

Matthew 13.31-33; 44-46; 51-52 | what the kingdom does to us

### Introduction | likening the kingdom of heaven

**What if our “Snohomish-Christianity” is not Biblical Christianity?** Even if you self-identify as a Christian, what if the Bible identifies you as a non-Christian? Is there a difference between ‘Christianity’ and Biblical Christianity? Jesus’ disciples grew up believing the Pharisees were children of God—leaving them a bit confused when Jesus calls them children of Satan. In chapter 13, Jesus teaches through a series of parables to help explain why there is a growing opposition between His disciples and the religious leaders. One of Jesus’ primary purposes in telling these parables is to challenge the religious leader’s understanding of how God and His kingdom work—as well as their membership in it. At the heart of everyone one of Jesus’ stories is the idea that, “God, and His kingdom, is not like you thought.”

**What are the marks of Kingdom citizenship?** The Jews had pedigree, knowledge, morality, and ritual but they were not part of God’s kingdom. In truth, the Jews false conception of what it meant to be in the Kingdom just as many have a false conception of what it means to be a Christian. The Jews thought the Kingdom of God was something they achieved. They thought the King would come and give them political freedom. They thought the King would give them physical healing. They thought the King would give them material prosperity. **Jesus revealed that the Kingdom NOW is something spiritual—that the Kingdom of God is essentially something “within you”. It is that power which rules your heart, mind, perceptions, and your actions.** As Jesus describes the “what the kingdom is like,” He does not tell us HOW TO LIVE in order to enter the Kingdom. On the contrary, He reveals how citizens of the Kingdom LIVE.

**The Kingdom of God produces something in us.** These four parables reveal the true nature of this change. Jesus doesn’t simply save us in order to brand us. Responding to Jesus call to “follow me” means more than apathetic identification and an occasional good deed—that is merely *Snohomish Christianity*. **Biblical Christianity is an entirely new life, in a new kingdom, with a new mind, a new purpose, a new joy, and a new will.** That is what Christianity is...God, doing something to us, producing something in us, so that we might accomplish everything He has prepared for us. **The Kingdom of God gives us four things, a new perspective, a new love, a new joy, and a new will.**

### The Mustard Seed | GIVES US A NEW PERSPECTIVE

<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> 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.” The Pharisees have all kinds of issues with Jesus’ description of the kingdom of God. They expected a King big enough and an army strong enough to throw off the Empire of Rome and establish a new kingdom. They expected power. They expected wealth. They expected charisma. **Their expectations were not based on Scripture; they were based on their fleshly desires—JESUS WAS TOO SMALL.** Isaiah 53 says: *he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53.2).* His disciples were even more unattractive—by all accounts, small in the world.

God used a motley crew of nobodies that, by His power, he made into somebodies. It is almost as if God picks all of the people that everyone else skips over when picking their teams—he likes the slow kid, the un-athletic kid, the one-legged kid, the SMALL KID. Some of God’s greatest “draft picks” were *fugitives, boat-builders, shepherds, religious-zealots, teenage moms, politicians, prostitutes, adulterers, invalids, criminals, fishermen, and even ancient IRS agents.* **God accomplishes His mission using the weak, weird, and even the wayward.** This is no more true than in the book of Judges. **Judges 3.31** *After him was*

**Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an ox goad, and he also saved Israel. Shamgar was an unknown farmer who used whatever he had, and did whatever he could, to save a nation. God can do a lot with a little.**

Our world, even evangelical world, does not celebrate the insignificant or ordinarily faithful. We LOVE to elevate the extraordinarily fruitful. We hear much about conferences and their speakers, movements and their leaders, best-selling books and their authors, and mega-churches with their preachers. We don't often hear about the electricians building beds for orphans in Haiti, or the tree toppers serving breakfast at shelters. We don't write books about the PUD lineman counseling people, high school teachers planting churches, or families adopting unwanted children. It's not likely we'll learn the names of the mom of three leading ministries or the shopkeeper who can be killed for hosting a "secret church" in his store basement. **But these are the stories of SMALL ordinary people using who and what they are to do extraordinary work for the Lord.** Much like Shamgar (and Moses, and Peter, and Paul, etc.), these are people who stopped asking the question, "Who am I?" and listened to God say, "*This is not about who you are. It is about who I AM.*" By God's grace, they became more concerned with faithfulness than their own success or measurable fruitfulness. They see themselves and others with Kingdom eyes.

The Kingdom of God changes our view of what seems "small" or insignificant—in ourselves and others. It causes us to look past superficial appearance, experience, or even historical precedent. **The smallest single seed of Kingdom faithfulness results in a huge tree that blesses many.** This is not a call to have a big impact; it is a call to see the small things you do as having big impact. Ordinary faithfulness as a man/woman matters. Faithfulness as a husband/wife matters. Faithfulness as a mother/father, matters. Faithfulness as a neighbor matters. Faithfulness as an employee matters. **In God's Kingdom, one person, one family, one small church can make an eternal difference! We are called to be faithful not fruitful.**

### **The leaven in three measures | GIVES US A NEW LOVE (FOR OTHERS)**

Not only does citizenship in God's Kingdom change our view of ourselves, it changes our disposition toward others. **It gives us a new purpose.** <sup>33</sup> 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. Leaven is yeast. Yeast is basically a fungi that reacts with sugars in dough and causes it to expand. Small bits of leaven are mixed into the dough. When dough has been prepared, it is set aside to rise. The yeast affects every part of the dough. Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like leaven; it comes into rule every part of our lives. **The smallest bit of the kingdom has a tangible effect on you.** Inexplicably, changes you from the inside out. We see it in the effects on our language, our money, our parenting, our recreation, our relationships, our sexuality, everything! This is not even a result of effort. It is the natural response to the Kingdom rising in our hearts—we grow as God's purposes begin to take over our lives slowly, but completely. **Snohomish Christianity divides life into spiritual and non-spiritual. Biblical Christianity makes all life spiritual.**

**The effects of the Kingdom do not end with our own leaven feast.** In this parable, the yeast is sown in "three measures" is the usual translation for the original Greek "tria sata" which is a little over a bushel of flour which is about 144 cups of flour. The average recipe for bread calls for 4-5 cups, making the amount of flour Jesus speaks about enough to make over 50 loaves of bread. That is a lot of bread for one woman, even one family, which is precisely the point. Entering the Kingdom of heaven is really about the restoration of relationships that were broken in the Garden of Eden. Beginning with our relationship with God, after our relationship with ourselves is restored, as well as our relationship to one another. We begin to live for a new purpose: <sup>4</sup> **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests**

of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2.4-7) **The kingdom of heaven IN US is like a woman who desires to do more than feed herself or her family.** The kingdom announced by Jesus is like a woman who wants to feed the city. The kingdom of God is like a woman who wants to feed the world. **If your Christianity is not “feeding” other people, it is not biblical Christianity.**

### **The Hidden Treasure | GIVES US A NEW JOY**

The Kingdom changes our view, it changes our purpose, and it changes our emotional disposition. “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. In the parable, the man is not looking for any treasure. But the treasure seems to find him. **And when it is found, it makes him exceedingly joyful.** Our minds are apt to wonder what the treasure is—in order to determine our own response (kid’s dessert). But Jesus tells us the treasure is the Kingdom of heaven. **The Kingdom of heaven, the rule of God, the ways of Christ, salvation itself makes men rejoice!** The Bible talks much about happiness, but even more about joy. Depending on the translation, the Bible uses the words “happy” and “happiness” about 30 times, while “joy” and “rejoice” appear over 300 times. Joy and happiness are different. In summary, the Bible teaches that happiness is fleeting because it often depends on things outside of ourselves (circumstances) which change; **but joy is everlasting because it is based on our internal unchanging position with God in Christ.** In writing to Christians being persecuted, the apostle Peter writes: <sup>8</sup> **Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.** **1 Peter 1.8-9.** The Kingdom of God is something to be excited about—it is matter of joy—not zippidy do dah fake Christianity—but a governing sense joy that I am known, loved, protected, and delivered. **Does your irrevocable, immeasurable, incomparable citizenship in the Kingdom of God make you joyful?**

How do I know when someone finds that kind of Joy? We live as citizens of the Kingdom now—**joyfully investing in the invisible.** Imagine when the man returns to town and sells all that he has. The people may ask what he is going to buy, and he responds with—that field. Of course, they don’t know what is in the field. They can’t see it. The treasure is hidden to them. We are not talking about a joy in visible things, earthly things, or temporary things. The joy of the Christian is in invisible future reward—the promises of the coming Kingdom—which lead us to invest our time, talent, and treasure in ways that will not make sense to the world. We will sacrifice the unrealistic American Kingdom for the reality of God’s Kingdom. And when you do this, the world will mock it, revile it, and condemn it. Imagine what these people might say as this man sells all he has to buy what appears to be a worthless field. **But he knows something they don’t.** <sup>17</sup> **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2Corinthians 4.17....** <sup>11</sup> **“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5.12)**

### **The Priceless Pearl | GIVES US A NEW WILL**

The last parable is probably the most convicting it reveals the true nature of our Christianity—it challenges our entire value system. <sup>45</sup> **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,**

<sup>46</sup> who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. The difference in the two parables is important. **First**, unlike the hidden treasure, this man is looking for pearls. Pearls are an interesting jewel. Certain oysters produce pearls inside their shells. *Pearls begin as irritants, like sand, that make its way inside the oyster and begin to irritate the soft inside. The oyster, in order to protect itself, begins to form layers around the irritant, out of the same material as its shell. The oyster keeps adding layers and layers and the result is often a beautiful, perfectly formed pearl* (Related to the Parable of the weeds in something we cannot get rid of by ignoring). As a merchant, we assume that he is searching for a pearl to sell in order to provide himself with power, security and prosperity. **Second**, it is clear that there is more than one pearl to find, some more valuable to the merchant than others. **Third**, searching for THE pearl, the merchant finds one pearl of great value. And, ironically, instead of selling the pearl, he sells all that he has to obtain it.

**Up to this point, each parable has identified the kingdom of God with an inanimate object—a mustard seed, leaven, and a hidden treasure. In this parable, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like the merchant, not the pearl.** I believe there are two ways to understand this parable which complement one another. In other words, they need each other. The FIRST way to understand this parable is to view ourselves as the merchants who, in finding the Kingdom of God, recognize its great value. This is the individual who finds Jesus so supremely glorious, their entire life becomes centered on Him. A kingdom-transformation of the mind leads to a kingdom-transformation of the will. If the outworking of your Christianity climaxes in sentiment—it isn't biblical. <sup>8</sup> *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. Phil. 3.8.*

How will we ever get to the point where I am willing even trying lose everything, my comfort, my lifestyle, my preferences, my plans, my success, my job, my reputation, my power, my relationship, even my life for Christ? This leads to the second way to understand this parable, which sees the merchant as Christ and His church as the pearl. Jesus found you. The Bible says, *“...You are not your own,<sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price, so glorify God. (1 Cor 16.19).”* **Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. My citizenship in God's Kingdom came at INFINITE COST to Himself. He gave up his throne, he sacrificed his comfort, he emptied himself of power, he forfeited his reputation, and he spent every drop of his life for a piece of dirt that he considered a pearl of great value.** Until I see Jesus death as the giving up of his everything for me, then I will resist losing anything for Him. But when I see that I really am a wicked dirty sinner saved by pure grace—at God's infinite cost—then there's nothing he cannot ask of me.

### **CONCLUSION: GIVES US A MISSION [BRING OUT YOUR TREASURE]**

By grace, through faith, over time, THIS Kingdom comes to reign in our hearts. It's presence in our lives gives us a new perspective, a new love, a new joy, and a new will. **This is Biblical Christianity.** In the end Jesus asks: <sup>51</sup> *“Have you understood all these things?”* They said to him, *“Yes.”* <sup>52</sup> *And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (51-52)*

If you have understood these things today, then you must act. You cannot act without understanding, but you truly do not understand unless you are willing to act. You are a disciple who has been **EDUCATED**, a master of a house who has been **ENTRUSTED**, a Biblical Christian who has been **EQUIPPED to bring out the treasures of the Kingdom for others.** Combat the lie that God only works through the big, fast, and strong with **Jesus' incarnation** and 30 years of blue collar carpentry. Combat the lie that the mission of

God ends with our own salvation with **Jesus' sacrificial death** for many. Combat the lie that immediate gratification is better than eternal reward with **Jesus Resurrection**. And combat that lie that it is better to receive than to give reminding yourselves of **Jesus' Mission**. **though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 2Corinthians 8.9.** **Be a Biblical Christian or don't claim to be a Christian at all.**