

Good morning, everyone. It is wonderful to see you here today

The New Year has well and truly started.

And as we enter the new year we will be starting a new series on the Kingdom of God.

As I begin I will pray...

*prayer*

So what questions came to mind when I mentioned the Kingdom of God?

What sort of images did you have, what did you think about?

If you are like me, then there would have been some questions that would have passed through your mind. Question like

- what exactly is the kingdom of God?

- what does it look like?

- what does it feel like?

Kingdoms seem remote so how is it relevant for me

- there might even have been some people who thought "I hope this won't be as boring as it sounds".

and I am sure some of you would have thought why look at something like that?

How is it relevant for me, in my life, in the struggles that I am going through.

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Kingdoms are not something that we talk about much these days. There are not many kingdoms around us - there is Tonga, Monaco and a few others but we don't really have kingdoms - it is not part of the way we see the world.

And the concept of what the kingdom of God means has been messed up over the centuries. When there was a movie about the kingdom of heaven a few years ago,

it was set in Jerusalem during the time of the crusades and that was a really really dark time for Christianity. What happened there was about as far removed as possible from what the bible talks about.

So why would we even look at something like the kingdom of God.

Well right at the start of his ministry on earth, Jesus described what he was doing as proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. There it is in Luke chapter 4. Jesus said he was sent for the purpose of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

(Luke 4:42-44

At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, “**I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God** to the other cities also; for **I was sent for this purpose.**” So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea)

So it is good news for us, and it is a really big idea. The kingdom of God is much bigger than an individual relationship that we can have with God. That is part of it, but it is not all of it. If it was just about an individual relationship then Jesus would have said something like, I must proclaim the good news about how you can have a relationship with God. But that is not what Jesus said.

He said that he must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

He said that it was what he was sent for. That was his purpose.

When we think of Jesus, his coming, his teaching, his miracles, his compassion, his dying, his rising from the dead. All of it is rolled up together in the idea of the kingdom of God. Now that makes it a really, really big idea and well worth spending some time exploring.

Now over the next few weeks as we look at the kingdom of God we will be using passages from both the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Luke.

And as we start doing that, there is something that I want to clear up before it becomes confusing.

Since sometimes Matthew uses different words to Luke to describe the kingdom. I will show you a couple of examples.

Luke 6:20 says

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”  
while Matthew 5:3 says

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

and in Luke 8: 10 Jesus says

“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables”

while in Matthew 13:11 Jesus says

“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”

Now, don't get worked up trying to find out the exact words Jesus actually spoke, about whether it is what is in Matthew or what is in Luke.

Jesus would have spoken in Aramaic while Luke and Matthew were both written in Greek. So neither of them is a word for word dictation of what Jesus said.

Matthew and Luke are saying the same thing, with just slight differences.

And those sort of differences are normal and expected. The Bible is the inspired word of God, and people wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Differences happen. That is what happens in life. If both Matthew and Luke were the same word for word, then we would think that one of them had copied from the other. But the slight differences are a mark of being authentic.

And we also need to remember that Matthew and Luke were written to different audiences. Mathew, mostly to people who had a Jewish background and Luke to people who were mostly from a non Jewish background.

And that is why there is one key difference, a difference in the way that the kingdom is described.

In Luke it is the kingdom of God and in Matthew it is the kingdom of heaven.

So why the difference?

Well Jews had a real thing about writing down the word God. It just got them too close to taking God's name in vain, and there would also be a chance that the written down name might be treated with disrespect. Even today you will often see God written down by Jewish people as G\_d.

So the kingdom of God is the same as kingdom of heaven. They are two descriptions for the same thing and we don't need to be concerned about the words being different. We can mix and mingle passages from Luke and from Matthew about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven and be confident that we are talking about the same thing.

So what is the kingdom of God, what does that phrase mean, what is the kingdom of God like?

Well that is something that we will need a few weeks to explore. and all of us, myself included will find out more as time goes on and we look at aspects of the kingdom of God.

This morning we will be looking at some sayings that Jesus had about the kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:44-46.

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”<sup>1</sup>*

So, a treasure, or a pearl is found that is extremely valuable. It is incredibly precious. More precious than we can imagine.

What do I mean, well take the image of that pearl of great value.

This pearl was found by a 6 year old, Portia Himsel on Banks Peninsula on Boxing Day. It has an estimated value of a few thousand dollars. That is a lot of money, it was an incredible find, but a few thousand dollars is an amount we can imagine. Pearls can be worth much more than that. Around the time of Jesus, pearls were worth fortunes.

A Roman general Vitellius, was said to have financed an entire military campaign through the sale of one of his mothers pearl earrings. Now that is not like financing the war in Iraq, that cost around a trillion dollars. But any war is expensive. Pearls of great value at the time of Jesus were worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Eye watering amounts, more money than I will ever see or really imagine.

These objects the hidden treasure, the pearl of great value are extremely precious.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 13:44–46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Now the story says some people find them, there is someone who finds the treasure in the field, there is a merchant who finds the pearl of great value. They come across them, and they realise how precious they are.

But there is also a sense that not everyone knows that they are valuable, not everyone finds them. Just like there would have been many people who walked past that pearl that was found on Banks peninsula, not realising it was there. Just like there are hidden treasures that are occasionally found after being buried underground for centuries.

Now for the person who finds the treasure, well they then need to go and sell everything that they have in order to purchase the field, or purchase the pearl. It costs them everything that they have.

But they have enough to purchase them.

That is the pattern in the two parables. It is there in both of them.

There is something that is extremely precious.

A person finds it, and realises its value.

They would not be able to buy it if they paid full market price. So there is a little twist in the story that means that they can get it for less than it is really worth.

Then they go and sell everything that they have and they purchase the thing that is valuable.

And the parable says, that is what the kingdom of God is like, that is what the kingdom of heaven is like.

So how is that like the Kingdom of God. Why would Jesus say that?

Well there are some similarities that we can see.

The kingdom of God is the greatest of treasures, it is something that's value is immeasurable.

And it is hidden away, not everyone knows how valuable it is, or even that it is there at all.

There are some who find the kingdom of God, they might be searching for it, they might stumble on it. But they find it.

And when they do, when they realise how valuable it is, they give up what they thought was valuable to gain the kingdom of God.

That is what the kingdom of God is about.

There are also some ideas about the kingdom of God that are cleared up a little. It can't be a political kingdom here and now on earth - that just does not fit at all with the parable.

But a parable by its very nature has in it something that is shocking. That shows different thinking and values than what you would expect. And for this parable I think it has to do with something that I skipped over a few minutes ago, just touching on it briefly. And it is the value of the kingdom of God and the need to give up what we might think is valuable.

Now as I have been musing about this parable, I think that the giving up, the cost is describing giving up things like the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of fame and the pursuit of happiness. Those things that society is built around, but they are also mirages they are things that do not deliver deep down inside our lives.

And I think that this parable also points to the extreme value of the kingdom of God. That it is worth far more than we might expect.

Have you ever watched the antiques road show? People take their antique treasures to be valued.

Sometimes they have a fair idea of the worth of an object.

But at other times the things that they think are going to be worth a fortune are really only worth a few dollars.

And then, occasionally something like this happens.

In case you are wondering the vase actually sold later for 37,000 pounds.

It did not look valuable, to my eye and to the eye of the person who bought it - well the plant was more valuable than the pot

But to the appraiser, the expert who knew what to look for - well it was worth a huge amount of money.

And it is my hope that as we look at the kingdom of God over the next few weeks, that our eyes would be opened. That we would realise anew the extreme value and richness of the kingdom of God. And that we would become excited at the priceless treasure that we have.

Since when we do, the cost of giving things up to gain it, just becomes insignificant. It would be as if that lady had been upset because she needed to pay a pound for a pot and a plant.

If we know, if we realise anew the extreme value and richness of the kingdom of God then we will become excited at the priceless treasure that we have.

Let us pray.