

**I want to share a little story. The lion was proud of his mastery of the animal kingdom.** One day he decided to make sure all the other animals knew he was king of the jungle. He was so confident that he bypassed the smaller animals and went straight to the bear. *"Who is the king of the jungle?"* the lion asked. *"Why, of course, you are,"* the bear replied. The lion gave a mighty roar of approval. Next he asked the tiger, *"Who is the king of the jungle?"* The tiger quickly responded, *"Everyone knows that YOU are, oh mighty lion."*

**Next on the list was the elephant.** *"Who is the king of the jungle?"* the lion asked. The elephant immediately grabbed the lion with his trunk, whirled him around in the air five or six times and slammed him into a tree. Then he pounded him onto the ground several times, dunked him under water in a nearby lake and finally dumped him out on the shore. The lion who was beaten, bruised, and battered struggled to his feet. *"Look,"* he told the elephant, *"just because you don't know the answer is no reason to get all upset."*

**That lame joke has very little to do with this sermon** - but there is also a slight connection because today I want to answer the question - who is the true King of the Jungle?

**If an extraterrestrial alien landed here and said,** *"Take me to your leader."* Where would you point them? If an emergency developed and someone shouted, *"Who's in charge here?"* How would you answer? What is the answer to the question, *"Who is your King?"* or *"Who is the King of the universe - over heaven and earth?"* What is the right answer? God, of course. More specifically it is God the Son, or Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is King over all forever.

**Results of election** or the lack thereof - still divided with no mandate. The political climate in our nation just stinks. I'm often tempted to throw in the towel and lose all hope for the future of America (and I would say that whoever won - or whoever eventually wins this election).

**I passed a political yard sign last week when taking a walk,** it said, *"Choose integrity and honesty."* I literally laughed out loud. I said, *"Is that even on the ballot?"* Once again, I forced myself to vote, but I didn't like any of my options very much. It's all very discouraging.

**I've spent several hours of my off days in recent months researching how to live off-grid in a RV** because some days I just want to check out and find quiet place in a mountain forest where I can step away and let the world burn. Some days I am just tired of all the fighting.

**At least I feel that way sometimes, until I'm reminded of the bigger picture.** The reason why we don't give up, or give in, or lose hope entirely. **This world / nation is not all there is.**

**This world - or this nation** - or any form of government or economic system (or our leaders at any level for a given season) are not the foundation of my hope and my reason for my being.

**So much of what the world holds dear**, builds their life upon, and fights to gain and hold on to, is not worth the love or loyalty or anxiety we attach to it. It's all somewhat transient - soon to pass away. The things of this earth, are not unimportant, I'm not saying that, but I am saying there are things that are more important and which serve as a better foundation for our lives.

**As I lament over the state of affairs in my beloved nation, I'm reminded of one very important truth: Jesus is still King and He is King Forever.**

**My older brother** posted something on Facebook last Tuesday that I liked very much. It says:

**After the election is over, we can still guarantee these ten results:**

1. God will still be on His throne.
2. Jesus will still be King of kings and Lord of lords.
3. The Bible will still have the answers to the most important questions
4. The tomb will still be empty
5. Jesus will still be the only way to heaven
6. Prayer will still work
7. The Cross, not the government, will still be our salvation
8. There will still be room at the cross
9. Jesus will still save anyone who places their faith and trust in Him
10. God will still be with us always - and He will never leave us or forsake us.

**NOTHING** will change the fact that Jesus still reigns and that God is sovereign over EVERY leader and EVERY government, and in that truth, and that ALONE will we find peace and rest.

**Today, I want to take a bit of a break from our series on Christian Character**, to talk about the King and His Kingdom. In truth this is still connected, because developing a Christian Character depends on submitting to Christ as King each and every day.

**The Bible teaches us that Jesus' message was primarily about the Kingdom of God.**

Matthew 4:23 says Jesus went about *"teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom..."* Acts 1:3 says that after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers *"over a period of forty days, and spoke about the Kingdom of God."*

**In fact, over 80 times in the Gospels alone, Jesus refers to the Kingdom.** In Matthew 6:33, following his teaching on the Lord's Prayer, Jesus said, ***"Seek first God's kingdom..."*** Clearly, the Kingdom of God was the priority for Christ. Therefore, it must be the priority of those who follow Him. In Luke, we read about people listening to Jesus preach, and they wanted to pin Him down and keep Him in their village or town. Jesus replied, *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."* (Luke 4:43)

**So, what's the kingdom of God?** Author / pastor, **Tim Keller** answers that question this way,

[The] kingdom of God can best be understood if we think about what happens when anybody comes into power. When a new president or a new king or a new governor or a new mayor or a new CEO – when anyone comes into power – that person’s new power is expressed through a new administration. The new administration is a new set of priorities and a new set of policies and a new set of strategies, and if the policies and priorities and strategies are wise, if they meet the needs, [then the people under them experience] “improved quality of life,” and that’s good!

Jesus Christ, though, is the supernatural and ultimate King; and when he comes into power, his power is expressed through a new administration called the kingdom. [This kingdom also has a] new set of priorities, a new set of powers, and a new set of strategies. The effects are far greater than anything we might call “improved quality of life.” The effects are more comprehensive and radical [and more eternal] than we can imagine.

To enter the kingdom of God means to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It means that we submit to his authority and leadership and kingship over every area of our lives.

And when we enter the kingdom of God and Jesus reigns as king over us, we learn that the values in Jesus’ kingdom are totally different than the values of this world.

**We don’t use the word "kingdom" very much these days**, and when we do, we’re usually talking about a place on the map, like the kingdoms of Morocco, or Brunei, or Great Britain or, more likely for our congregation, the “Magic Kingdom” at Disney World. In each of these cases, a kingdom is a specific geographical place defined by its borders. But the Greek word for "kingdom" in the Bible puts the emphasis on the rule or the reign of the king rather on the place where that king exercises his reign. So it is a question of scope, influence, and authority.

**I read about a time in Southeast Asia** many years ago. The competing Kings of Laos and Vietnam were fighting over a hotly disputed area populated by people they both claimed as their subjects. They found a way to decide which residents were under one government or the other. They concluded that the people who ate short-grain rice, built their houses on stilts, and decorated their homes with Indian-style serpents would be considered Laotian. The people who ate long grain rice, built their homes on the ground, and decorated their homes with Chinese-style dragons, would be considered Vietnamese.

**Even though they lived in the same geographical area**, their kingdom allegiance was determined by the values and the culture they chose to embrace. In a similar way, as followers of Jesus our ultimate allegiance is to God’s rule, and we must seek to live by the values and priorities of our King. Even though we live as Americans and seek to be good responsible citizens of our nation, our ultimate loyalty is to our God and King and Lord - Jesus Christ.

**On a Facebook profile** they ask you to name your political views - mine simply says, “*Citizen of the Kingdom of God.*” Why? Because, while I have strong political opinions, my participation in the Kingdom of God - and my loyalty to it - overrules everything else in life - it defines my life and the orientation or direction of all that I aim to say and do and become.

**Jesus taught that** through His life God's reign, God's Kingdom had descended upon the earth. He taught that His death and resurrection opened the door of God's kingdom so people might come in - here and now. Yet Christ also taught that God's kingdom wouldn't come completely, with all power and authority until His second coming at the end of human history.

**You might picture God's kingdom this way.** In Jesus' first coming, Christ opened the doors to God's kingdom, inviting all people to come in by trusting in Him. He also warned us that unless we freely accept the way God has opened - by grace through faith in Christ - we can't enter the Kingdom "here and now" or "then and there" in its heavenly glory.

**So God's kingdom reign is established in part through Jesus' first coming** as people chose to live in submission to Christ as their King, but there is another part. The Bible makes it clear that it's only when Jesus comes again at the end of the age that God's kingdom will be established on earth as it is in heaven. That is why we pray, "*Thy kingdom come...*," because all we need to do is look around and see that all of God's promises are **not yet** fulfilled. So we live in a time of tension between the birth of God's kingdom and the consummation of it.

**My Seminary newspaper was called, "*The In-Between Times*,"** and that is truly where we live. Through Jesus, our sins are already forgiven in the here and now, but because of the "not yet" we still struggle with the power of sin in our lives, we still fall and need to get up again. Through Jesus, our salvation is already guaranteed and we're promised complete healing and restoration in heaven, but because of the "not yet" our bodies still get sick and old and we still struggle with doubts and fears. Already the final fate of evil has been determined by Jesus through the victory of his death and resurrection, but still, because of the "not yet" there's still sin and evil present, and doing harm, in our world. So we live and trust and serve - and wait.

**So Jesus taught us to pray,** "*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" That focuses us on how we are to live in between the now and the not yet of God's Kingdom. While we wait, we must seek to live by the values of God's reign, even though, for the moment, we still live in "occupied" territory where the power of Satan still works to lure people into giving themselves over to the kingdoms of this world alone.

**I want to expand on few parts of our text to help us understand the Kingdom of God.**

**First Jesus says,** "*The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...*" In Jesus' day, the mustard seed, was considered to be the tiniest of seeds. Yet the marvel is found in that such a small seed can produce a that plant can grow as high as 12-15 ft tall.

**Jesus uses this very apt picture to prophesy the spread of Christianity** - from a very small and humble beginning, about 120 disciples led by 11 apostles at the time of His ascension, the church has grown to include billions of people living today for Christ and His Kingdom. And that doesn't even compare to the glory of the Kingdom when Christ returns to establish it fully.

**This idea of the kingdom's remarkable growth, despite humble beginnings,** was probably told, in part, to reassure Jesus' disciples that their investment in the kingdom would amount to something amazing - it was a call to persevere, to have faith, to trust God and not give up.

**And that is important for us as well** - we need to remember that the power of Christ and the Kingdom of God will triumph completely in the end and we can share in that ultimate victory.

**I especially love this image of a mustard seed,** a little larger than a speck of dust, being used to represent the life, power and growth of the Kingdom of God.

**I read a story about a cemetery plot in Hanover, Germany.** It belongs to a woman who died as an antagonistic atheist. She didn't believe in Christ, or His resurrection, but she decided to hedge her bet, just in case. Strangely, she directed in her will that her grave be made so secure that if there were a resurrection, it could not reach her. So on her grave workers placed huge slabs of granite and marble cemented together and fastened with heavy steel clasps. On the marker were inscribed these words: *"This burial place must never be opened."*

**However,** by a strange twist of fate or providence, a small seed was covered over by the stones. It began to grow very slowly until it pushed its way through the soil and out from beneath the stone. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs were gradually shifted so that the steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets and the grave was exposed. That seed became a tree that pushed aside the stones. The power in that seed was greater than she could have imagined.

**Likewise, the Kingdom of God,** and its earthly manifestation - **the church,** has the power to do things that no human institution can match. God's power at work through His people has a life within it that it can't be stopped. **It all starts when a small seed of the Gospel** is planted inside the heart of an individual. Once that seed takes root and grows, then what was otherwise lifeless and empty can become filled with the power and grace of God both now and forever.

**Jesus also says, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast (or leaven)."** Many people enjoy fresh baked bread (and many are like me and enjoy it way too much), but most of us don't make it the way they did in Bible times. We either buy at the store or bake it from a mix of some kind. But to make bread you still need the basic components of yeast and flour and you must knead them together in the dough to start an amazing chemical reaction that causes the bread to rise. Yeast, or leaven, is usually a small portion of fermented dough used to permeate and ferment other dough - and it is that fermentation that creates a wonderful transformation and growth.

**It only takes a little yeast to raise the flour and make it ready for baking bread.** As little as two pounds of yeast starter can raise 500 pounds of bread dough. Jesus is saying that, like yeast in flour, the Kingdom of God is meant to permeate and transform nations and all people - and it happens wherever and whenever Christian disciples live out their in their daily lives.

**The Kingdom of God is intended to be global and universal.** It is a spiritual kingdom not limited to national boundaries. The advent and growth of the Kingdom is intended to transform the world - to make it rise up to match the grace and love and justice and holiness of heaven.

**I'm going to skip the part about, "*The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure and a priceless pearl.*"** For now remember that Jesus calls us to deep commitment to His Kingdom - but first He reminds us that the value of that Kingdom is worth whatever it takes to share in it.

**Jesus goes on to say, "*The Kingdom of heaven is like a net..*"** This is a parable most of the disciples would be able to picture in their minds. Several of them were fishermen by trade. The bible says, when Jesus called them they left their nets and followed Him.

**I've never been much of a fisherman...** I don't have much patience or any skill for it. When I want fish I go fishing at Kroger or Red Lobster or Long John Silver's - anyone else? Those are great spots! The only time I fail to make a catch is because I'm waiting for a coupon. I might be more successful if I employed the fishing method Jesus is describing here.

**In Jesus' time there were two different kinds of nets used on the Sea of Galilee.** A casting net is small, bell shaped net, and an individual fisherman could use it by himself. The other kind of net, that Jesus mentions in this parable, is a **drag-net**, and it is much larger. In Bible times a drag-net could cover as much as one square mile of water surface area. A group of fishermen would work together to spread out the drag-net between two boats and then they would drag it toward the shoreline (or they could even wade out in the water to set it up and pull it in). By the time they got the net to shore it would be filled with all kinds of fish.

**Men on the shore** had the task of going through the catch and separating the good from the bad. They would separate the useful from the useless, like separating Walleye from Carp, but for them it would also be separating the clean, or kosher, from the unclean and unkosher.

**For example the most common fish in the Sea of Galilee, then and now, is a kind of Tilapia -** what they often call "St. Peter's Fish." Another common fish is Catfish - but that is not considered kosher because it has no scales - so they would just throw it back, or into the trash.

**It is very important to note that this parable points to both the now, and the not yet, of the Kingdom of God.** The **now** part is the fishing. The **not yet** part is the separating of the fish.

**The parable** is very similar to Jesus' stories about the weeds and the wheat, and the sheep and the goats. The weeds and the wheat are left to grow together until the time for harvest - and the sheep and the goats are left to graze together until it is time for wool to be gathered. Jesus is saying this - make no mistake - there is coming a final day and with it there will be a final judgement on where we stand, and with whom we stand, and to whom we belong.

**On that day the Bible says God will judge the souls of men and women.** It won't matter how much wealth we had, or what power or glory or good works we enjoyed, or what nation we call home - what will matter is whether we are citizens of the Kingdom of God - already. That "not yet" belongs to those who are part of the Kingdom "now." We can enter the eternal Kingdom now by placing our faith in Christ as our savior, our Lord, our God and our King.

**I want to make the point that** - as Christians - it's not our job to separate. It's our job to fish. We are not called to Christianize the world, we are called to Evangelize it - which means we proclaim Christ - we share good news. We cannot respond for others or choose their response - we can only spread the net - and let God sort out those who truly believe from those who don't.

**This doesn't mean that we should condone or ignore evil** in the Church or in the world - because it harms people and our love for people compels us to act against what is evil. But it does mean that the final removal of all that is evil is God's responsibility and not ours. Our job is to invite people to trust in Christ, and then to nurture them as disciples through all the changes and challenges involved in submitting our will ever more to the will of our King.

**We vote for political leaders in our nation - with mixed results.** Historically, pledging your faith and loyalty and obedience to a King was a much different thing. Instead of voting, you knelt down in total humility and submission as you recognized the King's authority. You might hold and surrender your sword, or lay down your lands, your wealth, your home and family, your freedom, whatever represented your whole life. There were usually many benefits that came along with that pledge of fealty or faithfulness. Being a Christian is about being saved by grace through faith in Christ, but we often forget is that faith also involves surrender and submission to Christ as both savior, and Lord - Lord - is just another word for King.

**Christ is King, but He may or not be recognized by you as your King.** That doesn't change who Christ is, but it makes a difference about who and where you are and where you're going.

**I think Christ ended this series of parables as he did,** with a sobering challenge, because He wants us to consider His invitation to a commitment to Him and to the Kingdom of God.

**Know this - God loves you and wants you to be with Him forever.** God wants to make you more than a loyal subject. God wants to make a you a full heir as a beloved child of God. So God has made a way for you to enter into the Kingdom - it is through Christ here and now.

**In the midst of all the challenges** and uncertainties in the world right now - there is one place where you can plant your feet and establish a sure and certain foundation for life. That place is the Kingdom of God which will still be standing when all the nations of this earth are dust.

**So let me be direct - Are you in or not?** Who is your King and what is your kingdom?