

Questions About the Kingdom
Matthew 13:44
Hillyer Memorial Christian Church
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by David Mallory

I don't won't you getting up and walking out on me this morning, but unfortunately about all I have for you today is just a lot of questions. Questions that I don't think are unique to me. Questions that have been asked by people a whole lot smarter than I am. People like Aristotle and John Wesley and Billy Graham and Erma Bombeck. Questions about the Kingdom. But then that's why we're here, isn't it? We're here to learn more, to experience more, to draw closer to the Kingdom. I mean the Kingdom of Heaven is where the wolf lives with the lamb and the bear and the cow drink from the same watering hole. The Kingdom is where love is the air that we breathe, where peace is the order of the day and where the presence of God is central. The Kingdom of Heaven is why the puritans left the old country for a new world. Its why millions of faithful flock every year to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. It's why we get out of bed on Sunday morning and trudge through the rain to gather for worship. It is arguably the most central pursuit of our faith. The Kingdom of Heaven. Maybe that's why I have so many questions.

And it's appropriate, I think, that we would turn to Matthew's gospel looking for answers. Because Matthew makes more references to the Kingdom of Heaven than any of the other writers in the New Testament. Matthew reports that Jesus says that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. It's the smallest of all seeds but it sprouts into a bush large enough to hold all the birds of the air. Now in trying to find answers to this parable, I did some field research this week. I found a gardenia bush, an oleander bush, a rose bush, even a George Bush. But I didn't find a single mustard bush in all of Wake County. So to say that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard bush doesn't really give any answers. It just creates more questions. According to Matthew, Jesus says that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer sowing grain. He tosses the seed willy-nilly out of his backpack. Some fall on rocky soil. Some fall on the path. Some fall on the good soil. But that isn't much help either, is it? Especially in agriculture rich North Carolina, who among us is foolish enough to be that wasteful planting seeds? Just more questions. Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven

is like yeast that a woman kneads into the dough until its fully worked in. Now maybe there was a time when mixing yeast provided some answers about the kingdom. But now that the Pillsbury dough boy takes care of that for us, this metaphor kind of loses its punch, doesn't it? It just adds more questions. Matthew spends a lot of time addressing Kingdom questions. He spends a lot of time doing this because his target audience has a lot of Kingdom questions. His target audience is the Jews who have converted to the Christian faith but who are still living in tension with their Jewish friends who have not converted to the Christian faith. It's kind of like being in a church where there are Blue Devil fans and Wolfpack fans and Tar Heel fans and Pirate fans and Demon Deacon fans. Sure they're all one community. But you know how hard it is when those different passions collide- especially during basketball season. These folks have lots of questions. And Matthew wants to unite them under one common umbrella. So he works really hard trying to provide them some answers.

But bless his heart, the elevator is just not getting all the ways to the top, is it? Especially when we read this parable of a treasure hidden in the field, our vision of the Kingdom seems to grow even more foggy. According to Matthew, Jesus gathers his followers around and he tells them "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone finds and then hides. In his joy, he sells everything that he has and buys the field." Now does that make any sense to you? Am I the only one with a goofy look on his face morning? I mean this is the Kingdom of Heaven, isn't it? And isn't God's promise supposed to be available to all? So why is it hidden? And who hid it? Did the owner of the field hide it? Did the government hide it? Does the church hide it? Did God hide it? To me, Kingdom means, well Kingdom. And so why are we hiding it? I've just got a lot of questions.

And why is this fellow out digging in the field? I mean is he working for the owner and preparing the field for planting? Or is he a top secret agent plowing through the darkness on an important mission? Is he a vagrant randomly looking for things that others might have cast aside? A couple of weeks ago I was out in the yard tilling my garden in preparation for the spring planting. And every once in a while, I'd turn over a rock or a tree root or occasionally, I might clank on an old piece of chicken wire from gardens' past. But then I unearthed something very odd. As I flipped my shovel over there in the dirt was

one of those old GI Joe dolls. Now at first I started to toss it aside. But then I thought about the little boy who years ago who was probably playing army in this very same spot. Maybe his mom called him in for dinner. Maybe his tunnels caved in on his toy. Maybe he just got sidetracked and forgets where he put it. But I imagined that little boy heartbroken because he'd lost something of great value to him. And I remembered something my mother taught me years ago, "One person's trash is another person's treasure." Was this fellow specifically looking for the kingdom or just any old castaway treasure that he might unearth? You see, I've got questions.

And did this fellow really know what he had found? Sure it was a treasure. But did he realize how blessed he was to dig up a treasure of such eternal value? I know a fellow who got one of those mid life itches that some men seem to get. The kids were grown, the job was secure, his marriage had become routine. And he got restless. So he left it all behind to chase a twenty something woman who batted her eyes at him. But because of her youth and his foolishness, she easily out ran him. And he was left with nothing. I remember him telling me, "I didn't realize what a good thing I had, and now it's all gone." It does seem to be a complacency in our lives, doesn't it? That we don't realize how good we have it, until we don't have it anymore. I wonder if this fellow knew the unbelievable gift that he's just uncovered. Just more questions.

And once he unearthed the treasure, why did he hide it? I mean, doesn't Jesus call us to share the message of the Kingdom. Didn't he say something about you are the light of the world? And yet this guy wants to smother the light. But maybe we shouldn't be too harsh on him. Because how many of us conveniently hide our faith from time to time? We hide it when our older college friends invite us to go to the keg party. We hide it when closing that big business deal requires that we lean toward an unethical practice. We hide it when we shortchange our tithe so that we can afford our weekend at the beach. Now granted, it's difficult to always be wearing our faith. It exposes us to ridicule and criticism and judgment. But to shelter it completely. To bury it in the ground. I'm not sure that's what Jesus would want. And so I want to ask this fellow, why are you hiding the Kingdom?

And I guess the last question that I have is-why does this fellow sell all that he has so that he can go and buy the field? I mean sell his boat and his Armani shoes and his favorite

set of golf clubs? And then you've got to have the land surveyed and do a title search and fill out loan applications. Why go to all the trouble? He's already got the treasure. Put it in your pocket and go home. But then maybe that was the plan all along. Yes, he's found the treasure. He's found the love and the joy and the hope and the promise that God provides. This fellow has found the Kingdom. But like finding a really top notch restaurant, when you uncover something that good, you want to share it with others. And so maybe the fellow bought the field so that he could leave the treasure in its rightful place so that some other lost soul might come along and uncover the Kingdom of Heaven among the dirt and clay and compost of this earthly life. Because when we start looking around, that's really where the Kingdom is. In the rich soil of human life.

Let us pray- How blessed we are that your Kingdom is not some far off treasure to find. How blessed we are that your love and grace and promise dwell among us each and every day. Clear the clutter from our hearts that we might know of your living presence and that we might rest our lives in the rich soil of your Kingdom. Amen.