

stepping deeper into the kingdom

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Scripture Passage Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

Begin with a Personal Story. Several years ago I knew there was a conflict between myself and one of our leaders at a previous church. He would not talk to me, answer my phone calls or meet with me. I genuinely did not know why. I racked my mind and searched my heart.

I was deeply troubled. I was due to preach the next Sunday. What could I do but my heart was not at rest.

I will return to that incident in about 30 minutes.

Prayer

A reminder about what we said last week regarding the priority of the kingdom, bring us all up to speed.

Jesus and the Message of the Kingdom:

If you asked many people what the message of Jesus was, I think they would say, we should just love one another. Sort of like John Lennon's song, love is all you need. I agree that is a great need and Jesus certainly taught that. But at the heart/core of the message and ministry of Jesus is something more, something deeper. It is the kingdom of God. His message was: repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Right here!

Jesus says that unless we are born again we cannot see the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, the kingdom of God is within you.

He said to Pilate at his trial, my kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus said that we were to seek his kingdom above everything else. Again and again Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is like ... and then often he told a story drawn from daily life.

In the Book of Acts.

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:8)

(Acts 8:12) But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

This theme of the kingdom of God is used over 100 times in the New Testament. If we do not

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think in terms of the kingdom of God, you are out of step with the teaching of Jesus. We are missing a major component in your spiritual life.

My working definition:

The Kingdom is the reign and rule of God over every aspect of our lives prior to his complete reign over the cosmos.

It is both present and future. It starts here and now, and one day it will be fully completed. It is embryonic in us. Just as an embryo grows inside a woman's body, she feels the baby move and one day she will hold this new life in her arms. It is both here, but not fully yet!

It is both individual and communal. It speaks both to the individual and also to the community.

We are to see that the kingdom is both personal and cosmic. Personal salvation is at its centre, but it is not its circumference. The kingdom demands of us that we also think about the poor, about the world, about the environment. It is as concrete as the dust on Jesus feet, and as silent as the wind blowing in his hair. It is as costly as the crucifixion, and it is as heavenly as the risen Christ sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

The kingdom of God anticipates the reconciliation of everything that is broken, and everything being complete and being presented to God.

The kingdom of God is the future breaking into the present. It is the spiritual infecting the physical. It is the supernatural incarnating the human experience. It is the perfect invading the imperfect. It is the invisible silently enveloping the visible.

When we pray may your kingdom come, we appeal in prayer for the future reign of God to start now. To intervene now. To become involved in our lives and in our world now. We are making an appeal for the embryo of the kingdom to start. We are not going to wait until the final day rather we pray for the kingdom to start its work now. And in doing so we align ourselves with how God works.

The reason this is vitally important for us as a church. From VCBC Vision statement, **we envision a community of faith where all members are brought into connection with God and one another in a way that reflects**

the presence and power of the Kingdom of God.

kingdom living is about change starting now. Jesus describes this for us in a parable about how the kingdom works.

Stepping deeper into the kingdom from 3 parables.

DEEPENING THE SOIL IN OUR LIVES FOR THE KINGDOM

Matthew 13 We know this as the parable of the sower.

When Jesus told parables, he was taking ordinary everyday events and situations and using them to teach a spiritual lesson. Parables are not allegories. Do not try to find a spiritual truth in every word. They are pictures.

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

This parable is about 4 types of soil that represent different attitudes within us.

1. Hard soil
2. Shallow soil
3. Rocky soil
4. Good soil.

It is not a parable just about how people may respond to the initial truth of the gospel, but also of how Christians respond to the word and message of the Kingdom, which you remember is the reign and rule of God over our lives. The whole of the Christian life is one of continuing revelation and transformation, and the teaching of the parable continues to apply to us. It is a parable about us. It is about how we right now may be responding or not responding to the truth of the kingdom even as Christians.

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The closed mind denies kingdom potential.

19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

Jesus looked and saw how some good productive soil had become dry and hard-packed as people had taken one route across a field. Alongside this simple picture, Jesus throws down a truth for us to see.

There are people with minds so hard and closed that they cannot see God and what he wants to do in their lives. They cannot see their way to accept Christ.

But there are also Christians whose minds are so hard and fixed that God's transforming truth cannot penetrate. There are also churches like that. Remember what the 7 last words of the church are—**WE'VE NEVER DONE IT THIS WAY BEFORE.**

The kingdom cannot work in people and in churches which have a closed mind. So when we pray Father may your kingdom come, at the very least we need to be willing to give God an open mind.

The shallow heart lacks kingdom stamina.

20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

One of the marks of vital qualities of spiritual life today among Christians must be stamina, endurance. All kinds of things may get thrown in our face, but the people of the kingdom cannot be shallow people. The people of the kingdom must be tough people, people of depth and endurance.

James 1:3
2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

The Overcrowded life lacks kingdom impact.

22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the

deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

We are all aware of the reality that the spiritual life has to be lived out in the rough and tumble of daily life. We are not asking for less than that. But sometimes the seed of the kingdom, that transforming power, has to compete and fight for time. For attention. For our priorities. Most of us live like crazy jugglers. We have far too many things flying around, and sooner or later the whole mess can come crashing down around our ears.

Jesus paints a picture of our lives that is too close to reality. There is a competition within us and the kingdom has to fight for space. It has to compete with worry, with materialism, with time.

Kingdom thinking challenges us to repent of the way in which our personal lives may be saturated with the values of our culture. Our thinking is shaped by the fashions of our society instead of by the metamorphic truth of God. When our thinking is saturated by the business of our culture, we are not free from the kingdom.

So when our lives are fragmented in a thousand different ways and pulled in a myriad of directions, when our minds and bodies madly rush from one thing to the next, our lives lose kingdom impact. We may have lots of activity, but little kingdom productivity.

The Receptive life produces kingdom results.

Jesus says, it comes 30, 60 and 100 fold.

Was the good soil always good? Probably not. Some of it may have been hard packed earth that had to be broken up. Rocks and clay had to be lifted out and carried away, weeds and thorns had to be dug out inch by inch. Bad soil slowly became good soil. Any of you who have gardens know all too well that when you first started, the soil was hard and full of clay, but you worked at it, and slowly it becomes good soil.

So the kingdom of God is always willing to work in us, seeking to reclaim our minds that are hard and closed. Or too shallow. Or full of junk. Everyone of us is somewhere in this parable this morning. Some part of your life is in this story.

If you are not experiencing genuine kingdom growth and change ask yourself, do you fit into

one of these categories? Is your mind closed? Is your life too shallow and lacks depth? Is your life too busy and the kingdom cannot get a foothold? God fully intends your life today to be an embryo of what is to come.

The question each of us has to ask ourselves is this: What kind of ground does God have to work with? Because receptivity, openness comes before change. Where do you have to dig out old ideas, haul out rocks, dig up weeds, and reclaim a mind and therefore a life for the kingdom?

DEEPENING OUR KINGDOM PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Sometimes we look at all the mess in our society, our city and we want to move to a desert island. We want to protect our children from all that is happening. As Christian men and women and parents we believe in God's work, but sometimes it is so hard. Whole argument here about Christian schools I do not want to get into. A tough decision for each home to decide. Respect the decisions we each make.

Matthew 13:24-30. Alongside what God wants to do, another force is at work. We must always acknowledge that. Verse 28 an enemy has done this.

The essential point of the kingdom parable is this, we live in co-existence with fallen-ness and evil.

So in a city where crystal meth abuse is rising, where homelessness is so visible, where social problems are on the increase, women vanished in the Downtown Eastside, where several weeks ago a young man was stabbed to death on a bus for trying to stop a fight, where the divorce statistics tells us that 50% of the marriages fail (same stats for Christians), the abuse of children. The list is long, but when we believe in the reality of the kingdom, we are saying that we will not stick our heads in the sand.

We will not give up. Rather we will find creative ways to do kingdom work. To sow the seeds of the kingdom.

We acknowledge it will not be easy. We know that alongside every good thing we try to do someone else is also hard at work sowing evil. In every school, in every street, we will feel the tension of this co-existence, but we are committed to sow

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the seeds of the final victory of the kingdom. We will see more and more that every life that is won is a life that has been rescued from darkness and brought into the kingdom.

The fact that some things may succeed and some struggle is unimportant. The fact that we face setbacks is minor. The reality that we face opposition is irrelevant because kingdom activity is motivated and stimulated by a kingdom battle that has already been fought and won.

Matthew 13:31

One of the parables of the kingdom is about the little mustard seed. It teaches us that in kingdom work small things done in the work of the kingdom can make a big difference. We do not always need massive programs. Sometimes what is needed are mustard seed projects. Creative ideas that will grow.

A final kingdom picture, deeply aware that it leaves so much behind.

DEEPENING OUR KINGDOM RELATIONSHIPS

I want to take you on a visit to a church which is experiencing a huge internal struggle. The church is in the city of Rome. They are struggling with a kingdom principle. The issue of whether or not you can eat meat. It is not an issue of diet. Nothing about being vegetarian. This issue is dividing the Christians. It could easily split the church. Some Christians because of their Jewish background have some concerns and meat being kosher. There was also the question/issue that in this pagan city. A small portion of the meat you bought was offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god. You took the rest home and put it in the barbeque and enjoyed your steak.

Some Christians said this was not a big deal. Christ had set them free, so enjoy that T-bone steak. Others still felt the dark cloud of judgment hanging over them.

So the heart of the matter is not really about what we eat and drink. It is about kingdom relationships.

We find this struggle in Romans 14.

Paul's kingdom conclusion Romans 14:17.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

When a church starts to major on the minors as we say, and people start arguing, disagreeing, and even dividing over issues which are peripheral and not central, some people leave the church. Paul reminds them, the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking (or guitars, or drums, organs, worship styles, the color of hymn books or anything else that relates to personal preferences or anything else peripheral). The kingdom and the reign of God is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are the issues in community that really matter.

Remember what we have said. We envision a community of faith where all members are brought into connection with God and one another in a way that reflects the presence and power of the Kingdom of God.

Relationships are crucial for the health of the church and for the glory of God, and we must ask ourselves some honest questions.

You need to do your own homework. I will just ask the questions which come from Scripture.

1. Are we aware of anything that you hold something against someone?
2. Are we aware of anything that someone has something against you?

Matthew 5:23-24

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

3. If you are married, are you aware of any issue/ unresolved struggle in your marriage. 1st Peter 3:7.

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

To the best of your knowledge and awareness, how are our relationships here at VCBC, with others, and if you are married with your spouse?

Remember even if you think you are only 10% at fault, you own 100% of that 10%. Struggles in a church cause me a great deal of pain more than you know.

Remember my personal Story, I knew there was a conflict between myself and one of our leaders at a previous church. He would not talk to me or meet with me. I genuinely did not know why. I racked my mind and searched my heart.

So I went and met him in his office with my diary and my Bible, told him that I would not leave until we had a meeting arranged, and if we did not have a meeting scheduled, I would not preach on Sunday. He looked at me and said, you are serious. I said yes I was. We had a meeting, we could not resolve our struggle. I honestly to this day still do not know what the issue was. What I thought was genuine friendship between two Christian brothers, sadly ended. But I had to be willing to do everything I could to meet and reconcile.

If we are serious about the truth of the kingdom, we have to be serious about relationships because they come before worship.

Is there a hurting relationship or a broken relationship where you have to take the first step forward, and seek to initiate some healing? You need to go and meet someone with humility and meekness—for the sake of the kingdom.