The Mystery of the Kingdom - Matt.13 pt1

1. Introduction

a. We saw last time that the Kingdom is both now and not yet. The Kingdom of God is all about a Messianic Kingdom that was promised throughout the Old Testament. It was manifested in Jesus at His first coming and brought all who would place themselves under His Lordship into the Kingdom. It will be fully established when He comes again and rules over all nations.

b. In and through Jesus, the king, came into the world to establish his saving rule.

   i First, in the hearts of his people and in their relationships by triumphing over sin, Satan, and death.

   ii Then by the exercise of his reign, gathering a people for himself that live as citizens of a new allegiance of the kingdom, not of this world.

   iii Then Christ comes a second time and completes the reign by establishing his kingdom rule over every nation upon earth.

c. So when we pray Your Kingdom come what do we mean?

   i That He would establish His Kingdom in our hearts first to enable us to triumph over sin and the schemes of the enemy. This is a decision which most of us have made to repent and be saved – as such we allow His Kingdom rule into our lives to overcome the enemy and to bring us into eternal life thus overcoming death itself.

   ii A willingness to submit to Him as our King. To place ourselves under His rule and live according to His kingdom rule and culture. An affirmation that we trust His leadership and that we pledge our allegiance to Him to live as citizens of His kingdom not of this world.

   iii A cry that He would come soon to establish His Kingdom rule on this earth and rule over every nation.

d. The Kingdom is often misunderstood and this was also true when Jesus came to earth to inaugurate His Kingdom. The Jewish people were awaiting their promised King expectant of a king like David who would lead them into victory against their enemies. When John and Jesus announced the Kingdom was at hand there was excitement that finally Messiah was here.

e. However, as Jesus began to fulfil the promise it wasn't what they were expecting and many, especially the religious leaders, began to publicly declare their animosity toward Jesus. Because of their rejection of Him, Jesus began to teach in parables that concealed new truths about the kingdom from those whose hearts were hardened against God.

2. The Daniel 2 backdrop

a. As we have seen previously in Daniel 2 King Nebuchadnezzar had a prophetic dream about a statue that represented four Gentile kingdoms that would arise—Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome

Dan. 2:31-44 *31 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image [Gentile kingdoms] ...34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image... 35 Then [they] …were crushed…so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth… 44 the God of*

heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and…it shall break in pieces…all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

b. The "stone cut without hands" spoke of the kingdom of God being manifested on earth. The stone struck and completely destroyed the statue (the oppressive Gentile kingdoms), and then the little stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

c. Daniel 2:34-35 pictured a single cataclysmic event which ushered in God's kingdom with power—as a stone that struck and shattered the oppressive governments. Thus, Israel was looking for Messiah who would totally remove all the opposing evil kingdoms on the earth.

d. John the Baptist spoke on this Daniel 2 theme of the kingdom of God coming to earth (Mt. 3:2-12). The Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom described in Daniel 2, so people assumed that John was proclaiming the time that God would overthrow Rome and establish His kingdom through Israel as He poured out His Spirit and judged the wicked like chaff burned by fire.

Mt. 3:1-12 *In those days John the Baptist came preaching…[2] saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"…[11] He who is coming after me…will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. [12] His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

3. The mystery of the Kingdom

a. However, the destruction of Rome, the universal baptism of the Spirit, and the growth of the kingdom to fill the earth did not occur during Jesus' first coming as Daniel and John the Baptist implied.

Luke 17:20-21 *Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, [21] nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."*

b. Jesus corrects a misunderstanding of the kingdom—namely, that it would come with such observable signs that it would be unmistakable: Rome would be overturned, Israel would be vindicated, and an earthly kingdom would be established. Jesus explains that it is not coming in a way that can be observed like that and that there is a mystery about the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom had come because He was amongst them and He was not setting up an earthly kingdom (yet!)

c. Another clear statement about the presence of the kingdom is Matthew 12:28 (cf. Luke 11:20). The Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (v. 24). But Jesus has a very different interpretation of what's happening.

Matt.12:28 *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

d. When Jesus does battle with Satan by the Spirit of God, and begins to plunder the strong man's house (v. 29), freeing people from his bondage, the powers of the kingdom are at work and the kingdom is already present.

e. The kingdom has come according to Matthew 12:28 and Luke 17:21; and the coming of the kingdom is still future according to Luke 19:11–12 and many other texts. This is puzzling and it threw the Pharisees into confusion. It took John the Baptist off guard (Matthew 11:2–6). It caused one crowd to want to throw Jesus off a cliff (Luke 4:29) and another want to make him king (John 6:15). It

baffled Pilate when Jesus was on trial (John 18:36–37). It left the apostles confused and hopeless between Good Friday and Easter (Luke 24:21).

f. Behind this confusion was what Jesus called the "mystery of the kingdom." What is mysterious about the kingdom is that it has come partly but not fully.

g. There are hints about this in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah 53—the suffering servant). But by and large the Old Testament does not clearly separate the two comings of Christ. It sees one great day of the Lord coming when God would deal finally with sin and defeat his enemies and gather his people into a kingdom of peace and righteousness and joy and make the earth and the heavens new and glorious with the Messiah ruling forever and ever.

h. It didn't make clear that this day of the Lord—the coming of the kingdom—would happen in two stages: first, with Jesus coming as a suffering servant to atone for sin, and second, with Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

i. The mystery, as George Ladd puts it, is "fulfilment without consummation." Fulfilment of the kingdom is here; but consummation of the kingdom is not. Many kingdom blessings can be experienced today; many are reserved for the consummation and the coming of Jesus.

j. In Matthew 13 the parables of the kingdom unfold the mystery of the kingdom for us.

4. Jesus' purpose for speaking in parables (Matt. 13:10-17)

a. Matthew 13 contains seven parables about the kingdom—the first four were spoken to the crowds and the last three only to the disciples. Jesus spoke in parables both to **reveal** and **conceal** truth. That is, to make truth easier to understand for those who are receptive to Him and to hide truth from those who harden their hearts against Him.

Matt.13:10-17 *10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

b. Jesus explained that He taught with parables both to reveal *and* to conceal truth. By hiding truth from those who hardened their hearts against Him, Jesus showed them grace in saving them from the added guilt of rejecting more truth and emboldening them to act against Him.

c. These parables revealed the mysteries of how the kingdom is manifested in this age. This "mystery" speaks of truths not revealed in the Old Testament and only revealed in the New Testament. Paul defined a mystery as that "which has been hidden but now is revealed" to God's people (Col. 1:26). It is not a truth difficult to understand, but a truth that can be understood only by divine revelation in the New Testament.

Col. 1:26 *…the mystery which has been hidden from ages…but now has been revealed to His saints."*

d. Many who "saw and heard physically" did not "see and hear spiritually." The understanding that a person "has" or "does not have" is related to their receptivity. Jesus emphasized that truth is not neutral; it hardens or softens those who are exposed to it.

e. Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom had come, yet it came in an unexpected and hidden form that did not overwhelm the present order of life. It grows only as people respond in faith and obedience. Israel expected a cataclysmic event like that which will happen when Jesus returns. However, Jesus' message was that, though small, the kingdom promised in Daniel 2 is here in its early stage.

f. Jesus conveyed four aspects of "the mystery," or four new truths, in the seven parables (Mt. 13). He taught that

   i *in this age* obedience to the kingdom will be voluntary and not enforced;

   ii second, that the kingdom will start very small, yet it will eventually fill the whole earth;

   iii third, its great value will be hidden to many;

   iv and finally, that God will separate the wicked from the righteous by His judgments at the end of the age.

   The mystery is that the kingdom would be revealed in stages.

g. The earthly reign of Messiah on the throne of David was clearly revealed by the Old Testament prophets, so it was not a mystery. But in Matthew 13, Jesus introduced the spiritual reign of the kingdom which would increase progressively in the period between His first and second coming. His judgments would be manifested first against Satan's kingdom, not Rome or human institutions.

h. Jesus first emphasized spiritual victory empowering His people to enjoy relationship with Him and walk in love, humility, and purity. At the end of the age God will release the greatest revival in the Church in the midst of the greatest, escalating darkness.

Isa. 60:2 *Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.*

5. Summary of the seven parables of the Kingdom

a. Jesus taught the parables of the kingdom (Mt. 13:1-3; Mk. 4:1-2; Lk. 8:4) when a great crowd had gathered by the Sea of Galilee which forced Him to speak from a boat.

Mt. 13:1-3 *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] And he told them many things in parables*

b. Parables one (the four soils) and two (the wheat and the tares) teach that kingdom obedience is not forced. The parable of the sower speaks of very different responses to the message of the kingdom.

c. Parables three (mustard seed) and four (leaven) teach that the kingdom starts small and grows large. The leavening process highlights the internal and invisible dynamic of its global growth.

d. Parables five (treasure) and six (pearl) teach that the kingdom's value is not seen by most people.

e. Parable seven (dragnet) teaches that the removal of the wicked will occur at the end of the age. The parable of the tares (parable two) also teaches this.

f. We need to make sure that our description of the kingdom is compatible with the description Jesus gave. To understand what he had to say about the kingdom now. He did not describe peace and prosperity, health and wealth, law and order. He didn't get into details of governmental organization or societal change?

g. As we look at these parables we need to be clear about what is now and what is not yet and live in the fullness of the now and in the hope of the not yet. The kingdom now is limited in its scope and effects but it really has arrived.

h. The King has come and He has dealt with sin once for all in the sacrifice of himself and He sits at the Father's right hand and reigns now until all his enemies are under his feet. His righteousness is now already ours by faith and His Spirit is now already dwelling in us. The King's holiness is now already being produced in us and the King's joy and peace have now already been given to us. The King's victory over Satan is now already ours as we use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The King's power to witness is now already available to us. And the King's gifts—the gifts of his Spirit—are now already available for ministry.

i. Next time we'll look at the parables to understand what Jesus taught about the Kingdom. To see and hear that we might be those who seek His Kingdom first.

Matt.13:16 *[16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. [17] For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

Matt 6:31-33 *[31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*