truths about the kingdom Jesus has come to introduce.** Subjects of the King, here's what you need to know about His Kingdom.

**If Jesus is going to be your king, which is the only way to enter His Kingdom, then that makes those who follow him his loyal subjects.**

Here's the first thing loyal subjects need to know...It looks small, right now.

**The comma** there is meant for a pause. It should be read this way. "It looks small...right now. It's a pause of anticipation. A pause with a sneaky grin attached to it.

**Picture this, Jesus stares at the crowd, reaches into his pocket for a single mustard seed and says, "Look in amazement and awe, because this is what my kingdom is like."** Then he dramatically thrusts his hand toward the crowd with this tiny seed in his hand. **(Seed picture)**

The people in the **back row** can't even see what is in his hand.

**This illustration would have been shocking, even angering** to the Hebrew people who believed the kingdom on earth would be great. **Kingdom means great, doesn't it?**

The NIV Application Commentary writer puts it this way...**"But through this parable Jesus declares that the kingdom is already present, although only as a tiny manifestation. Such a beginning may cause some among Jesus' opponents and the crowd to despise this manifestation of the kingdom. But the crowd should not let that belie the kingdom's ultimate greatness. 'What may not look like much to the world will in fact fulfill all God's promises.'"**  
483

The Russian army is finding this out right now. The Ukrainian Army doesn't look like much on paper. It's small. That's not even mentioning the people who are civilians, who are and will continue to be an invisible resistance to the tyrannical attack.

**Recently I had a flood of memories** of people I have worked with who are no longer following Jesus. I felt for a moment that **what God was doing through me looked pretty small**. I also remembered all of the **things that I put a lot of effort** and emotional energy into without any long-term benefit to the kingdom. It looked pretty small.

A friend of mine, who was **on staff at a huge church** for a while and then went to be the lead pastor of a much smaller church. He was very appreciative of what he learned at the mega church, but in order to put it in perspective he said this, **"bigger dog means more fleas."**

My favorite Bible story as a kid was **David and Goliath**. Yes, little boys are more prone to stories of **action** with a little **gratuitous violence**. In this story, the winner is a **young boy with a sling**, some stones, and the presence of God on him, not the **huge, fully armed, powerful, well trained and battle tested soldier**.

**The point of the story is don't be fooled by appearances**. What it looks like **at first glance**, in the moment, doesn't tell the whole story of what God's kingdom is about.

**The Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, says it this way thousands of years before Jesus.** <sup>22</sup> **"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take a branch from the top of a tall cedar, and I will plant it on the top of Israel's highest mountain.** <sup>23</sup> **It will become a majestic cedar, sending forth its branches and producing seed. Birds of every sort will nest in it, finding shelter in the shade of its branches.** <sup>24</sup> **And all the trees will know that it is I, the LORD, who cuts the tall tree down and makes the short tree grow tall. It is I who makes the green tree wither and gives the dead tree new life. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do what I said!"** Ezekiel 17:22-24

**This theme was all through the Bible. The large and impressive is replaced by the small, which then grows large. The one that looks full of life will wither and be replaced by one with no life in it.**

**What seems small will become something that will provide shelter for many. But you have to be ok with not seeing it all right now.**

**You need to trust the king when it looks small. You also need to have eyes to see the signs of the kingdom, signs of restoration of God's rule over all things.**

**Do you have trouble seeing potential in what seems less than ideal at the moment?**

**That is a bias that will keep you from seeing the kingdom and what you can't see, you won't be able to join.**

**Another way to describe small, is weak. <sup>8</sup> Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. <sup>9</sup> Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. <sup>10</sup> That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:8-10**

**How many times does he use the word "weak" in some form? Four.**

**Could we have it all wrong? Should we be looking for the kingdom in our weakness and brokenness? Are you the kind of person who, when what is a strength doesn't pay off like you think or get noticed, praised, or rewarded, you want to give up? If that is the case, you will have a hard time seeing and then joining Jesus' Kingdom.**

**Movements start small and grow. Crowds lose momentum and disperse. Jesus was suspicious of the crowds. He chose to work with small groups. That goes with the size of his group and the ability or power of the people in the group. Jesus never looked to leverage the crowd or mob. You can get the mob to do stupid things, but it won't amount to anything because the crowd loses steam quickly.**

**This is also a story that is also surprising because typically yeast is an illustration for something bad not good. Jesus is testing them to see if they will push through.**

**Resistance in occupied Europe** during WW2. They were motivated by the promise of an allied invasion that would come one day. 40-45 they waited. 497-499

**If you make it this far into this parable without leaving disappointed, then you are breaking through into real faith. Soren Kierkegaard says that real faith only comes when we are disappointed or offended by Jesus, but push through anyway.**

**<sup>5</sup> the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." <sup>6</sup> And he added, "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me. Matthew 11:5-6**

**Isn't that an interesting list of things Jesus says will happen? Notice what isn't there.** There is nothing about those who have power or influence. It doesn't say, **"and then Herod and Caesar will fall on their knees** and call me king and repent from their wicked ways." It doesn't say that **the Pharisees** all decide to follow Jesus along with the **Sanhedrin**. There is none of that.

**The King James uses "offended". Be honest, has Jesus offended you by not doing what you thought he should do? He didn't fix certain things.**

Subjects of the King, here's what you need to know about His Kingdom... It looks small, right now...**It begins an inner, hidden transformation.**

**The yeast is working within the dough out of sight, creating a change in the makeup of the dough and, therefore, how the bread will ultimately look. It's changed on the inside and then the form is changed.**

**As you know, science is my life, math is my life.** So I was trolling the Internet on some of my favorite science based web sites and I found a clear simple explanation for those of us who aren't as naturally gifted in science as I am. **My freshman physics teacher just choked on his coffee and doesn't know why.** **Video How Yeast Works**

**Who knew all of that was going on in there.** It was hidden from my eyes and yet I reaped the benefits of what was an inner, hidden transformation.

**"So the parables reveal what it means for Jesus' disciples to live as kingdom subjects in a world that has not yet experienced the fully consummated kingdom of God." 493**

Do you have the trust to stay faithful while the yeast is doing its work inside before you see any tangible effect? Can you delay gratification? I have to have patience when it comes to the kingdom. Because what God is doing isn't always visible, even to those who are watching, waiting, and anticipating.

Because it is hidden and inconspicuous, it is given no value in our world

- Clandestine kingdom disciples

<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:5-6 Somebody needed to hear that today. Someone is about to give up.

Remember, the kingdom of God is the restoration of God's rule and reign here and then extends into eternity. That means what he is doing in your life that is changing you into someone who progressively is learning to live and love like Jesus is a sign of the kingdom. There are things that you are not noticing about you that God has done, because you are treating it like a scorecard. The things that aren't changing in your life are what you focus upon.

I had an ICNU (I see in you) conversation with a friend who is particularly hard on himself. Of course, if that friend wasn't going to let me get close, I could not have been able to notice the growth in him and, therefore, not be able to encourage him.

Remain or abide is something that takes trust and patience, because you can't always see progress.

Don't get disappointed by your progress. If you are his loyal subject, this promise is for you. If you want a little Jesus to sprinkle into your life, then this promise isn't for you.

Responding to Jesus' kingdom story

- Admit your disappointment with God.

This is what it means to lament. It's not a bad thing. It really is good news. You are closer to something real and lasting when you are at this point than when things are going well. To admit your disappointment and cast your cares on him is a way of emptying something so that it can be refilled by something else.

- Confess your bias toward what is big and obvious.

You look at churches that are bigger and have better programs and say, "that will meet my needs." Nothing wrong with what those churches are

doing, but it's really about your heart. **Would you have loved the Sermon on the Mount, but been depressed after the upper room where Jesus prophesies his own death.**

**Would you have scattered** when the crowd left and went home?

**Be honest.** It's ok. **Ask God to help you notice the little flashes of his kingdom** coming on earth as it is in heaven.

- **Commit to memory Matthew 13:12 & 16-17**

**What can you really do in response to any of these Kingdom Stories?** You can make sure you are listening, leaning in, asking for more, and not being put off because the kingdom doesn't look like you think it should. Do you have eyes that can see? **Keep your eyes open, looking for what God is doing around you.**

**Think of this like putting your contacts or glasses on in the morning so that you can see properly. This is your kingdom glasses.**

<sup>12</sup> To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them... <sup>16</sup> "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. Matthew 13:12 & 16-17

1. What is God saying to me through these verses?
2. What do I need to do to be obedient?
3. Whose help do I need in order to align my life to what God is saying?