

Treasure

JESUS CHANGES OUR PRIORITIES.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 6:19-34 Memory Verse: Matthew 6:33

Our priorities reveal what's important to us. The things we value are the things we treasure. They determine how we invest time as well as money. If priorities are not in line with godly values, anxiety and stress naturally result. For example, people experiencing severe poverty have different needs than those who enjoy financial security, yet both groups can end up worrying about money. The key to overcoming worry lies in prioritizing a faith relationship with God through Christ. That's a simple way of describing discipleship.

Discipleship cannot be limited to Bible study and prayer, although those disciplines are foundational. Being Christ's disciple means living out biblical principles that find their basis in trusting the Lord. If we love and trust the Father, our values will not be wrapped up in material things, but in fellowship with Christ. As you dig into this session, examine your priorities, the things you treasure most. Ask God to reveal areas where He may not have first place in your life. Consider how you can help the adults in your Bible study align their priorities with God's plans and purposes for their lives.



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Common types of household debt include mortgages, car loans, student loans, and credit cards. Debt is any money you owe a person or a business. Money experts talk about good debt and bad debt. They describe good debt as debt you can leverage to build wealth. Bad debt, on the other hand, is debt used to purchase items that lose value over time. Or, it is any debt you are unable to pay. Many people today are drowning in bad debt because of misplaced priorities. (PSG, p. 49)

Do you agree or disagree that misplaced priorities fuel debt?
Explain your answer.



Understand the Context (Matthew 6:1-34)

On the mountain, Jesus's followers continued to learn what it meant to be His disciples. He taught how one's relationship with God affects everything from prayer to provision. Even their religious activities contrasted starkly with people who had religious pretensions rather than genuine faith. True disciples do not trumpet their devotion. Rather, they express their love for God and others with pure intentions and compassionate actions.

One instance involved giving to the poor. The scribes and Pharisees engaged in benevolence, but made sure people took notice and gave them credit. Jesus told His people to help others privately, with no desire for praise. Similarly, prayer is primarily a personal conversation with God, not a public display to gain attention. God sees private devotion and responds with blessings.

Jesus provided an example of how believers should pray. What we call the Lord's Prayer (or Model Prayer) is a template for communication with God (Matt. 6:9-13). It begins by acknowledging Him as our Father. While this relationship is personal, we cannot presume upon it because His name—His reputation and character—is holy and transcendent. We confess Him as King, desiring the arrival of His kingdom and submitting to His will.

In proper prayer, we can ask God to meet our daily needs. Such provision not only involves material matters, but it also includes forgiveness

for our sins. We should mirror that forgiveness in the way we treat those who sin against us. Consequentially, we can trust the Father to lead us in the right way and deliver us from the evil one.

Jesus gave one postscript to this Model Prayer. Our vertical relationship with Him must be revealed in our horizontal relationships with other people. Nothing highlights this principle more clearly than the issue of forgiveness. How can we request forgiveness from the Father when we refuse to forgive one another?

In addition to benevolence and prayer, fasting was an act of devotion corrupted by some religious leaders. They professed a form of righteousness, but they lacked its reality and power. Instead of advertising that they are fasting, Christ followers are called to do it privately. They should not seek the praise of people, but the approval of God.

If we have the foundation of a faith relationship with the Father, anxiety flees. When we prioritize Him and His rule, everything else falls into place. We don't worry about material matters because our true treasures cannot be corrupted or stolen. Our values center on trust in a loving Father who sovereignly rules over all things for His glory and our good.

Read through Matthew 6:1-34 in your Bible. Make a list of what Jesus said *don't* do, then list the things Jesus said *do*. Circle the actions that pose the greatest challenge for you. (PSG, p. 50)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and **Pack Item 11** (Handout: *The Sermon on the Mount*).

INTRODUCE:

Read the opening paragraph on page 49 of the PSG as adults make a mental list of their debts.

ASK:

Do you agree or disagree that misplaced priorities fuel debt? Explain your answer. (PSG, p. 49)

STATE:

Regardless of where individuals stand on the issue of debt, we can agree that humans are prone to let material possessions dominate our lives. When we do, the world steals our proper focus from God and we fail to trust Him like we should.

REVIEW:

Remind adults that this is the second of three sessions drawn from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: *The Sermon on the Mount*) and direct them to scan through the content. Encourage them to share what they recall from the previous session.

CONTEXT:

Share this information from page 50 of the PSG to help set the context for Matthew 6:

In chapter 6, Jesus contrasted sincere religious activities with the insincerity of those He called "hypocrites." Jesus was speaking of motivation. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees were motivated by selfishness and pride. They performed acts of piety for the attention and accolade of others. Jesus's followers were to engage in acts of devotion out of a desire to glorify God.

TRANSITION:

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus touched on topics like benevolence, prayer, and fasting. The real key to living as a Christ follower in this world is trusting Him with all your heart. That's going to be the focus of this session.



Group Activity Option

Music

Direct adults to read the lyrics to "Be Thou My Vision" (*Baptist Hymnal* 2008, No. 83) silently. Draw attention to the fourth verse and lead the group to recite it together. Note that the lyrics reject earthly goods, along with the flattery of others, to focus instead on a divine inheritance. It unequivocally places faith in God as treasure. Ask: **How challenging is it to keep that perspective in everyday life?**

Possessions (Matt. 6:19-24)

19 “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **22** The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. **23** But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness! **24** No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

(vv. 19-20) Jesus warned His disciples not to **store up** for themselves **treasures on earth**. Scholars note the similarity of words translated as “store up” and “treasures.” Earthly treasures are always subject to loss. For example, the garments of biblical days were easy targets for a **moth** or another insect. Metal objects were destroyed by **rust**. Today, our storage units might be better, but our possessions still can be damaged by insects, rust, flood, or fire. They are temporary at best.

Everything remains vulnerable to **thieves**. The term **break in** literally means to “dig through.” Commentators note that many homes of Jesus’s day were plastered with mud, and thieves could burrow through a back wall. If we have a materialistic value system, our treasures are just as vulnerable.

Believers should place their treasures **in heaven**. In God’s presence, our spiritual wealth is secure. Of course, we don’t gather heavenly blessings by self-effort. By faith, we determine our values according to God’s kingdom. Heavenly treasures accrue as we live to glorify Him.

(v. 21) Most people assume that we invest our money in things we love. Jesus said the reverse is true. The location of our **treasure** determines the condition of our **heart**. If you want to change your heart, change what you treasure. By doing what is right, inner motivations will follow.

(vv. 22-23) Jesus used the **eye** to illustrate the importance of proper perception. Through this **lamp of the body**, we observe everything around us. But it’s important that our source of spiritual perception stays **healthy** (or clear). We maintain proper focus when we see as God sees.

Full of light does not suggest that illumination penetrates each body part. Rather, it means

that the **whole body** benefits. By seeing the road, we know where to place our feet. The sight of food enhances or suppresses the appetite and the stomach’s digestion. Every part of the body benefits from healthy eyesight.

Conversely, every body part suffers if the eye is **bad**, either through disease or damage. Jesus likened the result to being **full of darkness** rather than light. The term for “bad” can also be rendered “harmful.” The issue is not physical well-being, but keeping a spiritually healthy perspective and avoiding spiritual harm.

This passage appears in Jesus’s teaching about materialistic values versus spiritual values. In context, Jesus addressed the issue of one’s treasure and its effect on the heart. When the **light** inside us turns dark, that darkness runs **deep**. The Greek wording emphasizes the degree or extent of the darkness.

(v. 24) Jesus made it clear that we cannot **serve two masters**. Conflict between the two is irresolvable. Either we will **hate one and love the other**, or we’ll **be devoted to one and despise the other**. Jesus offered this precept as an illustration of the person who tries to follow **God** while also building a life around **money**.

Jesus was not saying that money itself is bad or that all wealthy people are evil. The full measure of Scripture reveals the virtue of proper stewardship and provides examples of wealthy people who used the resources God gave them for His glory. Here, Jesus’s emphasis was on loving God preeminently, leaving all other matters in their proper relationship to Him.

Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions. If we love God supremely, we will serve Him alone—and experience His blessings in the process.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions.

Call on three volunteers to read Matthew 6:19-21, 22-23, 24 as the group determines which of the three passages is most convicting and which is most inspiring.

DISCUSS:

Allow adults to share their responses to the three sets of verses that were read. Discuss what this passages says about wealth as well as what it *doesn't* say. Emphasize that God never condemns wealth when used properly, but He does not want us controlled by material possessions.

SHARE:

Direct attention to the “Did You Know?” feature (PSG, p. 52). Note that more than 2,300 Bible references to money and possessions prove it is an important topic.

RECAP:

Encourage adults to call out the things that destroy earthly wealth in these verses. To highlight the danger of storing up improper treasures, share this content from pages 51-52:

Material possessions cannot be carried beyond the grave into the heavenly kingdom. The things that carry over into the kingdom of God include the godly character of the disciple and the souls of people influenced for Christ. As Christ followers use their material resources in this life to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others, they are storing up treasure in heaven. Earthly possessions are to be used for the work of building God's kingdom.

EXPLAIN:

Use the content for verses 22-23 and 24 in the Leader Guide to highlight the significance of the eye and the choice people must make between two masters.

ASK:

How can we assess where our true devotion lies? (PSG, p. 53)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Tree Sketch

Give adults a sheet of paper and two pens of different colors. Invite them to try sketching two trees, holding the pens in different hands. After a few minutes, review their work. Note that simple tasks become harder when we try to control two sides of our body at the same time. Correlate this to Jesus's analogy of serving two masters and the inevitability of the dominant one taking control.

Worry (Matt. 6:25-30)

25 “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? **27** Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? **28** And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. **30** If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith?”

(v. 25) Much of our anxiety comes from focusing on the wrong issues—allowing our “eye” to be darkened and distracted. **Therefore** linked one of humanity’s natural concerns with what Jesus said earlier about values. Followers of Christ should not **worry about your life**.

Jesus was not telling the disciples to avoid planning for the future or working toward their dreams. He just urged them to avoid worrying about these matters. In fact, the Greek wording is present imperative, indicating a continuous action. Jesus didn’t just encourage His followers to remain calm. He commanded them to stop worrying now and for each day moving forward.

Worrying about physical needs is natural. In the first century, questions about what to **eat** or **drink** or what to **wear** had nothing to do with menus or fashion trends. They focused on basic needs for survival. But Jesus emphasized that human existence consists of more than **food** and **clothing**. Regardless of economic circumstances, every person should remember that life is about more than our physical stuff. We all have deep spiritual needs that will define our eternity.

(v. 26) Sitting outside, Jesus may have pointed out **birds** flying past. Regardless, He noted that birds **don’t sow or reap or gather into barns**. They totally depend on God’s provision because the **heavenly Father feeds them**. Jesus’s question about human **worth** emphasized that the Creator who feeds the birds cares for His highest creation even more because we play an active role in His redemptive plan.

(v. 27) In a nutshell, Jesus taught that worry gets you nowhere. His rhetorical question reminds us of the obvious: none of us can **add one moment to his life** through worry. Scholars point out the

Greek wording can refer to stature, as well as age. Both renderings make the same point. People may fret over controlling their lives, but worrying is futile. If anything, anxiety diminishes our quality of life.

Key Doctrine

Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. (See Luke 12:16-21; Philippians 4:19.)

(vv. 28-29) Jesus returned to the question about **clothes**. Just as God had fed the birds, He challenged His listeners to examine how the Father dresses **the wildflowers of the field**. Like birds can’t plant or reap, flowers can’t **labor or spin thread**. His use of humorous hyperbole proved how ridiculous it is for people to worry about things they cannot control.

In contrast, with God in control, wildflowers surpass **Solomon in all his splendor**. Solomon gained fame for his wisdom and his wealth. Yet, even on his best days, Solomon could not rival the simple beauty of a field filled with wildflowers.

(v. 30) God nurtures **the grass of the field** even though it could be **thrown into the furnace tomorrow**. Some writers believe this is a reference to using dried flowers and grass as fuel. If God cares for these temporary things of nature, how **much more** will He do for His children?

Ultimately, worry reveals a character flaw: **little faith**. It’s not that we have no faith, but that our faith is weak. We need to believe our heavenly Father loves us and will provide for us.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Placing too much priority on material possessions leads to worry and anxiety.

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 6:25-30 aloud. Direct half the group to count how often the word “worry” is used as the other half counts the number of questions Jesus asked.

SHARE:

Allow the “worry” group to share what they counted. Encourage adults to identify the sources of worry Jesus mentioned in the passage (*food, drink, clothes*). Emphasize that these were legitimate concerns in the first century.

RECAP:

To supplement the context, share this content from page 53 of the PSG:

The common people in Jesus’s day lived under a heavy burden of taxation. It became a struggle to obtain items like food and clothing. In fact, most people ate one meal a day, and meat was served once a week at best. Their daily existence was trying to scrape up what was necessary to sustain life. As Jesus addressed these circumstances, He told His followers to stop worrying about these things. The word “worry” is a key word in this section that is repeated six times. Worry is doubting God’s faithfulness and ability or willingness to provide. Jesus told His followers to replace worry with trust in God.

ASK:

What kinds of things might you be tempted to worry about—and why? (PSG, p. 55)

SHARE:

Allow the “questions” group to share what they found. Highlight that Jesus’s questions were not for information but for reflection. Point out that the examples of birds and flowers reminded His listeners that they could trust God to take care of their needs, eliminating the need for worry.

DISCUSS:

Draw attention to the “Key Doctrine” on page 54 of the PSG. Encourage adults to share how properly trusting God could have an impact on their ability to be faithful stewards of what God provides for them.

ASK:

What are practical things you can do to get through times when you have “little faith” in God?

Trust (Matt. 6:31-34)

31 “So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. **34** Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

(vv. 31-32) Since Jesus confronted worry six times in ten verses, we need to pay attention. Once again, He told His followers **don’t worry**. He reiterated His previous points about concerns for what they would **eat, drink, or wear**.

People have various triggers for worry. Family, health, finances, conflict, and many other matters overwhelm us. These fill us with fear and apprehension. Whatever our problems, Jesus commands us not to worry.

Jesus offered two reasons to avoid worrying. First, we don’t want to act like **Gentiles**. Jesus demonstrated love for all people: Jews, Gentiles, or Samaritans. In this instance, “Gentiles” was a general term for unbelievers. When we allow materialism to consume our lives, we are behaving like those who have no relationship with God.

A second reason to avoid worry rests in our **heavenly Father**. If we have a relationship with God as Father, we believe He cares for us and wants to provide for our needs. If we believe that He best understands what we **need**, we can trust Him to meet that need.

(v. 33) The best antidote for anxiety is faith-based action. Instead of worrying, we should **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**. Notice the key components of this command. “Seek” infers more than mere desire (as in v. 32). Here, it means actively going after something to obtain it. It’s not enough to crave something; we must pursue it. The qualifier “first” refers not to the first among many interests, but to the primary, superior concern.

Also, Jesus identified a two-fold object of our search: God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness. As our Father and King, He sovereignly rules over every aspect of our lives. His benevolent reign extends to the smallest details, and we can trust Him with everything.

Seeking God’s kingdom also requires pursuing His righteousness. The apostle Paul understood the difference between righteousness based on human standards and the genuine righteousness of Christ received by faith (Phil. 3:9). Biblical righteousness involves a right relationship with God demonstrated by right behavior. Seeking God’s righteousness requires forsaking shallow attempts at religious ritual in favor of a right standing with the Father.

Praying Scripture

Matthew 6:33

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 6:33. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Confess times when you’ve failed to seek the kingdom first. Thank God for His grace and His willingness to provide for your needs each day.

(v. 34) Using **therefore**, Jesus linked the two truths of seeking God’s rule and trusting God’s relationship. He again admonished His followers to avoid **worry**. While guilt usually is rooted in the past, anxiety often focuses on the future. We can deal with what’s happening today because we’re living it. The fears about tomorrow’s unknowns grip our hearts. While it’s wise to plan for the future, we should never obsess over it.

In reality, **tomorrow will worry about itself**. Many things we worry about will never happen, while others may arise. Worry has no power or control either way. **Each day has enough trouble of its own**. By focusing on living for Christ, we position ourselves to trust Him with whatever happens today or tomorrow.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers can trust God to provide what they need.

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 6:31-34 aloud while the group listens for repeated words or phrases.

ASK:

Why does “tomorrow” create so much anxiety for us?

DEFINE:

Note that Jesus referred to those who grasp after food, drink, and clothing as unbelievers because He taught us to counter those concerns with daily prayer.

RECAP:

Use the content for verses 31-32 in the Leader Guide to explain the two reasons Jesus gave to avoid worry: *We don’t want to act like unbelievers, and we know we can trust God to meet our needs.* To complement the explanation, summarize this content from page 55 of the PSG:

“Followers of Jesus are not to worry or get agitated about how to make ends meet in life. To worry is to abandon faith. Faith says, ‘God will provide.’”

PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*). Invite adults to use the pack item to pray Matthew 6:33 back to God using the “Praying Scripture” prompt on page 68 of the Leader Guide. Point out that this is also the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to spend time memorizing it in the week to come.

ASK:

What situation do you need to entrust to God today? (PSG, p. 56). Discuss responses, reminding adults of the futility of worrying about tomorrow and the power of faithful trust in God.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Jesus referenced worry six times in Matthew 6:19-34. Identify each reference to worry and put them in a list. Identify the commands. Identify where worry or worrying is used as a noun and note how it is used. Write a summation of each point Jesus made. ***How do these statements about worry apply to your life? What steps can you take this week to overcome worry?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 57 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions.*
- *Placing too much priority on material possessions leads to worry and anxiety.*
- *Believers can trust God to provide what they need.*

HIGHLIGHT:

Remind adults about the “Key Doctrine” on page 54 of the PSG. Point out that today’s passage makes it clear that God provides all of our needs from His abundant resources, so we should trust Him—not obsess over material possessions like they belong to us or worry as if He will not come through when we need Him to move in our lives.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 57 of the PSG. Allow a few volunteers to share their struggles and practical ways to trust God with their finances. (NOTE: Be sensitive to adults who may not be comfortable sharing about their finances or talking about money in a group setting.)

PRAY:

Challenge the group to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) to pray and meditate on Matthew 6:33. Close the session in prayer, asking God to give adults the wisdom and boldness to trust Him and to seek His kingdom as their highest priority in life.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email, directing them to think through the first set of questions on page 57 of the PSG. Encourage individuals who are comfortable to share a personal need they are facing. Commit to praying for those needs and challenge other adults to join you in praying for one another. Suggest that they be sensitive to how God may move them to be the “answer” to one of these prayers.

ADULT COMMENTARY



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew

Robert Weathers

With frequency and fervency, the Scriptures teach about the coming of God's kingdom on earth. In both the Old Testament languages of Aramaic and Hebrew and in the New Testament Greek, the terms translated "kingdom" referred more to the reign and authority of the king than it did to a geographical area. So in the Bible the "kingdom of God" referred primarily to God's rule, His divine kingly authority, which had come from heaven to earth. The kingdom was not so much a geographic place as it was the reality of God in action.¹

The Gospel writers used two terms interchangeably to speak of God's kingdom. They called it "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven" (or in some English translations, "the heavens"). These are variations of the same idea. All four Gospels use "the kingdom of God," but Matthew favored "the kingdom of heaven." While he used the designation "kingdom of God" only five times, he punctuated his Gospel with the phrase "kingdom of heaven" thirty-two times. Since "kingdom of heaven" was a typical Jewish way to "avoid the use of the name of God" when referring to God's rule, Matthew's preference for this phrase demonstrated his concern for reaching a Jewish audience with the message of Jesus.²

HOW JESUS TALKED ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM

Exploring Jesus's use of these terms in Matthew's Gospel illuminates compelling truths about God's reign in the universe. In fact, chapters 12; 13; 16; and 19 provide keys to understanding these truths. Chapter 13 is especially significant. In that

chapter, Jesus defined the nature of God's kingdom through a series of parables. Four facts about Jesus's use of "the kingdom of God" or "heaven" emerge as we scan these chapters in Matthew.

First, the kingdom is embodied in Christ. The early Christians realized that the kingdom of God had actually arrived in Jesus Christ. As Messiah, Christ was the anticipated King. But more than that, He actually embodied the kingdom of God. He brought its mission to earth. He carried bodily the full authority of God.

Matthew recorded events through which Jesus demonstrated His regal authority. For example, when the Pharisees criticized Jesus for permitting His disciples to eat grain and for healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus proclaimed Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8). Jesus was inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth and asserting His authority as King. Matthew clarified that the King had come by quoting a passage from Isaiah that anticipated the Messiah's arrival (Matt. 12:15-21; Isa. 42:1-4).³

Jesus further validated His authority by casting out demons. He taught that the contest between God and Satan was a battle of kingdoms. His arrival on earth meant that Satan was defeated. To the Pharisees, Jesus declared, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28).

Second, the kingdom is a call to discipleship. Jesus's coming ushered in God's kingdom. Further, it requires a response from all who encounter the

King. Jesus packaged His call to discipleship with His kingdom teaching. When the Pharisees tried to test Him and asked about His perspective on divorce, Jesus explained God's original intention for marriage. He used marriage as a way to call His followers to fulfill God's intention, rather than to look for a way to dodge God's design (19:1-12).

Not everyone would accept the demands of discipleship. Jesus used the parable of the sower and the soil to compare the ways people responded to His call to enter God's kingdom and become His followers (13:18-23).

Matthew was careful to include an explanation with this parable. Although all hear the same message of the kingdom, not all respond the same way. Only the person who is fit for the kingdom "hears and understands the word" (v. 23). That disciple will produce a great bounty for the kingdom. Under the tests of time and endurance, his profession of faith will be proven genuine.

Even Jesus's closest disciples wrestled with the demands of discipleship. Following Peter's great Christological confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus promised that His followers would be kingdom disciples and would have keys to the kingdom. The gospel message was that key to the kingdom. Their actions of "binding and loosing" would create the church on earth, which would then carry out the mission of the kingdom.⁴

The disciples did not fully understand this teaching. While they professed their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, they did not grasp that, as King, He would die a sacrificial death (16:13-23).

Matthew recorded other episodes to underscore Jesus's expectations for His followers. Jesus showed that citizens of His kingdom should have the faith of a child. He also taught a rich young man that discipleship was a lifestyle that required a complete surrender to the priorities of God's kingdom (19:13-30).⁵

Third, the kingdom is a treasure that God reveals. Jesus's disciples wondered why He taught kingdom truths using parables. Jesus answered, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them" (13:11). He meant that parables have a dual purpose: to reveal and to conceal. The inability to understand stemmed from

a hardened heart, but people who were open to the truth would understand Jesus's teaching and choose to follow Him. To see that the kingdom of God has come required accepting God's perspective. God revealed this truth (16:17).⁶

Jesus also taught that, unlike the pomp and pageantry that so often accompanied earthly kingdoms, God's kingdom would begin small, with a handful of disciples. Ultimately, though, it would generate grand results. For that reason the kingdom was like a mustard seed that would become a great tree or like the leaven mixed with dough (13:31-33). He similarly compared the kingdom of heaven to a treasure found in a field and to a pearl of great value (vv. 44-46). The kingdom of heaven is precious—anyone would be wise to make any sacrifice in choosing it.

Finally, the kingdom is both a present fact and a future hope. Though the kingdom of God was established with the arrival of Jesus Christ, its full coming is not yet complete. He has brought its mission to earth and given that mission to the church. However, one day in the future He will return and the kingdom will be realized in all its glory.

Jesus taught that the final coming of the kingdom of God would be a day of judgment for those who reject Him and a day of reward for those who accept Him (16:27-28). As one scholar stated, "In a very meaningful sense the kingdom has come because Jesus has come. But in an equally meaningful sense the kingdom will come when Jesus comes. It is present. It is future."⁷

Robert Weathers is pastor of First Baptist Church, Shallotte, North Carolina. This article originally appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Used with permission.

1. Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 106; G. E. Ladd, "Kingdom of Christ, God, Heaven," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 608.

2. Morris, 127-128.

3. D. A. Carson, Matthew in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 282-283; 327.

4. "Jesus' church" is not the same thing as His "kingdom." The kingdom is the reign of God. The church is the people of God who are called out through the reign of God to be on mission for Him. Therefore, the kingdom produces the church. See Carson, 369.

5. Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 218, 295-300.

6. *Ibid.*, 215.

7. Morris, 129.