

WEEK FORTY-TWO INTRODUCTION

What is the kingdom of heaven? What is it *like*? Reading the Gospel accounts of the Lord Jesus requires a confrontation with the King and His kingdom. Jesus preaches a gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15) and ethics of the kingdom (Matt. 5-7). He instructs Nicodemus about how to enter the kingdom (John 3:3). This week's readings contain images of the kingdom presented by Jesus in the form of parables. George Guthrie defines a parable, "A parable is a story placed alongside spiritual truth to elucidate that truth." For those who possess "ears to hear," the parables provide a gateway for greater insight and application. For those hard of heart, Jesus utilizes Isaiah 6:9-10 recorded in Mark 4:12 to demonstrate the parables as a means of judgment. How will we hear God's word as we read?

KEY SCRIPTURE

What do you think? If someone has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go and search for the stray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over that sheep more than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. In the same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

– Matthew 18:12-14 CSB

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How would you summarize Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of heaven in the parables recorded in Matthew 13? What does each parable teach regarding the kingdom? All of the parables utilize agrarian and organic imagery. Why do you think that is?

Who confronts Jesus by the sea in the region of the Gerasenes in Mark 5? In this particular man, note the effects of the domain of darkness in his life and behavior before he encounters Jesus (Mark 5:3-5). Then, mark the evidence of the King and the kingdom in his life (verses 15, 18-20). Think about the people in your life, are their lives marked by the domain of darkness or by the kingdom of Christ?

What does Jesus send His disciples out to do in Matthew 10? Where does their ability to do so come from? What promises does He give them? What warnings?

What is the significance of Peter's confession in Luke 9:20 in light of the verses immediately following (vv. 21-22)?

In Luke 9:23-27 Jesus gives a stark assessment of what is required to follow Him. Have you considered the cost of being a disciple of Jesus? How does the prize outweigh the cost?

What is the "work of God" according to Jesus in John 6:29? How does Jesus in this chapter confront the consumerism of the crowds to whom He says, "you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled"? They sought Jesus as an *instrument* to their satisfaction rather than the *source* and *substance* of their satisfaction. Describe the difference between consumers and disciples. Which will we be?

What is the argument among the disciples in Mark 9:33-34? How does Jesus respond? What illustration does He give to instruct them about His kingdom?

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

“...but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.” -**Luke 9:60 CSB**

Identify what’s holding you back from full commitment to Jesus? Who is close to you but far from God? They need to hear “the news of the kingdom of God.” Begin to pray for those people right now.