

The Mystery of the Kingdom

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The Kingdom of God Series

Matthew 13:1-23

It's good to be back. It seems that in the past two months I have been gone much more than I've been here what with hospital visits, conferencing, vacations and 25th Wedding Anniversaries. It appears that I am going to be around pretty much for the next six months, so that is nice for me and I hope that it will be good for you as well. I heard wonderful things about the teachings when I was away – one by Andy Saperstein last weekend and another by Bill Christensen the week before.

I started a series about a month ago on the Kingdom of God. At that time I told you that the central message of Jesus was the Kingdom. You can't understand Jesus' coming into the world without understanding the Kingdom. God coming to defeat the enemies of God's people. God coming to bring about a reign of prosperity, blessing, peace and healing. God coming to create for himself a people who live a distinctive lifestyle and who are wholly devoted to him.

Today I would like to tackle one aspect of the Kingdom – something that is often called “The Mystery of the Kingdom.” The word “mystery” is a precious word. It is an important word for Christians because many of the key truths of our Christian faith are wrapped up in mystery – things beyond human comprehension.

We worship a God who is a Trinity. What an inexhaustible mystery. How can God be three persons eternally distinct, eternally equal in power and glory? Three centers of consciousness and yet, we worship not three Gods, but one. The church in history came up for a word for the God we worship. It is the word Trinity. For nearly 2000 years we have called God Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But while we have a word for God, we don't have an exhaustive explanation. Ultimately, the being of God, for the true Christian, is a mystery. A truth beyond our rational grasp. Something that is larger than what our little minds can comprehend or contain. Most of the great Christians truths are mysteries. How can one person be fully God and fully man? How can it be that Jesus was not just God filling a body that looked like a man, but wasn't fully human? Or that Jesus was not simply a very spiritual man, a man who was touched by the Holy Spirit? But that Jesus of Nazareth was fully God and fully man, one person. The church has historically come up with a word for the person of Christ. The word was “Incarnation.”

But while we have a word for Jesus, we don't have an exhaustive explanation. Ultimately, the person of Christ is, for the Christian, a mystery. A truth beyond our rational grasp. Something that is bigger than what our little minds can contain.

Now some people can't live with mysteries. They refuse to believe anything they can't fully explain. The absence of mystery is actually a central feature in most non-Christian cults. You take the Jehovah Witnesses – one of the central features of Jehovah Witnesses' belief is that they squeezed out all of the mystery. You read their writings and it is all about, "How can anyone believe in three in one? It doesn't make any sense. How can someone be fully God and fully man, yet one person? It doesn't make any sense." Almost all of heresies that have risen throughout the history of the church where people have departed from the biblical faith have started with folks who said, "I just can't deal with things that are beyond my mind. I have to put my religion in a nice little box."

God becomes smaller than us as people. We can figure God out. We have explanations for everything. The post-enlightenment world, the modern world, for the last 200 years has been totally devoted to the enterprise of squeezing mystery out of all of life. There has been this incredible arrogance on the part of men and women, which said that so long as we do more scientific investigation, we will answer all of life's questions.

There is no mystery. If you read these silly articles which suggest that love between a man and a woman is nothing more than a genetic predisposition mapped into our DNA by evolutionary processes designed to preserve the propagation of the species; you call it love, but I've discovered that love is nothing other than microbiology. No mystery of romance. No magic. No spark. No wonder. No worship. Just chemicals and DNA.

The modern world believes that it can squeeze all mystery out of life. You see these ridiculous articles constantly in Time Magazine, which is the biggest purveyor of this kind of nonsense. And Psychology Today is constantly writing about all human behaviors are simply genetic. There is no mystery in jealousy or altruism or why someone ends up being a homosexual or why kids rebel or why people commit adultery or why we seek revenge. It is all just programmed into certain sequences of your DNA. In time we will be able to exhaustively explain all human behavior.

That's the modern mindset. We are reaching now the end of the modern age. Postmoderns are much more open to the notion that there are things beyond our intellectual grasp. Postmoderns, people who have grown up in the last 20-30 years, have much more flexible minds. They say, "You know, maybe life is more complicated than just genetics or your simple, easy, 5-step explanations for how to do marriage; or how to raise kids. Maybe your fill-in-the-blank world is actually

unrelated to the real world because the real world is full of paradoxes. Full of truths that we can't quite reconcile in our minds – like Trinity and Incarnation.

Let me pause here and ask you a question. What kind of person are you? Are you a black and white person? Do you think you can fit everything into a nice little box and that every thing can be explained? That you won't believe something that you can't fully comprehend?

What kind of a person are you? Are you the kind of person who has a flexible mind? Or an inflexible mind? A person who enjoys mystery or a person who has to fit everything into certain boxes. Are you someone who says it is okay if the feminists, the liberals, or the gays don't fit my preconceived little box or they are enemies? Or does everything have to be reduced into nice, neat categories?

"I know where to put that person who is of a different race."

"I know where to put that person who has a different religion."

Some people are just not comfortable with complexity. With partial explanations. With messiness in their thinking or even messiness in their theology. There are lots of churches where everything is laid out. You come here and we will lay it out for you with charts and graphs. We will roll out the chart of the end-times and we will tell you exactly to the moment when the Lord is going to return and the sequence of events following and when the anti-Christ is going to be revealed and when the Temple is going to be rebuilt. We will lay it all out for you. All you need to do is take notes and memorize it.

And then we come upon this little word that should be precious to Christians. It is called "mystery." There is a mystery that causes us to kneel before God in humility saying, "God, you are so much bigger than me. You deserve worship." The value of mystery is that it employs another part of your being, not just your brain. It employs your heart.

In the passage we are going to be looking at today, Jesus speaks of the mystery of the Kingdom of God. There is a mystery in Kingdom that can't be fully exhausted by our explanations. Jesus came announcing the Kingdom, and that in his person the Kingdom of God had come into the world.

In the first talk that I gave, I said the Kingdom of God means that God comes to defeat his enemies as he defeated the Egyptians in Moses' day. The Kingdom of God means that God comes to bring blessing and healing and wholeness and prosperity as he did in Solomon's day and as he will do as we read in Revelation 21. The Kingdom of God means that God is coming to create a people who live a distinctive lifestyle, wholly for him.

Well, here is the mystery of the Kingdom. If God has come in Jesus Christ, why aren't all of the enemies of God's people defeated? Why are Christians still

martyred around the world? Why are there places around the world where Christians are imprisoned for teaching their kids the Bible? Why, in the Sudan, are Christians actually crucified on this very day?

For the disciples, they asked this question: Jesus, if the kingdom has come, why are the Romans still ruling us? Why do we still live with Roman legions still marching us out of our houses? And why are Roman troops still surrounding our beloved Temple?

Or more personally: Jesus, if the Kingdom of God has come, why do some children this summer get to go to Disney World and others are getting cancer treatment down at Children's Hospital?

Jesus, if the Kingdom has come, why do some Americans get to push half their dinner down the garbage disposal while others in Africa get to watch their children die of malnutrition?

If the Kingdom has come and God is bringing a reign of blessing and prosperity and healing, then why don't we see more healing? And where are the people who are living a distinctive lifestyle wholly devoted to Jesus? If the Kingdom has come, why are churches so fractured?

In other words, Jesus, if you are who you say you are, the Bearer of the Kingdom of God, the Savior of the world, the Messiah – and if the promises of the Old Testament are being fulfilled in you, then why aren't things better than they are?

Come on – let's shoot straight with each other and stop playing religion for just a moment. Haven't you ever shaken your head and asked yourself the question: If God really came in Jesus and some new things were instituted through Jesus, then why is everything so screwed up – in your life; in your family; at your workplace? Why is there still so much corruption in government and business? So many people hurting each other? So much pain? As one woman put it right to me, she said, "If there really is a God, then why did my 35-year old husband have to die of cancer?" Jesus, if you brought the Kingdom, then why does cancer still exist, and AIDS and everything else?

Well, what we are going to discover today is part of the mystery of the Kingdom. We are not going to exhaust the mystery. But what Jesus is going to reveal to us is part of the mystery of the Kingdom. We are not going to exhaust the mystery. We are not going to explain it all away. What Jesus is going to say to us today as part of the mystery of the Kingdom is this amazing truth that the Kingdom comes to this world not around people, not without people, not in spite of people, but through people and through people's responses. Part of the mystery of the Kingdom is that people can receive the Kingdom, and welcome the Kingdom or reject the Kingdom, and resist the Kingdom.

There is a mystery that God's coming into the world – blessing and defeat of enemies and the formation of a people distinct for God – is extended or restricted based on your response and my response to Jesus. I have called today's talk "The Mystery of the Kingdom." Let's pray.

We read in Matthew 13, "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got in a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables."

We find Jesus sitting by a lake teaching. Sitting was the normal posture of a Jewish rabbi in Jesus' day. That is how Jewish rabbis would teach. They would sit. And we often find Jesus acting like a teacher, a rabbi, giving us his thoughts and perspectives on life.

I just want to pause and make the point that in many evangelical churches there is such a strong desire to say that Jesus is more than a teacher, as conservative churches react to liberal churches. There is such a strong desire to say that Jesus is more than a teacher. That he is Lord and Savior. Many evangelical churches, many conservative churches make him less than our teacher. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Savior. But for perspectives on life, for wisdom, for how to have a good marriage, for financial counsel, for just how to do life successfully and well, we evangelicals run to the Christian self-help section of our bookstores, trade tapes, or run off to seminars. How about allowing Jesus to actually be your teacher?

Dallas Willard, in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, which I encourage you to pick up, if you like to read, makes a very simple point. He says, "Jesus is very smart." And he deserves to be listened to. His thoughts about life and how life works are really smart.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe Jesus is smart? Do you believe he is smarter than you?

Now the only way you can really answer that question truthfully is if in the practical areas of your life you believe that Jesus knows better what will make you happy than you do. That he knows better what will work in your family and in your marriage than you do. That he knows better what will bring you peace and how you will lose peace. He knows better how you can find joy in life and how you can lose it. He knows better what crushes you, what hurts you, what destroys you and what will free you better than you do. Do you believe that? Is Jesus your teacher? Is he your Rabbi?

Well, it says that Jesus taught in parables. This was a very common way for Jewish rabbis to teach. Greek teachers did generally teach in parables. Roman teachers didn't. But Jewish teachers did. One way you can understand what a

parable is, is to actually look at the literal meaning of the word. I think it does provide in this case some insight. The word “parable” comes from the Greek word “parabole.” It literally means to lay something along side of something else. What happens in a parable is that a spiritual truth that would be very hard to grasp is laid alongside of an earthly truth that helps to explain it.

We are dealing with the mystery of the Kingdom. How, Jesus, can you claim that the Kingdom has come when we sure don’t see the fullness of the defeat of our enemies? These sure aren’t the days of Revelation 21 or even the days of Solomon. Jesus, can you explain to us how the Kingdom has come into the world and, yet, things are still so goofed up?

And so Jesus lays next to this lofty spiritual truth of the coming of the Kingdom and, yet, the continued existence of sickness, sin and death, this mystery – a simple earthly story. A story about a farmer who went out to sow some seed in his fields.

Let me move on and talk about the purpose of parables because the disciples asked Jesus: Why are you doing this?

Matthew 13:10-17

“The disciples came to him and asked, ‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’ He replied, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing, but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

Let me break this down for you. Jesus is saying that his style of teaching really divides people up. That the reason he teaches in the way that he does is to draw a line through the human race and divide people up between those who are seekers, who are looking for truth, who are looking for real answers, and put them on one side. And on the other side, those who really couldn’t care less about answers or about truth, about God or Christ. And Jesus’ style of teaching, his use of parables, divides people up.

For the non-seeker, the person who couldn't care less, the person who is just too busy skimming over the surface of life; "Don't bug me, I have another business deal." "Don't bug me, I am working on my boat." For the person like that, Jesus' style of teaching conceals the truth. It hides it.

For a person who is saying, "There has to be more." For the person who has moments in the week where they say, "You know, are there any answers? Is there a God? Are there better ways to do life? There has to be more. There has to be some truth." For the seeker, a parable doesn't conceal, the parable reveals truth. The parable explains it.

Here is a picture for you. Think of a parable as a pair of sunglasses. Sunglasses really help you if you are out in the bright glare of a summer day. You can see better if you are out in the bright glare if you put on a pair of sunglasses. If your heart is filled with blazing light, you are a person who is going after truth; a parable is going to help you to see the truth.

On the other hand, sunglasses really hurt if you walk inside or into a dark room. They actually shut the light out. It hinders your ability to see. And if you are a person who has no light inside of you, you are just not interested in talking about what is true, what ultimately matters – you just want to skim over life, a parable is actually going to hinder your ability to see.

Now, what Jesus is saying here is a hard saying. Verse 11, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

We can't press all the mystery out of why someone has light in them and is a seeker and why someone else has no light and just skims over the surface of life. You can't squeeze all the mystery of how it is that someone comes into connection with God. The parable will take one side of the mystery, that is the human response to the Kingdom of God, but there is in this prophecy of Isaiah a strong note of what theologians call "predestination." God choosing to reveal truth to some and hide it from others, based upon some secret choice in the heart of God. God choosing not to bring the kingdom at this time on this Sunday. The people in the Bible had much less difficulty affirming what, for us, is utterly paradoxical – God's strong predestination of some and, yet, God's strong preservation of our responsibility to seek him and respond to him when he offers us the Kingdom.

There is a mystery in the Kingdom. We must regularly affirm God's place in bringing the Kingdom or not, and we must regularly affirm our duty to respond to the Kingdom when it is offered.

So Jesus is our teacher. And what is the parable?

Matthew 13:3-8:

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

Note that the farmer is sowing seed widely, not just placing one seed in the ground at a time. He is tossing seed by the handful. Of course, it's his desire to have the seed put only on good soil, but he realizes that's an impossibility. So he tosses it by the handful, realizing that that's the only way he will reap a big harvest. Now this is a spiritual principle: how we, as a church, will reap a big harvest of people for Christ. We have to sow widely and extravagantly – speak to everyone, in other words. You say, “Isn't this wasteful?” The truth is, you can't tell on a superficial investigation who is receptive and who isn't. Someone who seems really resistant to the Kingdom, really hard, may only be posturing. In the recesses of their souls they may really be wrestling over the big questions of life. They may be dissatisfied, they may be wanting more, they may be looking for an alternative to their way. We need to witness to our neighbors at Cooper Colony, the apartments to the north, at our offices downtown, and at OSU, through church planting around town and missions around the world. There is only one secret to reaping a big harvest. Talk to lots of people about Jesus. Talk to the server in a restaurant and the guy who changes your oil at Jiffy Lube and your hairdresser and the neighbors and the parents of your kids' friends. It's really basic. Talk to lots of people about Jesus. You don't believe that. Turn to the person on your right and say, “Talk to lots of people about Jesus.” Now turn to your left.

Jesus is such a great life situation teacher. It is possible that as he was sitting there in the boat off in the distance there might have been a farmer who was walking, throwing seed. So he seized upon some current life situation. Or it is possible that because most of the people in his crowd were farmers that he just talked with them from their every day life, but there was no farmer at that moment walking by.

In either case, what we see in Jesus is he is a life situation teacher. He puts his teaching into contemporary life – not just religious life, not just church religious boxes, the temple, the Torah. You rarely hear him talking in religious categories. His stories are not taken from the world of religion. They are taken from the world of life.

Maybe one of the reasons why people are so turned off to preaching is that it is so often unrelated to life, to where you and I live, in front of our computer screens, with our kids. It so rarely enters our home. People just switch off.

Matthew 13:18

“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 is not just describing a certain kind of person. Oh, that is the hard person. Thank God, I and my family are the good person. That is the way church people usually read this parable. Thank God we are not persons 1, 2 and 3. We are good people. Some churches will say, “Let’s figure out who the other soils are.” But I think you don’t really hear with ears of understanding unless you put yourself in the parable. Unless you see at different times your heart is hard and at other times your heart is shallow and at other times your heart is crowded and sometimes it is good.

And sometimes you will see that your heart is a mix of all four qualities. That in some areas you are hard. In some areas you are shallow. In some areas you are crowded. And sometimes your heart is good in some areas. You put yourself into the parable.

What is the hard heart? The seed falls on soil that is as hard as an airport runway. The seed falls on the passing lane of the expressway. What is the hard heart?

I think the hard heart is the person who holds truth at arm’s length. It is the person who holds what God is saying to them at arm’s length and says, “Not now. I will deal with that issue some other time.” God comes to you through another person with a correction, but you defend yourself. You fend off the truth. The birds of the air come and they snatch that away.

God comes to you in the middle of the night. He wakes you up and begins to speak to you in the deep recesses of your soul about your life. But you fend him off. You hold what you are hearing at arm’s length. God comes to you through preached messages, through your spouse, through a friend, through something that you hear on the radio, but you fend it off. You hold the truth at arm’s length. The hard heart is when you have a conviction about something and you know that God is speaking to you, but you don’t follow through on it.

You protect yourself against change, necessary change, painful change. And when you have a conviction and you don’t follow through on it, your heart grows more and more insensitive to the truth. When God says to you, “Here is what I want you to do. I want you to give some money to something or someone; I want you to make an effort at reconciling a broken relationship – you are at odds with

someone in your family and I want you to make an effort at reconciliation, at ending your judgment, at forgiving.” God says to you, “I want you to pull the plug on your TV or your computer because you have a problem with those things or you need to make room for me every morning” and you don’t follow through on that conviction, your heart becomes more and more insensitive and harder and harder inside.

Every time you say to God, “Not now,” you are whistling for the birds of the air to come and steal the truth of God out of your heart. Every time you resist or get angry because the truth is too hard for you to handle, because it is going to create too much upset in your life, because the truth runs across the grain of your own desires – you want one thing and the truth is cutting in the other direction – if you don’t listen to it, you are whistling for the birds of the air to come and steal the truth away. The hard heart –the truth goes in one ear and out the other.

And then there is the shallow heart.

Matthew 13:20

“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, 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.”

The word sown in shallow soil – there are a couple of ways that we can think about that. Certainly, we all know people who have gone through periods where they seem really excited about the Lord. They are real active in church and they are talking about God with their neighbors and friends. They are going to small group and witnessing. They’re crying during inspiring worship and raising their hands. But two weeks later, two months later, sometimes two days later, it is like they have no spiritual interest at all. It is like they are into something else. They are resisting fellowship or resisting the truth.

What happened? We are talking about the shallow heart. You have about a millimeter of soil into which the seed has fallen. Underneath that millimeter of soil is a huge rock – a rock of selfishness, perhaps, that has never been pulled up in the person’s life. If you see that in you, this pattern of great fervor and excitement and then total fall-off and you have been through that a number of times, I say this with all affection, but I bet you have a rock in you of selfishness and self-centeredness and ultimately of control that just won’t quit.

The bottom line is whatever you say and however excited you have been in the past, you really have never yielded control of your life to Christ where your conversion has come down to the place of letting Jesus Christ run the show and run your future and call the shots in every area no matter what it costs. Where his will wins the day over and over again. Where you come to the deep place of recognition that your way of doing life ultimately doesn’t work. And his way of

doing life ultimately does. Because you still, at bottom, believe that your way is going to result in more happiness for you, no matter how many times you have run your head into the wall. If you are one of those people who burns hot and cold a whole bunch, there is a rock of control in your life that needs to be dug out.

And you know, when I think of shallow soil, I think of someone who has not had the Kingdom enter at the level of the heart, which is made up of our intellects, our emotions, our wills. See, I think some people have the thin soil of will over a rock of unyielded emotion. God wants us to receive the Kingdom at the level of our will, of our emotions, and our intellects. But some people are, what I call, will Christians. Churches produce will Christians all the time. Forget about how you feel, just do what's right. Will Christians.

And yet, all of these people, who are activists, are functioning and running around, but underneath there is this rock of unyielded emotions from childhood. And there is this brewing anger and it comes out in emotional outbursts or depression or burnout or hopelessness. Will Christians – I am going to just keep going; grinding away. Do you know anyone like that? But all the time there is this rock of the emotional life – the person feels like they have never gotten intimate with God or they have a tough time being intimate with other people.

There are emotional Christians where the seed is planted in the thin layer of emotions. They are real excited about Jesus. They are always up, up, up. But underneath there is this rock of intellect where they have questions about God, about his justice, about pain, about the Bible. They have all this doubt that is eating away their faith. Are some of you like that?

Lots of Christians who go off to college find themselves utterly wiped out because they are just emotional Christians. They have never been converted at the level of their minds, their intellect, to get real big answers to real big questions. They have child-sized, Sunday School answers to life's big questions.

You see emotional Christians. You see will Christians. You even see churches produce intellectual Christians. They have everything figured out. Everything fits into a box, but they squeezed all the mystery out of their faith. It is all lined up. They have all the charts of all the categories. But they sure don't experience the life or the power or the joy of Jesus' Kingdom.

Because the Kingdom requires an open heart. It is bigger than your mind and your boxes and your categories. If you are waiting to figure everything out because you think that the seed of the Kingdom needs to just be planted in the soil of intellect, if you are waiting to dot every "I" and cross every "T", I will tell you, you are going to be waiting a good long while before you see the power of God at work through you and in you. You are always going to be struggling with hearing God's voice or believing for the miraculous, if you are just trying to put

the seed of the Kingdom in the thin soil of intellect. It has to be placed in the good soil of a full heart, an open heart.

And then, of course, we have the crowded heart.

Matthew 13:22

“What was sown 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.”

The crowded heart.

This is the seed sown among thorns. This is the person who just has too many competing commitments. God comes, but there is no room for the Lord in your life because you have too much action going on – a commitment to your job, a commitment to your boyfriend or girlfriend. I can't tell you how many women I have seen choke off the work of the Kingdom of God in their lives in their pursuit of a boyfriend. Jesus or my boyfriend? I can't tell you how many men I have seen choke off the work of the Kingdom in their pursuit of a girlfriend. And how many people I have seen choke off the work of the Kingdom by their total absorption in business concerns, in work concerns, in building their careers and businesses.

Jesus is asking the question: Do you have room in your crowded busy heart for me? Do you have room for the Lord? Be honest. Is there room in your life and the way you organize your life, is there room in your life for Christ? For the Kingdom?

Or is your heart so crowded with your goals, ambitions, plans and your worries? And hanging around your waist you have a utility belt like Batman's belt, or in a purse or briefcase you have a cell phone, pager, beeper, palm pilot and the radio is always on and there is always background noise and you are always popping in a CD and the TV is always on. “Is there room?” Jesus is asking. Is there room to hear the word of the Lord in your life? Because a person on the go, the person who is just absolutely over-stimulated, is rarely going to be a Kingdom person. That's just the truth.

A person who is always on the go and who is always stimulated by a million things, you might see around that person lots of human activity, lots of good stuff. But all that activity is just going to be humanly conceived. It is going to be humanly energized. It is going to be humanly planned. It's not going to be the Kingdom because there is no time for listening to God.

Listen, let me make a simple point here. We are not going to have much of the Kingdom unless we make room for Jesus Christ in our lives. You have to make room in your heart for God. You've got to give God some space in your life.

There has to be some time for worshipping him alone. There has to be some space in your life for real confession about what you need to confess to God. There has to be some space for real repentance and real sorrow over what you do and what you should have done that you didn't do. There has to be room for deep meditation on God's Word.

But if you are too over-involved, if there are too many responsibilities, if we are too busy doing our to-do list, if our mind is wracked by worry and obsession about this or that, we are not going to see much of the Kingdom of God.

And then finally we have the good soil.

Matthew 13:23

"But what was sown on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

What is the good heart like? The good heart, of course, is someone who has given up control, the rock of "I have to be in control." The rock of selfishness has been dug out. The person has come to a conviction that Jesus' way of doing life is better than yours. That your way of doing life always doesn't work and his way always does. The good soil is someone who has been converted down to their toes. Your mind is convinced that this is true. It is laying hold of the truth. Jesus is the Bearer of the Kingdom. You are opening up your heart for God to heal your emotions and your will is brought into submission to Jesus.

The good heart is deep conversion – intellect, emotion and will. The good heart is found in a person who is making room for God. There is space in your life for the Lord and his will. The good heart is the person who dares to believe that they could see more of the Kingdom of God; the person who doesn't say, "My present state is all that will ever be," but a person who dreams big dreams, who dares to believe that God could use them more than he is using them now. The good heart is the open heart, the dreaming heart. The heart that says, "Whatever my past, God is not done with me yet and I want to see what Jesus can do with a life that is yielded to him. I want to see what kind of righteousness could be brought into a life, what kind of peace and joy, what kind of power, what kind of witness, what kind of healing."

The good heart is a heart that ultimately believes Jesus and takes him at his word – that I will see more of the Kingdom of God in my life and through my life as I respond in obedience to him. And you will see more of the Kingdom as you respond in obedience to him. Let's pray.

The Mystery of the Kingdom

Rich Nathan
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The Kingdom of God Series
Matthew 13:1-23

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- II. The Purpose of Parables (Matthew 13:1-3; 10-18)**
- III. The Power of Responding**
 - A. The Hard Heart (Matthew 13:19)
 - B. The Shallow Heart (Matthew 13:20-21)
 - C. The Crowded Heart (Matthew 13:22)
 - D. The Good Heart (Matthew 13:23)