Untitled (62)

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Date: 26 July 2020

Preacher: Caleb Evans

[0:00] So the way that this morning's gospel text is assigned in the lectionary kind of has the feel of an overwhelming flurry of parables, doesn't it?

In most cases, I wouldn't attempt to include each of the parables in one sermon, but I think that there's something of a special case going on here.
All of the parables are short, and they all center on that same theme of the kingdom of heaven. I think that in these parables we get a series of snapshots of important truths about the kingdom of heaven.
That being the case, this morning's sermon topic is going to be Insights into the Kingdom. We probably need to begin by acknowledging something a little awkward.
This past week, in my spare time, I've been watching a documentary series about American history. Here's a recurring theme in American history. We don't like kings.
[1:14] We don't like kingdoms. We don't like kings or anyone else telling us what to do. We're not going to let anyone push us around. Well, that is a bit of an awkward dynamic for American Christians, isn't it?

Because we live under the authority of the king of the universe, and he reigns absolutely. He has the right to tell us what to do in every area of our lives.
So while we might not like being told what to do, generally there is an important exception we need to keep in mind. I think that there's something else that we need to keep in mind when we think about our king and our kingdom as believers.
Because the king is not just our king. The king is our loving father. I'm reminded of a quote from J.I. Packer who went to be with the Lord a little over a week ago.
And Packer said this, Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name.
[2:20] So whenever we think about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, helps to remember the good news that we are thinking about it as those who bear the family name of the king.

How awesome is that? What is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven? We see these phrases over and over and over throughout the gospels.
So I think simply put, we can think of it as the kingship of God. Where can we see the kingdom of God? Wherever God's creation is subject to God's perfect and righteous rule.
You probably will have noticed that there is a bit of a problem, though. In creation, including among human beings, we still find rebellion against God and against his kingdom.
That's why we pray that his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. In fact, that very problem is something we need to have in the back of our minds as we navigate our series of parables for this morning.
[3:25] It will be especially helpful as we look at our first two parables. Please look with me at the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, starting at verse 31 in Matthew chapter 13.

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 is 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 until it was all leaven. These parables communicate the same basic theme about the kingdom of heaven.

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To begin with, a mustard seed is a really tiny thing. I've seen a mustard seed. Maybe you have, too. They are really small. Yet a tree grows from it.
[4:35] A little bit of leaven goes a long way. Those three measures of flour are all leavened by that little bit of leaven. That brings me to this morning's first point, which is this.

Against all worldly expectations and appearances, the kingdom of heaven is expanding and will expand and will be victorious over everything.
In other words, his kingdom really will come on earth as it is in heaven. I don't know about you, but I certainly need that encouragement.
Ministry and Christian witness in this world, and especially in such a fiercely secular culture as ours, can be so discouraging. Any of you who try to share the gospel with others regularly will know what I mean.
It's often the case that you share the gospel, and it feels like no one wants to listen. And yet, the mustard seed goes on growing into a tree, and our efforts will not be in vain.
[5:51] How do we know that? Well, the most important answer to that question is that God has said so. I'm going to trust him on that one. What about you?

But it's interesting. While back, I looked at a map that visually tracked the spread of the gospel throughout the world over the centuries, and let me tell you, our century looks a lot more impressive on paper than the first century did.
Even as I speak this morning, I am confident that the gospel is marching forward, slowly but surely, reaching every corner of the earth and every single people group.
And it's not going to stop. Until the kingdom of heaven has reached the entire world. What's on our mind these days?
Well, it's that we think that the spread of COVID-19 is really something. But let me tell you, it has got nothing on the certain expansion of the kingdom of heaven.
[6:56] Am I right? Am I right? Bring that example up for a reason. We're living in the middle of uncertainty.

We're all facing unusually severe challenges. We're all discouraged. I mean, if that's not enough, just this past week, the Supreme Court appears to have ruled against the right of churches to gather without heavy-handed restrictions that for some reason don't apply to secular institutions in the same way.
And yet the mustard seed has sprouted. The tree is growing. From a little bit of leaven, the kingdom of God is leavening everything and won't stop doing so until the work is finished.
The kingdom marches forward. Don't doubt it. Believe it. Our God can do anything.
The kingdom of heaven will flourish. The kingdom of heaven will prevail. And the kingdom of heaven is victorious. And not only that, the kingdom is glorious.
[8:20] The kingdom of heaven is valuable beyond all that we could be tempted to compare with it. Let's look at the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great value.

Picking up at verse 44, we read this. 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.
The kingdom of heaven is valuable. It is a treasure that nothing else can compare to. Simply put, knowing Jesus is worth absolutely everything even if it costs us everything.
I think we're tempted not to like the idea of it costing us everything.
[9:33] Uh-oh, all this selling all that I have to get it. The sinfulness in us tells us that what we really like is a comfortable and respectable religion.

Something that makes us look good and pious and something that makes us feel good. But Jesus calls us to so much more than that.
Something so much better than that. He calls us to eternal life with him where thieves will not break in and steal and where rust will not corrupt. It is so beautiful.
It is so valuable. It is so glorious that it is worth giving up everything of worldly value.
I'm reminded of what the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who happens to have been killed by the Nazis for opposing Hitler had to say.

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[10:43] Bonhoeffer said that when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die. Even so, it's worth it.

As Jesus said in Mark chapter 10 truly I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.
When Christ calls us he bids us to come and die that we might have eternal life.
And so we say that to live is Christ and to die is gain. If we have gained Christ we have gained everything that matters. If we have the kingdom of heaven we have everything that lasts.
The kingdom of heaven is victorious. The kingdom of heaven is valuable beyond all description.
[12:05] That's what our text has shown us thus far this morning. That is certainly certainly good news. But our text also comes with a warning. The kingdom of heaven also entails we see in our text a final separation between those who have submitted themselves to God and his kingdom and those who have not.

We see that in our final parable for this morning the parable of the net. Starting in verse 47 we read Again the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.
When it was full men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age.
The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
I'm going to be honest with you guys. This portion of our text is the kind of thing that preachers often skip right over. That even whole lectionaries often skip right over.
[13:28] But Jesus said this for a reason. For a reason Jesus taught us and warned us about hell. I don't enjoy preaching about hell but Jesus preached about it and I must do the same.

Jesus taught about hell because he loves us and does not want us to go there. It is a loving warning. And that's why I have to talk about hell in our text too.
In this parable about the kingdom of heaven Jesus is talking about a place of separation. A place he describes using the imagery of a fiery furnace.
A place where God's holy judgment is experienced. He warns us that that day of separation is coming.
But here's the thing about hell. You and I don't have to go there. Jesus came to save us from sin and death and hell.
[14:50] Let's be clear. Outside of Christ all of us will go to hell. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. All of us deserve God's wrath and God's judgment.

But God loves us and sent his only son to die for us. Jesus loves us and willingly gave his life for us. On the cross he took the punishment for the sins of all who put their trust in him.
And that means that anyone and everyone who puts their trust in Christ alone in his saving death, anyone who receives Christ as Savior will not go to hell.
and will not be under God's judgment. And will not be under God's wrath. Because Jesus paid the penalty for all of that forever for all who believe with his death on the cross.
the same Jesus who lovingly warned us about hell, lovingly gave his life so that you and I wouldn't go there.
[16:13] We've seen the warning in these parables about the kingdom of heaven. I'm going to close on the other side of the coin, so to speak. I'm going to begin by saying this.

The kingdom of heaven is open to everyone who will come. There is only one way into the kingdom of heaven and that is through the blood of Jesus Christ.
But it is open to anyone and everyone who will come. Amen. We know that if you ask Jesus to save you from your sins through his death on the cross for you, you can be certain that he will.
He never turns away anyone who comes to him for mercy. Never. Here's one major difference between heaven and hell.
heaven will be full of people who didn't get what they deserved. People who are only there because of what Jesus did for them when he died and rose again.
[17:39] In closing, here's an amazing thing about the kingdom of heaven. we receive salvation as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus.

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If we put our trust in Christ as our Savior, we will know the joy of the kingdom of heaven forever.
You want to know the greatest thing about the kingdom of heaven.
It's knowing Christ and knowing God as our loving Father and living in relationship forever.
Is it any wonder then that Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in this morning's parables as being the most valuable thing we could possibly imagine.
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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