

The Kingdom of Heaven is like....30 July 2023

Matthew 13. 31-33 and 44-52

Read both passages and note the common formula at verses 31, 33, 44, 45 and 47. All parables beginning with this introduction are called “Parables of the Kingdom” (see notes for 16th July).

What do you think Jesus is getting at in the first parable (vv. 31-32)?

What do you think Jesus is getting at in the second parable (v. 33)?

What do you think Jesus is getting at in the third parable (v. 44)?

Can you summarise the drift of these three parables each in a single word?

Note that these parables all declare what the kingdom of heaven is “like” – but what, and where is the kingdom? Is it in any way a political institution?

In the fourth parable, vv. 45-46, consider the nature of human “seeking.”

Is it instinctive for all human beings to seek? Why is it instinctive? What do we seek for?

How does Jesus suggest, with supreme simplicity and yet without offence to other beliefs or systems, that his teaching outranks all alternatives?

In this parable, what is the objective of searching humanity, or what does the “pearl of great price” stand for?

If the “kingdom of heaven” is not a political institution, what is it?

“Suddenly it dawned upon me that Jesus himself is the kingdom!” C.H. Dodd

Would the penny have dropped earlier if St. Matthew had given us first these short parables and then the longer ones of last week and the week before?



Some Background

Today’s two sections conclude the third of the four discourses by which St. Matthew, in the course of the Galilean Ministry, conveys some of the teaching of Jesus.

Note that verses 47-50 are virtually a marine and fishing repetition of the land and farming parable of verses 24-30 and 36-48 last week.

Note the common language of 42b and 50b, further repetitions of the favourite saying of Johanan ben Zakkai last week.

What do you make of verse 52?

Some scholars suggest that as artists write their signature in the corner of their paintings, so here St. Matthew is placing his own “signature” in his Gospel.

They suggest this might follow an example first explored by St. Mark in Mark 14.

“Surely there can be no greater privilege in life than the privilege of making people laugh!”

(Ronnie Barker in his farewell speech on retirement.)

Is that right?