

Life Group Questions

November 27th, 2022

The Treasure of the Hidden Kingdom – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – [Matthew 13:31-35](#)

To the Life Group leader: thank you for your ministry leading this Life Group. **Take time to review the questions, selecting those you believe will be most helpful for your group study.** You will not have time to use all the questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you lead, as you select questions, and as you guide the discussion.

Reconnect

Come together with these preliminary questions:

- How has God gifted you to serve Him?
- How will you serve Him this fall at Willingdon Church?
- Where has God placed you in the city? What is your role there?

Open in Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text, the questions, and each other.

Message Recap Questions

Review the message using these questions

1. What stood out to you most in this week's message?
2. What was the most meaningful thing you heard in the message? Why?
3. What questions are still lingering?

Questions

1. Throughout the 'Hidden Treasures' series, how has your understanding of the kingdom of heaven grown?
2. How did Jesus state the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32)?
3. Why did Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed? (There are other seeds he could of used as an example).
4. Jesus never really explained this parable, but what applications would it have to the kingdom? In what way is the kingdom like a small seed that becomes so great?

5. What did Jesus describe as happening in the parable of the leaven – 13:33? In what way would this illustrate the kingdom? What characteristic does leaven have?
6. Why did Jesus continue to keep teaching the crowds through parables?
7. What prophecy did Jesus' use of parables fulfill (Matthew 13:34-35)? Where is it found?
8. How have the comparisons to the kingdom of heaven encouraged you? (If the kingdom still seems small, how would you encourage others about the kingdom to come?)

Choose Your Next Step

What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?

Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is an effective way to point people back to our Loving Father as they seek to apply their new learnings throughout the week. Ask group members to share what they sense God calling them to. Pray for each other and commit to continue to do so during the week as people step out in obedience to God's leading.

Commentary

Jesus continues with his parables. Matthew has two of them that bring out the thought of growth before he goes on to the interpretation of the parable of the weeds. These parables are important. Over against the mighty numbers of the worshipers of heathen gods and even of the Jews who acknowledged the true God, those who proclaimed the kingdom were a tiny minority. Jesus teaches them not to be hypnotized by size. These tiny beginnings would grow into something greater by far than any of the religions found in the disciples' contemporary world.

1. Throughout the 'Hidden Treasures' series, how has your understanding of the kingdom of heaven grown?
2. How did Jesus state the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32)?
3. Why did Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed? (There are other seeds he could of used as an example).

That mustard is *the smallest of all the seeds* does not mean that nowhere is there any smaller seed. It is a way of saying that among all the seeds mustard is a very little seed indeed. It was popularly held to be the smallest of the seeds (evidence that the size of the mustard seed "passed into a common proverb,"; indeed, Jesus himself used it that way when he spoke of faith like a grain of mustard seed, Matthew 17:20). We should understand Jesus as appealing to this well-known view rather than to his having surveyed all the seeds and come up with the conclusion that there is none smaller than this (in fact, some seeds are smaller). The point of the parable is that this very little seed grows into a sizeable plant, one larger than all the plants of the garden, and indeed in its mature state becomes *a tree* (it can grow to a height of 8 to 12 feet). Jesus passes over the various stages of its growth; for this parable they are irrelevant. He is concerned with the contrast between the tiny seed and the mature majestic plant. *So that* introduces the thought of result; the consequence of the great growth of the plant from the tiny seed is that birds come and roost in its branches (Daniel 4:12, 20–21; Ezekiel 31:6). The little detail about the birds roosting fills out the picture of the seed growing into a tree; in the end the mustard plant fulfils all the functions of a tree. This points up the strong contrast between the tiny seed and the tree that is the end result of the seed. The kingdom may be considered insignificant in its beginnings and was doubtless despised by many in Jesus' day because of this. But in the end its growth would be extensive; it would be a very great kingdom indeed. There is also the thought of the continuity between the seed and the grown plant; it is

from the mustard seed and that seed only that the mustard plant grew. So it is from Jesus and his little band that the mighty kingdom of heaven would emerge. And if we can reason from the connection with all the nations in the Ezekiel passage, there will be representatives of all peoples in the kingdom.

4. Jesus never really explained this parable, but what applications would it have to the kingdom? In what way is the kingdom like a small seed that becomes so great?
5. What did Jesus describe as happening in the parable of the leaven – 13:33? In what way would this illustrate the kingdom? What characteristic does leaven have?

Jesus moves to a twin parable conveying much the same teaching (this one is not in Mark, but it is found in almost identical words in Luke). He repeats the formula of verses 24 and 31 as well as the reference to *the kingdom of heaven*. This time he gives us a picture of a woman at work preparing food. Bread was normally baked in homes, not obtained from bakers' shops, and Jesus pictures a woman occupied in this task. Most translations refer to her as using "yeast," but this is not strictly accurate. *Leaven* was a piece of last week's dough, which certainly made this week's dough rise, but was not strictly "yeast." Some exegetes hold that leaven must be taken as a symbol for evil on the grounds that this is the way it is to be understood in the Old Testament. But this is not invariably the case, for leaven was sometimes specified for use in sacrificial offerings (Leviticus 7:13; 23:17–18). That in some contexts it may be used as a symbol for evil forces does not mean that in others it cannot stand for what is good. We should take this parable as making much the same point as the previous one; they reinforce one another. Jesus speaks of the woman as putting her piece of leaven *into three measures of flour* (the quantity used by Sarah, Genesis 18:6; Gideon, Judges 6:19; and Hannah, 1 Samuel 1:24) until the whole was leavened. The leaven was but a small amount, but in time it changed the large quantity of flour. Like the previous parable this one brings out the contrast and the continuity between the small beginnings of the kingdom and its great consummation. The little group of disciples might be despised as preaching a kingdom too insignificant to be noticed, but as surely as a tiny piece of leaven had its effect on a large mass of dough, so surely would the kingdom have its effect throughout the world. The parable also makes the point that the power that effects the change comes from outside the dough; the mass of dough does not change itself.

6. Why did Jesus continue to keep teaching the crowds through parables?

All these things signifies the totality of the preceding section of teaching about the kingdom with its series of parables. The aorist tense in the first *spoke* views that teaching as a whole, but it should not be pressed to mean that it was all given on one occasion (though, of course, it is

not inconsistent with that view). The second *spoke* is in the imperfect tense and has the force “he used to speak”; it points to the habitual mode of teaching. Matthew is not saying that Jesus never taught in any other way than by using parables, but he certainly maintains that this was his common practice, and perhaps also that this was the way he taught about the kingdom. The crowds could so easily understand plain teaching on the kingdom in a political sense, but parables made this much more difficult.

7. What prophecy did Jesus’ use of parables fulfill (Matthew 13:34-35)? Where is it found?

The purpose is to show that Jesus’ use of parables was in order to fulfil prophecy, this particular prophecy being contained in Psalm 78:2 (for Matthew the whole Old Testament comes from God and is thus prophetic; for him there is no problem in seeing prophecy contained in a Psalm, and in any case Asaph is expressly said to have prophesied, 1 Chronicles 25:2, and to have been a seer, 2 Chronicles 29:30). In this context *parables* indicates wise sayings of a pictorial kind in general and is not to be limited to the stories with which we are familiar from Jesus’ teaching. From his affirmation of his intention to speak in this way the Psalmist goes on to affirm that what he will say has been *secret from the foundation of the world*. That is to say, he intends to utter no commonplace, but things that God has revealed. That they have never been known from the beginning of the world indicates that they are not attainable by human search. Asaph picks out significant points in the history of Israel and shows that the divine purpose has been worked out despite the rebelliousness of the people. Just as God’s salvation was made clear in Asaph’s interpretation of history, Matthew is saying, so is God’s salvation brought out in the parables of Jesus.

8. How have the comparisons to the kingdom of heaven encouraged you? (If the kingdom still seems small, how would you encourage others about the kingdom to come?)