



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

## ***Resourcing for Prayer Network*** **Spiritual Guidelines on Kingdom (2)** **‘Thinking Kingdom’**

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**September 2017**

**In the introduction to this new series in August 2017 we took a closer look at the Values of the Kingdom and the nature and principles of the Kingdom of Heaven (or God) and we now move on to discover how Jesus communicated this good news to his disciples through his teaching as well as the first principles he taught them.**

### **Starting where People are**

People flocked to hear Jesus teaching - and not just because he was able to perform miracles and heal many people. Jesus spoke to them with power and authority and as if he knew what was important for them *'the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law'* (Matt 7.28-29). He also spoke of everyday things and in ways they could understand - he drew on the things they already knew and brought them to life. His teaching was usually very graphic with illustrations from their own experience which would have had relevance and been meaningful to all those who heard him - whether young or old and at all levels of understanding. Each one could get some truth out of the word and could feel they understood what Jesus was saying because he started where they were. His hearers would be catching a vision of a different kind of believer that is expected in the Kingdom of God.

### **The Challenge to Think**

Jesus challenged his listeners to think in different ways by giving them a new interpretation of things they were familiar with - he was showing them the difference between the ways of the world and the ways of the Kingdom. Even the calling of the disciples was going against the ways of the world - the humble fishermen (just ordinary people) can be given a vision of, and be elevated to become, *'fishers of men'* (Matt 4.19). Levi the tax collector, who was despised in the nation was called to be one of Jesus's disciples (Mark 6.14-17) *'When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'* Jesus responded with the highly significant phrase: *'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'* (Luke 5:31-32). This opens the door for change to take place in anyone who has the right heart and understanding - Jesus not only sees the potential in each one of us but he also is able to help us fulfil it.

### **Using Parables**

Jesus also often taught in parables which could be understood and appreciated by all - children love the parables of Jesus - but so do adults as there is often much more to them than immediately meets the eye. So with a little more knowledge, there can be a further message which will enable them to understand the nature of the Kingdom and be challenged to follow it. In all there are more than 30 different parables often repeated in both Luke and Matthew (with just a few in Mark) although some researchers can identify as many as 46. They all give guidance and support to the believer on the values that will be expected by those who give a priority to seeking first entry to the Kingdom (Matt 6.33).

### **Putting into Context**

Even though these parables were first told 2000 years ago they can still have a good and appropriate meaning for us today and they also have relevance for how we now live. But to get the full meaning we have to place ourselves as though we were in that society hearing this for the first time - and then the message comes even more alive. For example, sheep

farming was very different then, the shepherd was not behind the sheep driving them along with a sheepdog - he went ahead of his sheep and they followed him; when darkness fell they would be led into a safe sheep-pen with other sheep and in the morning the shepherd would call out his own flock who would recognise his voice and come to him (John 10). We can also understand better the significance of the first miracle recorded by John in Chapter 2 - the one when Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana - if we understand the usual procedures at the weddings of the day and the responsibilities of close friends of the family.

## Use of Idioms

Many of the old sayings in Judaism are still used today - people are encouraged at flag days and appeals today to 'give with a good eye' meaning to give generously: *'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'* (Matt 6.22-23). Can you find other idioms which help in our understanding of Kingdom thinking?

## The Starting Point(s)

Matthew follows the Beatitudes with his teaching on salt and light which are both parables in themselves encouraging us to look at the effect we have on others and to share the good things we have received with others.

Salt can be good or bad - but Christians are called to be *'the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot'* (Matt 5.13). It can have qualities of flavouring and preserving and when we delve more deeply we can see how being seen as salt ourselves can not only transform our own lives but also have a great effect on the quality of life of others. Both Luke (14.34-35) and Mark (9.50) record this.

Christians are also called to be *'the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven'* (Matt 5.14-15). This analogy also appears in both Luke (8.16 and 11.33) and Mark (4.21) with significant emphases. The good news of the Kingdom cannot and must not, be hidden. Jesus words *'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'* (John 8.12) gives even greater credence.

## The Containers!

Luke precedes his Blessings and Woes with two more parables which have significance for the structures needed which can contain these values and these also appear in Matthew. They are those of 'patching up old garments' and 'putting new wine into new wineskins' (Luke 5.37-39 and Matt 9.16-17). The emphasis here is that the Kingdom being proclaimed is a new concept and will need new structures in order to flourish. One of the lessons we learn here is that when we adopt this new way of thinking we ourselves must be prepared to change - and that change must be complete in all ways. If we only change partially and retain old habits which no longer serve the purpose for which they were created we will damage both the old and the new!

But there is much more in these two parables so perhaps you should take some time to study the passages above and discuss and share what you are learning. My own thinking explored our current church and fellowship structures of the Body of Christ as suitable vessels for this new thinking. I thought on the following:

1. The difference between 'revival' and 'renewal'.
2. The need to rejoice to know that new churches and fellowships are meeting as we become aware that new methods of worship are required for a new generation who will also need to have their own first-hand experience of God and his ways.
3. The need for new and old to grow to maturity and pass the baton onto others.
4. A further fascinating point is that we can rejoice that the old wine can still be of great value! The mature wine can set a standard and give an example as the new wine is formed.

Do you share any of these? What are the insights being revealed to you? Can you share your thinking on this with us?

Once we have the foundations and basic principles firmly established we can move on and look at some of the more memorable parables and how we should behave in the future. Next time we will be looking at the parables Jesus used to encourage us to build wisely on these foundations - and what happens if we do not.

*This paper comes to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in September 2017  
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