

## Lesson Four: The Stories of the Kingdom, continued

**Main idea:** As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus, and we tell everyone about how much Jesus loves them.

### Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, Deuteronomy 4:29, Matthew 10:37-39
- Gather: Bible; dry erase markers or chart paper and markers; 2 buckets per relay race team; lots of ping pong balls or pom poms, or crumpled paper; one spoon per relay race team; crayons, colored pencils, or markers; Kingdom Mini Book 2, one per child
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life.

### Scripture references:

- Matthew 13:44-50
- Acts 26:9-20
- Ephesians 2:8-9
- Jeremiah 29:13
- Luke 14:25-33

### Game: Pearl Race

The goal of this game is to be the team who collects the most pearls in their bucket. Divide your class into at least two relay race teams. Place an empty bucket for each team at the far end of the room and a bucket full of ping pong balls in front of each team. (Or you could use bouncy balls, pom poms, marbles, whatever you have.) Provide the first person in each line with a spoon. (The smaller the spoon, the more difficult the challenge, so choose accordingly. Anything from a teaspoon to a ladle would work.) On your signal, the first kid on each team will scoop up one ping pong ball and run with it to the other side of the room, where they will drop it in their bucket. They may not touch the balls with their hands. If they drop the ball, they must pick it up, go back to the beginning, drop it back in the bucket and start over. Time the race for as long as you want. Make sure everyone gets to run at least once. Whichever team has the most ping pong balls in their bucket at the end wins.

## Message:

Open in prayer, then say, This is our fourth week learning all about the parables. Who can remind us what parables are? (Allow a student to answer.) That's right, parables are stories Jesus told to teach us important lessons about the Kingdom of Heaven. From them, we learn what Heaven is like, what God is like, and what we should do as citizens of Heaven. We heard the Parable of the Soils and learned that everyone has a different reaction when it comes to the word of God. Last week we read three of six parables that Jesus taught about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. From them we learned that the Kingdom of Heaven is not only a place, but it is Jesus reigning, or ruling in the hearts of those who love him. In the story of the wheat and weeds, we learned that Jesus is patiently waiting to give everyone a chance to get to know him, and that it is our job to pray for people who don't know and love Jesus. We learned that God can use even little things that we do to make a big difference in the parable of the mustard seed. In the last parable we looked at last week, the parable of the yeast, that it is our job as Christians to go out into the world and tell everyone about Jesus. The parables remind us that we represent the Kingdom of Heaven, we represent Jesus, everywhere we go in the world.

Today we will read the last three Kingdom of Heaven parables found in Matthew 13 and learn a few good lessons from them, too. Let's jump right in! Open your Bibles to Matthew 13:44. Who would like to read this first, one-verse parable? (Have a student read Matthew 13:44.)

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field."

This short story teaches us some very important lessons. Let's start with the man. It said he discovered a treasure hidden in a field. He wasn't out looking for the Kingdom of Heaven on purpose, he just sort of stumbled across it. I love this parable, because it reminds us that Jesus is calling everyone to himself, even those who aren't looking for him. We can think of the story of the apostle Paul. He was actively trying to kill Christians when Jesus appeared to him. Let's look at Paul's story real quick. Turn with me to Acts 26. I'm going to read a part of this chapter as you follow along. In these verses, Paul is in prison, and explaining to King Agrippa why he does what he does. He gives Agrippa his testimony. Listen now as I read. (Read Acts 26:9-20).

<sup>9</sup>“I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene. <sup>10</sup>Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. <sup>11</sup>Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. I was so violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities.

<sup>12</sup>“One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. <sup>13</sup>About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. <sup>14</sup>We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.’

<sup>15</sup>“‘Who are you, lord?’ I asked.

“And the Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup>Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. Tell people that you have seen me, and tell them what I will show you in the future. <sup>17</sup>And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles <sup>18</sup>to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me.’

<sup>19</sup>“And so, King Agrippa, I obeyed that vision from heaven. <sup>20</sup>I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do”

In this passage, Paul is referred to as Saul. That was his name before he became a Christian. Now in this passage, do you get the feeling that Paul was looking for Jesus? Do you think he felt like he needed a savior? (Allow children to answer.) It sure doesn’t sound like it. In fact, Paul was persecuting Christians! He was actively doing things to go against Jesus when Jesus saved him. Jesus loves everyone and wants everyone to follow him, even the people that don’t seem to want to have anything to do with him. Paul was like the man in our parable, who just stumbled across a great treasure in a field. What do you think this great treasure represents? (Allow children to respond.)

Let's look at the first part of the parable again: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field." The treasure in this parable is the Kingdom of Heaven! Heaven is where we get to spend all of forever with Jesus, our King. It is the best treasure we could ever want! When the man discovered the treasure, what did he do next? (Allow children to respond.) The parable tells us in the second half of Matthew 13:44. It says, "In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field." Can you imagine that? Can you think of anything so wonderful in this life that you would sell EVERYTHING you have to get it? I can list a few things I would like to have, like a new car, a new phone, and a swimming pool in my backyard. Can you think of things you would like? (Have children list a few things.) That's a pretty good list of things we would like. But would you be willing to sell ALL your clothes, ALL your toys, your cars, your food, and even your house to get any of those things? No way! Nothing in this life is worth selling ALL your stuff in exchange for. But the Kingdom of Heaven is worth everything we have and then some.

Now here's an important point. Can we buy our way into Heaven? (Allow children to answer.) No, we can't. Let's have a quick sword drill to see what the Bible has to say about the cost of salvation. Take all fingers and bookmarks out of your Bible and hold it above your head. When I say go, look up Ephesians 2:8-9. Go! (Read, or have a child read, Ephesians 2:8-9.) "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."

So what does salvation, becoming a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, cost us? Absolutely nothing. The Kingdom of Heaven and being freed from our sins is a free gift that God gives us when we believe that Jesus died for our sins. After our next parable, we'll talk about what Jesus wants us to give for the Kingdom of Heaven. In this story, the Story of the Hidden Treasure, the man sold everything he had for the great treasure he found. We learned that Jesus can save people even when they aren't looking for him, and that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth more than anything we could ever want.

Let's read the next parable, which is so similar to the one we just read, they are often lumped together as one. We are looking at them separately because there are a few different things we can learn from each one, and some things that are so important for us to know that Jesus repeated them in both parables. Let's now read Matthew 13:45-46. "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is

like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!”

The first thing to notice here is that this man was on the lookout. Unlike the man in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, the man in the Parable of the Pearl was looking for Jesus. You are all lucky, blessed to get to come to church every week and learn about Jesus. Many people don't go to church, and don't know where to go for the answers to some hard questions they may have. Life without Jesus can be very lonely, and people who don't know and follow Him often feel lost, and like something is missing in their lives. When that happens, they often go searching for something to make them feel like they belong, something to fill the emptiness in their lives. Can you think of some things people may turn to as they try to fill the emptiness they feel? (Make a brief list on the board with the kids answers. Some ideas include work, food, other religions, buying lots of stuff, relationships, and hobbies.) People look all over the place for something to fill them up, but there is only one thing that will make us feel like we belong, and that is a relationship with Jesus Christ. The great news is that those who really look for Jesus will find him. It says so in Jeremiah 29:13. It says, “If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”

So we learn from this parable that people who are looking for the truth with their whole hearts will find God and the Kingdom of Heaven. What does the parable say the man does when he finds the pearl, or finds the Kingdom of Heaven? It says he sold everything he owned and bought the pearl. So in discussing the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, we said that salvation is a free gift. We don't have to pay anything or do anything aside from believe in Jesus and ask him to forgive us of our sins in order to get to go to Heaven. But there is more to it than that. It gets a little tricky to wrap your head around, but you are smart kids, so we are going to talk about the cost of discipleship. Turn to Luke 14:25-33 and follow along as I read. <sup>25</sup> A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

<sup>28</sup> “But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before

running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. <sup>30</sup> They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'

<sup>31</sup> "Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? <sup>32</sup> And if he can't, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. <sup>33</sup> So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own."

Following Jesus is not always easy. Sometimes you will be teased or left out. You will have to make hard decisions and do scary things sometimes. You may even lose friends over your faith. Salvation is a free gift from God, and it still costs us everything. When we choose to follow Jesus and let him cleanse us of our sins, we have to love him more than we love anyone in the whole world. We have to love Jesus more than we love our parents. Your parents have to love Jesus more than they love you. Think about how much you love your family, and how much they love you. Your parents love you a whole lot, and you love them a whole lot, too. That's a whole lot of love! We still need to love Jesus more than anyone if we want to be his disciple, or his follower. Like the man in the Parable of the Pearl, we have to give up everything. This doesn't mean that we actually throw away everything – although sometimes we may need to get rid of some things in our lives that lead to sin – it means that Jesus **MUST** be more important than anything else in our lives. He has to be more important to us than our families. He has to be more important to us than our friends. He has to be more important to us than school, volleyball practice, video games, and our favorite toy. Being a Christian is not about following rules, or just getting "saved from our sins." Being a Christian means we love Jesus, because he loves us. When we love someone, we show them we love them. We show our parents we love them by hugging them, saying "I love you," and obeying them. We show Jesus we love him by keeping him first in our lives. How do we keep Jesus first in our lives? (List their answers on the board. Include things like going to church instead of sleeping in, reading the Bible instead of playing video games, and not hanging out with friends who get us to say and do things that Jesus would not appreciate.)

From the Parable of the Pearl, we learn that when people look for the truth, they find God. We also learned that when we follow Jesus, we make sure he is the most important relationship in our lives.

The last Kingdom of Heaven Parable found in Matthew 13 is called the Parable of the Fishing Net. It's in verses 47-50. This one won't take long to go over. Follow along as I read.

<sup>47</sup>“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. <sup>48</sup>When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. <sup>49</sup>That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, <sup>50</sup>throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This parable is very similar to one we studied last week. Does anyone remember which one? (Allow a student to answer.) That's right, this parable is similar to the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds. In both parables, we learn that at the end of the world, those who follow Jesus will get to go to Heaven and those who don't will be thrown into Hell. This message is good news for those who love Jesus, but bad news for those who don't! Part of being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is telling everyone about Jesus so they don't get thrown away like the bad fish in the story. That is part of the cost of following Jesus. We show we love Jesus by telling others that Jesus loves them. As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus, and we tell everyone about how much Jesus loves them.

End in prayer.

### **Craft:** Soils Mini Book

Every week, students will make a mini book that retells the parable in very basic terms. This fourth mini book in their library reminds the kids how to live like citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. To begin, demonstrate how to fold the book. Fold along the solid lines. Start by folding the long side to the long side. Crease well. Keep it folded, then fold in half, crease well, and fold in half again, creasing well. Now unfold it all the way and fold it in half short side to short side, so the dotted line in the center is folded in half. Cut along this dotted line. Do not overcut! Now unfold the paper and fold it in half again, this time long side to long side. Now for the tricky part. Pinch both short ends of the paper, with the crease facing up. Bring your hands together, causing the cut in the middle of the paper to open up. You should have a plus sign now.

The last step is to press all the pages down so the cover is on top. Mush the pages down and crease all the folds. You may need to use a marker or pencil for these creases, as they are all now stacked up on each other. Now that you have a little book, have the kids write their name on the cover. Read each page and have the children illustrate it accordingly.



As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus, and we tell everyone about how much Jesus loves them.

# Story Time with Jesus

Lesson Four

## The Parables of the Kingdom

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In the parable of the Hidden Treasure, we learned that Jesus can save people even when they aren't looking for him, like he saved Paul in the book of Acts.

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From the Parable of the Pearl, we learn that when people look for the truth, they find God and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mathew 13:44-50

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. 45 “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. 46 When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it! 47

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. 48 When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. 49 That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, 50 throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

we are to be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

From both the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl, we learn that salvation is a free gift from God, but following Jesus still costs us everything. Jesus has to be the most important relationship in our lives if

In the Parable of the Fishing Net, we learn that at the end of the world, those who follow Jesus will get to go to Heaven and those who don't will be thrown into Hell. This message is good news for those who love Jesus, but bad news for those who don't! Part of being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is telling everyone about Jesus so they don't get thrown away like the bad fish in the story.

