

Love God, love people and help others do the same.

Week 7 - What to believe and next steps to take:

- A. **What to believe** – Disciples make disciples and nothing else is more exciting or meaningful in all of life. (Matthew 28:19-20; Hebrews 11:24-26; Matthew 16:13-18; 1 Chronicles 12:23-38)

- B. **Next Steps** – Pray for those who are in your life that do not know the Lord or do not act like they know him. Begin to make efforts toward them in conversation, building bridges to the gospel, to disciple making.
 1. Scripture memory:
 - a. Romans 10:9 “...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...”
 - b. Romans 10:13 “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

 2. Scripture reading – Matthew 13-17
 - a. Ask this question when you read a chapter – What do I need to believe about God from reading this chapter?
 - b. If I believe this about God, what will I do or stop doing as a result of believing this?

 3. Meditation is lingering in contemplative listening, listening to what God has said in His Word, resulting in specific obedience to God and His word. Spend time meditating on the verse that captures what you need to believe and how you will obey.

 4. Pray
 - a. Pray for the people in your life that need a disciple to be a blessing to them.
 - b. Begin to pray for the person/s you will disciple in the next year.
 - c. Pray daily using your neighborhood map or top ten list for those in your life with whom you want to share the gospel.
 - d. Continue to journal a couple of prayer requests you would like to be praying this week.

 5. Some additional assignments:
 - a. Begin to think about a plan for becoming a first generation disciple maker at FBCGT.
 - b. Work on sharing your own personal story of salvation. Ask someone you know if you can share your story with them in about 2-3 minutes. (with some current story on what difference it is making now).
 - c. Work on sharing the gospel with the three circles conversation guide.
 - d. Begin to plan out a conversation to ask someone to enter into a discipling relationship.

The Parables of Jesus:

In parables, Jesus will at times in His explanation of the parable assign meanings to some elements of the parable and then at other times will assign no meaning to other elements. When Jesus assigns meanings to elements of a parable, He is only assigning meanings that are needed to understand what He meant by the parable. No other values are needed to understand what He intended to be understood other than the ones He assigns. We do not need to make everything in a parable stand for something and we shouldn't even try. Parables are not perfect representations of something spiritual. They really are not perfect allegories. There is no perfect one-to-one correspondence. Parables are stories intended to teach. The story is told to teach something and Jesus' explanation, when it occurs, leads us to understand that something. If we try to make every element of the story represent something spiritual and something we have to figure out, then we will likely make the parable say something that the parable doesn't say and was never meant to say.

In Matthew 13:31-33, two parables occur with no explanation. In the case of these two parables, we should not conclude that Jesus left it up to us to assign meanings to the elements of the parables. For example, Jesus did not intend us to conclude that the birds in the mustard tree were demons because the birds eating the seed along the path were representative of Satan. We are not to assume that we have the wisdom to do what Jesus did in His explanation of other parables. We should not assume that it is even necessary. We should instead conclude that if we needed to know what stuff stood for in these stories Jesus would have told us. So if we don't need to know what the tree really is or the leaven or the flour then we are left with a simple picture from real life that is meant to illustrate some simple truth about the kingdom of heaven.

In the mustard seed story, Jesus is using this picture, the small mustard seed becoming a much larger plant, to reveal a mystery of the kingdom. The simple truth of this picture is that something that starts very small will, in the end, be something very large. That is the simple message and it is a wonderful truth about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven has come in Jesus Christ but the way it has come is not what was expected. It is really a very unspectacular arrival, but an arrival nonetheless. In the end, however, the greatness of the kingdom will provide as amazing a contrast as is seen between the mustard seed and the mustard tree. Let me illustrate the contrast. If I were a mustard seed (all 5'9" of me) then after becoming full grown I would be about 2500 feet tall. The empire state building is only 1,454 feet tall. Now that is truly a contrast.

In the leaven story, again, there is no need or reason to allegorize this parable or similitude. We don't need to understand the leaven as being something other than leaven. If you think the leaven is the evil of the Pharisees here, just because it is in another place, you are forcing a foreign context upon this passage. Leaven is just leaven here. The flour is not a code word for something other than flour. The three measures are not anything other than three measures. This is just a simple picture of something that reveals something about the kingdom of heaven.

There is one detail that is important to understand. The leaven involved is not a large amount but the flour is a large amount. Three measures of flour amounts to somewhere around 100 pounds of flour, enough to feed 150 people. A small imperceptible amount of leaven is introduced into a very large amount of flour and, eventually, that leaven has an effect on the entire huge amount of flour. The message of this little parable is the same as the mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is like something that starts very inconspicuously and discreetly but then will become something very different, something very large and obvious. The kingdom of heaven appears initially to be insignificant and of no consequence but, in time, it will produce an astonishing and dramatic effect.

Jesus told his disciples this parable so that they would understand that the beginning of the kingdom of heaven, though not exactly what they had imagined, was a guarantee that the kingdom was moving toward an amazing fulfillment and completion. The beginning of the kingdom of heaven signals an end that will be incredible, amazing, spectacular and much, much greater than the beginning. What the disciples saw in that moment in those little stories we see a little more fully through the window of the completed Word of God and through the eyes of history. We know that the subtle beginning mushroomed into a world-changing movement of the gospel and salvation for millions. And we also know that the kingdom of heaven came and will some day fully come. We have not reached the end and the kingdom of heaven is still moving toward its fulfillment. And the end will be of such a nature that it will make its beginning, which affected all of history like nothing else, as insignificant as a mustard seed.

Knowing that truth should create a result in our hearts just like it should have for the disciples. These parables are meant to encourage our faith. We should hear these little stories and realize that Jesus is the king of the kingdom and He is moving His kingdom forward towards full and final redemption, toward eternity. The beginning of the kingdom of heaven is the guarantee of its future completion. The kingdom of heaven is here and it is coming. We should keep on believing, keep on trusting, keep on following. Jesus came and He will come again. What happened in Jesus' day makes certain the future and complete coming of His kingdom. Stay in the faith. The completion of the kingdom of heaven will make the beginning look like a little yeast sprinkled in a huge bowl of flour. It will be spectacular. The kingdom is coming and it is coming through the church making disciples who make disciples. Join in the adventure of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ! Nothing else is more exciting or meaningful in all of life.