

Sermon Text for August 25, 2024

By Rev. Robert Bronkema

Daniel 2:44-45 and Matthew 13:44-50

“The kingdom of heaven is like...”

We place a lot of emphasis in this church on children and families, it was something that came up 14 years ago when the Pastor Nominating Committee talked about this church and the goals that they had for the next pastor who might come along. Every church wants young families and children but not every church is willing to make that an emphasis in their life and in their decision making. We want to have children and families and yet still not have anything change around us. If you have ever had kids does your life ever stay the same afterwards. Of course not, it changes, you change, and the culture and the even the priorities change. That is where we find ourselves today in this church. We place a high importance on children and families and our programs and ministries reflect that.

But lately I have been trying to emphasize another aspect of our church life which we would do well to not neglect. I have often used Colossians 1:28 as a guiding Scripture for this church, let's read it. Our goal as a church is that every single person would become mature in Christ. What can we do so that when someone walks in these doors and interact with us they leave having learned something or grown in some way in Jesus? I don't care what age you may be, I hope you have felt challenged to grow in your faith as a result of our coming here to this church. No one should leave unscathed, everyone should be challenged to become more mature in their faith.

Our recent efforts with Prayer and Scripture and Action is an example of a concerted effort by this church and its leadership and its staff to increase our desire and our exposure to prayer and Scripture and action all of which we hope would grow our faith maturity. We took some very deliberate, concrete steps to make that happen, it didn't just happen by chance that somehow somehow because you stepped into this church by osmosis or by chance you grow in your faith. No, it takes work, it takes coordination, and it takes resolve to lead people to a place where first of all that they are even willing to grow, or that they see a need to grow, and then secondarily provide a way in which they can grow.

I was shocked by the results we received this past week in regards to the values of increase in our interaction with God as a congregation. At every single level, except at the family level and coordinated prayer, we grew as a congregation, as a whole, in our time of prayer, in our reading of Scripture, and in our action as an extension of the hand of God. In every single way you said that you matured over this past year because of this very deliberate

effort on the part of the church to grow our communal and individual faith. God wants us to engage with him and desire a mature faith in him and you responded by saying that you desire to engage with God and want to deepen your faith in him as well.

Today we are engaged in more parables that speak to what do we do to develop and strengthen our love of God. Jesus uses this term kingdom of heaven to define our relationship with Jesus and what the end result of that relationship will look like. While the present is arguably more important than the end, we can't ignore the end. A mature faith looks to the kingdom of heaven that is to come while working as hard as they can to establish it here on earth. Let's read.

READ

Daniel may not be a very popular book of the Bible to read from for sermons unless you are looking at the fiery furnace or the lion's den. This Scripture is neither of those. In this Scripture Daniel is interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar who was the most powerful king of his day. He ruled Babylon Daniel was in exile in Babylon along with all of the people of God. As the most powerful king on earth the assumption is that no other kingdom could compare. But Daniel interprets his dream stating that one day there will be a kingdom that the God of heaven himself will create and it will be more powerful than anything you can create or than any other kingdom that has ever been seen up to this point.

It would be established and ruled by God. It would be like God would be in charge of the government as a whole. You know if God is in charge of the government we really wouldn't need elections because God himself would take charge of all things. But that would be the only way this would work, if God himself came to earth and established his kingdom here on earth. That has not happened yet, and barring that, this kingdom of heaven is not around and we are left with our fallible system that has not been instituted by God but which we pray would be directed and guided by the Holy Spirit every single Sunday.

The kingdom of heaven that we find in Scripture, and the one to which Daniel was alluding, is not like any kingdom, or government that we have on earth today. As a church we shouldn't want to strive for a theocracy where people are in charge in the name of God, because simply speaking those people are not God. This kingdom of heaven that Daniel describes and that we will see later that Jesus alludes to is not political at all, and it is not the system that we have nor is it a system that we want people today to try to create. Only God can create it. That is what Daniel is telling Nebuchadnezzar which is why in the next verses he falls on his face and

worships the God of Daniel because he recognizes how small he is in the face of God. Oh that our politicians today would do the same.

We read in Daniel that one day, on judgment day, God will rule. It is God who will establish his kingdom. Now, we have a role to play in this kingdom of heaven, and Jesus in Matthew describes what that role is like. Let's turn to Matthew and see the kingdom of heaven as Jesus describes it. Our reading is a bit confusing because it is divided into two very similar parables and then a third parable which is completely different but sounds a lot like the wheat and the weeds parable that we read earlier.

There is a man walking along the field and stumbles across a buried treasure which he reburies, sells all of his possessions to buy the field in which this treasure is buried, and then does so with great joy. Similarly there was a pearl merchant who found the mother of all pearls and sold all he had and bought that pearl. Those are the two stories. These two parables tell us that there is nothing more valuable than the treasure and the pearl both of which are described by Jesus as the kingdom of God. There is nothing more valuable in our life than the kingdom of God, or as we say today, than having a personal relationship with Jesus. We give up everything if it allows us to have a mature faith in God. We should not allow anything to get in the way of that. We should pursue it with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Notice the man who bought the field did so out of joy. He didn't do it out of guilt or out of fear, but out of joy. That is what ought to define our relationship with God. We obey and love God because we want to not because some pastor makes us feel guilty for not praying or not reading the Bible or not reaching out in concern for others. Our relationship with God has to be defined by joy. Our growth in our faith has to come from a joy to grow.

This selling all that you have is not foreign in Scripture. We see it in both of these parables, we also see it in Matthew 19:21, here is someone who genuinely wanted to grow in his faith and asks Jesus how can he grow. Jesus tells him, he is given the way in which to grow, but he goes away sad because he is not willing to follow Jesus in joy on Jesus' terms, he is only wanting to do that which he hopes will benefit him. Jesus says this will make you perfect. I'll take okay, I don't need perfect. But Jesus says this will make you perfect, who doesn't want that?

We often find ourselves confronted with the decision of following Jesus which can seem terribly impractical, or pursuing our own goals and desires which God has not set for us, but which we have set for ourselves based upon what everyone else around us has set their goals on. Pursuing the kingdom of heaven, growing in our faith, is not easy, and it always demands that we

change our way of life, but when we are faced with the reality of it all we would rather pursue a faith that we can control and put limitations on so that it doesn't impact those areas of our life that we would rather control.

The last parable speak directly about the kingdom of heaven as a bit net that is thrown out there and gathers everyone under it. The kingdom of heaven is expansive, it gathers everyone, and I mean everyone. But then we see that it becomes quickly exclusive, meaning that a separation takes place. The separation takes place based upon, in vs. 49, the evil and the righteous. And while this happens at the end of the age, on judgment day, this is not an unfamiliar example to us. We saw this before in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, where there is a separation and the weeds go to gnash their teeth and wail. We see this in Matthew 25 where there is a separation based upon righteousness. Those who are acting according to the will of God will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

But keep in mind that it is God who is doing the separation and that happens in the end of the age so it is not something that we need to be involved in here and now. These parables more than any of the other ones that we have seen up to this point, tell us quite clearly what are we supposed to do in order to increase our faith. The other parables describe what God is doing, these parables tell us what we are to do. We are to approach our faith and our relationship with God with joy and be willing to sell all that we have in order to be in full communion with God.

In most of the parables we have seen up to now there is no real human response. God plants and gathers and we just are, we just be in God's presence. This week the parables stress the human response to what God is doing. The emphasis is on the overwhelming response made to the discovery of the treasures. Proverbs 2:4-5 tells us that we are to actively search and seek it out. We can't passively expect to grow without actually trying and without being willing to sacrifice.

The kingdom can be present among us but we may not perceive it because it doesn't lift itself up above others. By its very nature the kingdom is humble, not much to look at as Isaiah 53:2 mentions. But the point is that the kingdom is worth everything. A relationship with Jesus is worth everything.

While the church is not the only place where God operates, it is where God has chosen to reveal the kingdom to his people. Jesus established the church as his bride and we as a church are called to live out our faith together so that we may mature together. It is meant to be the closest representation to the kingdom of God on earth as God is able to establish. But it is also a gift, this church, God's representation on earth, is a gift to each one of us. Let us live out our

lives aware of the emphasis on the great value of the kingdom of heaven, and the single sided response it should elicit from us. Amen.