

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like.....

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[0 : 00] Well, please keep open your Bibles at page 794. As I said before, this is part of a little sermon series for three weeks, and this is the middle week on Matthew 13 and into chapter 14.

And let's pray. God, our Father, we thank you that by your grace you reveal to us truth about your kingdom and gospel. Do so tonight, we pray.

Fill our minds with truth and give us the wills to follow the Lord Jesus, the King. We pray this for his sake. Amen. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

It's here. It's come, in effect, is what Jesus says. And so in those verses of Matthew chapter 4 that I read at the beginning of this service, Jesus began to proclaim from that time in Capernaum of Galilee, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come.

And he went around about the cities and towns of Galilee and into perhaps what is Syria today, preaching the good news of the kingdom. So we're told in Matthew chapter 24, there is an excitement about the kingdom of heaven, which finally is at hand, has come.

[1 : 18] It's near. It's virtually here, in effect. In his famous teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And then again in that same Sermon on the Mount, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus taught the need for righteousness to enter the kingdom of heaven. So he said, I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And still teaching and preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus then issues a warning. He warns those, the crowds that are listening to him, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Indeed, Jesus also teaches about prayer, and striving first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given for you as well.

[2 : 40] And in the Lord's prayer, praying, Your kingdom come. And then as Jesus has finished the Sermon on the Mount, and performs a whole array of miracles around the Sea of Galilee in the north part of Israel, he marveled at the faith of one Gentile man, a centurion.

And he said, I tell you, many will come from east and west, and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, teaching quite provocatively that there will be Gentiles in the kingdom, and those racially descended from Abraham ought be careful not to rely on racial descent, but rather on faith, like the faith of that centurion.

The various miracles that Jesus performs, the casting out of demons, the healing of people who are sick with a fever, or curing a person of leprosy, even raising the dead.

Jesus sees that and proclaims it as signs of the coming kingdom of heaven. So when John the Baptist asks about who Jesus is, Jesus' reply is, Go and tell John what you hear and see.

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

[4 : 14] In effect, Jesus is saying, The kingdom is here. I am the king. Indeed, later on in Matthew 11, after those words of reply back to John the Baptist, Jesus says, Truly I tell you, among these born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.

Yet, in the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent have taken it by force.

And then last week in Matthew chapter 13, we saw in Jesus' teaching to his disciples about why he teaches in parables. He said, To you disciples, it has been given to know the secrets of the

kingdom of heaven, but to them, the crowds, it has not been given.

The kingdom of heaven is here. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's come, and Jesus the king has come. But look around, and what do we see?

A small, motley band of followers. Yes, large crowds, but to them has not been given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but only to the disciples. Maybe more than 12, but a small and insignificant group.

[5 : 39] What do we see? We see confused crowds, confused by the teaching, by the parables. What do we see? We see a growing leadership of the Jews in opposition to Jesus, mumbling about how to destroy him.

Those to whom Jesus says, why do you think evil in your heart? Those who say of Jesus that he is performing these miracles by the prince of demons. What do we see when we look around, but Roman rule unchallenged?

The kingdom of heaven is here, has come, and yet Rome rules. The despot Herod Antipas still rules over Galilee.

Pagans are in the city of Jerusalem. There is compromise in the temple. The kingdom of heaven is here. Really?

It doesn't quite look at, there are, there are little things happening, but where's the overthrow? Where's the independence of the people of Israel? Where's the restoration of their land borders promised way back to Abraham at the beginning of the Old Testament?

[6 : 53] Where is an Israelite king on the throne of Jerusalem, ruling over the whole of the promised land? From the Jordan River across to the Mediterranean, and up towards the Euphrates, and down into the Negev Desert.

Where is that? We don't see that. We don't see the restoration of hope, and the abundance of blessings promised in the Old Testament. It doesn't quite look right.

This kingdom of heaven doesn't quite match the expectation. So, what is the kingdom of heaven like?

Well, Jesus, you say that the kingdom is here, but why are there still Gentiles here? Why are there evildoers here, living in the land, indeed, in some parts, ruling over this land?

Why are they here? Why haven't they been kicked out, and cast out, so that this land and kingdom of God's people, remains pure, as the Old Testament delineated about the people who would live in the land?

[8 : 01] Why has that not happened, Jesus? The kingdom of heaven, may be compared, to this. To someone who sowed good seed in his field.

But while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. And then went away. A particular weed is actually described, and one that looks, in fact, like wheat, and would grow and throttle the wheat, more or less.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves, or rather the servants, of the householder, came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

Where then did these weeds come from? I often ask that about my garden too. He answered, An enemy has done this. The slaves said to him then, Do you want us to go and gather them?

That is the weeds. And he replied, No, for in gathering the weeds, you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest.

[9 : 11] And at harvest time, I'll tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first, bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

That's what the kingdom of heaven is like. That whole picture, not just the sower, not just one aspect of it, but this is describing an aspect of the kingdom of heaven. That is, it's growing alongside evildoers.

There are wheat and weeds growing together, and now is not the time for separation. Now is not the time for getting rid of, or burning, or punishing, or judging, or condemning to fire the enemies. Those who do not belong to the kingdom, the wheat that is. Rather, that will come at the harvest time, at the end. You see, the whole world belongs to God.

And the picture here is of the world. It's not a picture of the church, as sometimes it's interpreted. It's a picture of the whole world. And within this world that God owns, there are those who belong to the kingdom, and those who do not.

[10:23] Those who are sown by God, and those sown by the enemy, the devil. They live intermingled, around the world. Unlike the Old Testament, where the people of God were to be gathered, into the promised land, and those who are pagans, were to be put to death, or expelled from the land, and kept out of it, unless they converted.

Not so in the kingdom of heaven, at least now. It's come, but it's come, in a sense, concurrent, with the living of evildoers, in this world.

Until the end. Until the reapers come. Until the harvest time comes. And then, and only then, will there be the separation.

Let both of them grow together, until the harvest. And at harvest time, I'll tell the reapers, collect the weeds first, and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat, into my barn.

Jesus actually explains this parable, in verses that follow. In verses 36 to 43. And in effect, that's what he says. It's only at the end of the age, as he describes it in verse 40.

[11:35] The end of the age, when this separation will come. Then, the evildoers, will be cast off, in effect to hell. So verses 41 and 2 say, the son of man will send his angels, the reapers in effect.

And they will collect, out of his kingdom, all causes of sin. That doesn't mean something abstract, but stumbling blocks, as in people, who cause others to sin. And all evildoers.

And they will throw them, into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping, and gnashing of teeth. A typical description, of hell in effect. Then, and only then, at the end of the age, the righteous, the wheat, will shine, like the sun, in the kingdom of their father.

Let anyone with ears, listen. Shining like the sun, picks up an expression, from the Old Testament, from Daniel. Jesus keeps showing, that the kingdom, that has come in him, the king, is the long awaited kingdom, from the Old Testament.

Notice too, interestingly, verse 41, talks about the son of man, will collect out of, his kingdom. But verse 43, talks about the, kingdom of their father.

[12:52] That is the kingdom of the son, is the kingdom of the father. It's why of course, in the book of Revelation, at the heart of heaven, is the throne of God, the father, and, of the lamb, the son.

There's a one throne, dual occupancy, in a sense, of the father, and the son. It's the father's kingdom, it's the son's kingdom, it's the same kingdom, it's the kingdom of heaven, and it's come now, but it's separation, from evildoers, has not yet come.

That's what the kingdom of heaven, is like now. Jesus you see, is teaching patience, to those who are followers of him. He's teaching them, an expectation, but not a, not a too soon, too much expectation.

That is, there will be separation, of evildoers, and those who belong to the kingdom, but not now, not yet fully, only at the end of the age, when the son of man, sends his angels, on that final day. Then, the fullness of the kingdom, will be seen, and those who belong to it, will shine, like the sun. So what Jesus is teaching, is that until that day, until Jesus comes again, those who follow him, who belong to his kingdom, Christians, as we're now called, believers in Jesus, we live in the midst, of evil in our world.

[14:17] We're not meant to live, in a holy ghetto, or a holy huddle, but we live next door, over the road, or behind us, in the house, or we work with, or we study with, those who do not belong, to the kingdom.

That's part of the mixed economy, of this world, that belongs to God. But only at the end, at the harvest, when the Lord returns, then, the final separation, will occur.

So therefore, for those who are puzzling, about this kingdom, Jesus is saying, live righteously, for it's the righteous, who will shine like the sun, so make sure you're righteous.

Live righteously now, in the midst of evil, in this world. And also, of course, to pray, come Lord Jesus, but Jesus, that's all very well, but how can you say, that the kingdom has come, this great glorious kingdom of God, long awaited, through the Old Testament, and described, with so many majestic pictures, of power, how can you say, it's come, when, I mean it's you, and a few people, following you around, a tax collector, a fisherman and two, and so on, yes there's a lot, of popular appeal here Jesus, there are big crowds, but they're confused, they're not really, following you as disciples, how can you say, it's come, it looks so, small and insignificant, well I'll tell you, what the kingdom of heaven, is like, the kingdom of heaven, is like a mustard seed, that someone took, and sowed, in his field, it's the smallest, of all the seeds, not literally, but basically, it's renowned, to be such a small seed, it was the proverbial, small seed, even in Jesus day, it's the smallest, of all the

seeds, but when it's grown, it's the greatest, of shrubs, and again, not literally, there were bigger trees, bigger trees indeed, but from such a tiny seed, comes quite a significant, shrub, normally four meters high, that sort of, height, but when it's grown, it's the greatest, of shrubs, and becomes, a tree, so that the birds, of the air, come and make nests, in its branches,

Jesus is connecting here, the small beginning, and the large outcome, there is a line, of continuity, between the two, and what the crowds, or the disciples, are seeing, is the smallness now, and for some, perhaps they're getting, confused, or demoralized, by just a handful, of real disciples, of Jesus, kingdom of heaven, I mean, this looks like, a tiny little, sect or cult, or breakaway group, that's insignificant, the Romans, is going to squash us, any day, not so says Jesus, tiny seed, but it's growing, and it's growing, to be a large tree, and indeed, by talking about, the birds of the air, making nests, in it, picking up language, from the prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel again, Jesus is indicating, that from this, tiny beginning, will actually grow, something large enough, not just for Jews, but even, for Gentiles, that's the background, of those prophecies, it seems, where the birds of the air, represent the nations, the Gentiles, who come and rest, in the tree, of the kingdom of heaven,

[17:38] Jesus is looking forward, to the future, and saying, you might look around now, and think this is small, this is insignificant, I'm depressed, discouraged by this, not so, he says, look to the future, and be encouraged, at what will grow, but more than that, it's not just small to large, but it's small to large, that actually works in, and transforms, those who belong, it's not just about, numerical growth, but it's about, transformative power, so Jesus says, let me say, the kingdom of heaven, is like this, it's like yeast, that a woman took, and mixed in with, three measures of flour, large measures of flour, significant enough, to feed a hundred people, or more, until all of it, was leavened, small to large, but now in the sense, of effect, and change, or transformation, Jesus is saying, you look around now, and you're discouraged, a bit demoralized, and you're doubting, this is really the kingdom, but it takes time, it's growing, it's being transformed, some years ago, a colleague of mine, left the ministry, after a significant, moral misdemeanor, let me say, but I remember him saying, after this, after he'd, had an adulterous affair, that he was maintaining, and had left the ministry, he said, you know,

I look around, and I think, what have we actually accomplished, we're just such a, a tiny speck, in the suburb, I mean, what's the point, he says, now he was very discouraged, but it's easy, to feel like that, as Christians, we look around, our secular society, and we think, here's a school, of a thousand students, and there might be, 20 or 30 Christians, that I know of, in this school, look around, a university campus, of 20,000, and compare that, to how many come, to the Christian union meeting, each week, a handful, people, you look around, the suburb of Doncaster, of so many, thousand people, 20,000 or so, living in our parish boundaries, and we might think, well we're a big church here, 500 people, but so what, compared to the thousands, who live in this area, and don't know anything, about the gospel, the vast spread, of secularism, the Islamification, of some parts, of our society, and some countries, like Britain, and France in particular, we look around the world, and think yes, in some parts of the world, the Christian church, is growing significantly, and we rejoice, in huge growth in China, but it's still at best, at absolute most, 10%? That's a small minority, really, you'd never get elected, to parliament, at 10% vote, it's easy to look around, and be discouraged, and think, this is actually, quite small, and insignificant, and for us, in the West, in decline, Jesus is saying, the kingdom of heaven, is like a seed, a tiny seed, but it will grow, to a large tree, on the final day, it's like, a tiny bit of yeast, that infiltrates, a whole swathe of flour, on the final day, be encouraged, it's growing, don't be discouraged, the kingdom of heaven, is here, Jesus has come, and he's ushering in, this new age, of the kingdom of heaven, he quotes, from Psalm 78, in verse 35, I will open my mouth, to speak in parables, I'll proclaim, what has been hidden, from the foundation, of the world, Jesus is saying, that God's, original purposes, in many ways, veiled, or hidden, through the Old Testament, are now being, revealed, in Jesus Christ, yes, he's speaking, in parables, as we saw last week, he explained, some of that, but the secrets, of heaven, are being revealed, through the king, of heaven, well Jesus,

I can see, what you're saying, it's small, but growing, I can see, what you're saying, about living, in this mixed world, of evildoers, and members, of the kingdom, of heaven, but is it really, worth it, I mean we've seen, the opposition, that's already, coming to you, in the early part, of Matthew's gospel, the people, who are muttering, against you, and saying, what you're doing, comes from the devil, in effect, from the prince, of demons, we can see, that there are people, out plotting, to

destroy you, John the Baptist, who heralded you, is in prison, is it really, worth following you, well let me tell you, the kingdom of heaven, is like this, it's like treasure, hidden, in a field, people would actually, hide things in fields, because their houses, were not lockable, often, and if they had, something valuable, they might well, bury it in a spot, that they knew, and remembered, but others wouldn't know, so the kingdom of heaven, is like treasure, hidden in a field, which someone found, and hid, it looks immoral, but actually, there were rabbinical laws, about finders keepers, the issue, is not the morality, of finding something, and keeping it, but it's treasure, hidden, and then this person, who found it in his joy, goes and sells, all that he has, and buys that field, that's what the kingdom, of heaven's like, not the man, not the treasure, but the whole story, of selling everything, to buy it, you doubt, that the kingdom, is worth it, let me tell you, it is worth, everything you have, the kingdom, of heaven, is treasure, well let me put it, another way, the kingdom of heaven, is like this, it's like a merchant, in search, of fine pearls, here, the man who found, the treasure, may not have been, looking for treasure, but this man is, he's a merchant, and searching, for fine pearls, and I'm finding, one pearl, of great value, enormous value, he went, and sold, all that he had, and bought it, the kingdom, of heaven, let me tell you, despite the opposition, despite living, in a world, where you might be, choked by weeds, despite the fact, that it looks small, and insignificant, it is worth, everything, we often talk, about the cost, of being a Christian, but actually, this is a wise, investment, it is worth, selling everything, it is worth, giving up everything, to follow Jesus, and be a member, of this kingdom, that's actually, not in some sense, costly, it is a hugely, wise investment, it is worth it, the kingdom, of heaven, is like treasure, like the greatest, most expensive, pearl, that you could, ever find, is it worth, being a member, of the kingdom, of heaven, of heaven, is it worth, copping flack, for following Jesus, is it worth, the effort, of being part, of God's people, encouraging each other, praying for the Lord's return, is it worth, giving up, financially, as we support, Christian ministry, and mission, around the world, is it worth, striving to be righteous, and shunning, the temptations, and lures, and attractions, of our world, two, two, two, thousand years, years later, and he's still not come, is it worth, trusting that promise, absolutely, it is worth, everything, and more, the miracles, of Jesus, is just a, a tiny glimpse, a foretaste, of what this kingdom, will be like, it'll be beyond, imagination, and all the worldly wealth, that you could accumulate, all the comfort, that you could have, all the luxury, that our world, lavishes upon us, pales into insignificance, all our earthly, glory, and treasure, is fading away, all its boasted, pomp, and show, is nothing, by comparison, with the solid joy, and lasting treasure, of the kingdom, of heaven, like wheat and weeds, disciples of Jesus, live in the midst, of an evil world, maybe we long, to be in God's kingdom, long finally, to be separated, out of the evil, that infiltrates, and pressures us, day by day, in this world, and that's coming, to an end, at the judgment day, that's when the separation, will have, that's when the righteous, will shine like the sun, well Jesus returns, to the same encouraging thing, let me tell you, the kingdom of heaven, is also like this, it's like a net, that was thrown, into the sea, and caught fish, of every kind, and when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good, into baskets, and they threw out, 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 furnace, of fire, where there will be, weeping and gnashing of teeth,

[27 : 02] Jesus moves from the picture, to the reality, that is you throwing out, bad fish, into a furnace of fire, and the bad fish, will weep and gnash teeth, no not really, he's moved from the picture, of the fish, to the reality, of casting out the evildoers, into hell, Jesus, why do you allow, this opposition to happen now, why doesn't it end now, why do you allow, Christians who belong, to the kingdom, to live in a sense, concurrently in this world, a mixed world, of evil and righteous, why can't you come, and judge now, and be done with it, and bring in the full glory, of your kingdom, be patient, judgment is coming, that separation is coming, when the net is full, it will be drawn ashore, and the separation, of the good fish, and the bad fish, will happen then, justice will be done, the evil fish, they will be judged, then, and yes, the kingdom is here, and is coming, in its fullness, pray for it to come, come Lord Jesus, when little children, try to understand, something beyond, their comprehension, often it's similes, that elicit, the some level, of understanding, that is something, is like something else, what's the kingdom, of heaven like, how do I understand, this concept, that Jesus is proclaiming, and preaching, it doesn't seem, quite to match, the reality, and in a sense, through these parables, that Jesus speaks, the kingdom of heaven, is like this, well actually, the kingdom of heaven, is like this, and it's a bit like that, and it's like this as well,

Jesus is showing, that it doesn't all come, instantly, fully, it's begun, when Jesus comes, the first time, and it will come, in its fullness, consummated, when he comes, a second time, and we live, as members, of the kingdom now, in a mixed world, the kingdom has come, we belong to it, we're citizens of it, but it's not yet, the fullness, of that kingdom, in a sense, till the second coming, and in a sense, Jesus is trying, to help Christians, now live, in the midst, of the ages, between the first, and the second, comings, of Jesus Christ, he uses, everyday illustrations, things that, his listeners, would readily, have known, like wheat, growing amidst weeds, wait till the harvest, like a mustard seed, like yeast, or leaven, like treasure, like pearls, like a net full, of mixed fish, speaking these words, on the edge, of the sea of Galilee, do you understand, do you understand, what the kingdom, of heaven, is like, yes they say, the disciples say, not the crowds, the disciples, yes we do, and Jesus says, to them, therefore every scribe, who has been trained, for the kingdom, of heaven, is like the master, of a household, who brings out, of his treasure, what is new, and what is old, scribes, were learned teachers, and Jesus here, is saying, if you understand, the secrets, of the kingdom, of heaven, they're not secrets, for you to keep, to yourself, if you've been, trained, for the kingdom, of heaven, as you are, you disciples, now who understand, then you're like, scribes, teachers, you are to convey, those secrets, to others, and teach them, the secrets, of the kingdom, of heaven, that is, you'll be like, the master, of a household, who has people, under him, and around him, in a sense, and you'll bring out, your treasure, the kingdom, or the kingdom news, is like treasure, but notice, that it's treasure, that is new, and old,

Jesus is saying, that the treasure, of the kingdom, of heaven, the secrets, of that kingdom, are both old, and new, that is, there are things, from the old covenant, or the old testament, that are part, of the secrets, of the kingdom, of heaven, Jesus, many times, in these words, through Matthew, keeps showing, a continuous line, a line of continuity, from old covenant, to Jesus, but there is also new, because it's not simply, a line of continuity, Jesus, in fact, earlier on, back in chapter 9, spoke these words, of warning, about the newness, of what he comes, to bring, he said, then, no one sews, a piece, of unshrunk cloth, on old cloak, for the patch, pulls away, from the cloak, and a worse tear, is made, and neither, is new wine, put into old wine skins, otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins, are destroyed, that is, there is a, discontinuity, between old and new, there is something, bigger and better, even than the old, expectation, of what the new is, now you disciples, you say, you understand, now you're teachers, of the secrets, of the kingdom, of heaven, you ought to, proclaim the good news, of the kingdom, to others, so that they will, embrace it, with repentance, because the kingdom, of heaven is at hand, and faith, like the Gentile, centurion of chapter 8, to give your life, in following,

Jesus Christ, yes Jesus is, the long awaited, king of the kingdom, from the old testament, but he more than, fulfills, the expectations, therein, it's not that he's, less than the expectation, but actually greater, than their imagination, and expectation, repent, the kingdom, of heaven, is near, the wheat, is germinating, the dough, is rising, and the tree, is growing, and the time, is coming, for the net, is filling, and the day, of the Lord's return, is approaching, when the kingdom, of heaven, will be fully, consummated, and every person, who has ever lived, the living, and the dead, will be brought, before the king, and bow their knee, before him, and the bad fish, will be cast out, into judgment, and those, who are righteous, the good fish, the wheat, that will shine, like the stars, of the sun, in the glorious kingdom, of the sun, forever, come,

Lord Jesus Christ, let's pray, Jesus, you are our king, we thank you, for opening, to us, the secrets, of the kingdom, of heaven, by your grace, and mercy, we thank you, for the glorious kingdom, that you, you have brought, are bringing, and will consummate, on the day, of your return, Lord Jesus, we long, for the day, when we'll stand, perfected in your presence, we long, for the day, when evil, will be ended, when your glorious kingdom, will be fulfilled, on earth, come, Lord Jesus, come soon, Amen, with him.

[34 : 33] We long, we long, God's a king, weøрге in your hand, we sound like. Now, we're going, slow down, slow down, and we're going, to go see, because you want, there is a magical sometime, and I kin, because I love you, as a king, of my ■■■mas fruit, after I have had■■■, and!

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