

Checking In

1. Take a few minutes to check in with everyone, see how they are doing, and open with prayer.
2. Church Life: Nourish and Grow Women's Retreat April 13th-14th at Mission Hills; Ministry Partners needed for Children, Student, Music and Media Tech. Baptisms are on April 29th between services.

Learning

Knowing God

Key Doctrines

- *God* – God's kingdom is the realm in which his will is done, and he is in the presence of his people in and through the King, Jesus.
- *Man* – Human beings are spiritually blind and cannot see God's kingdom, and therefore are subject to the power of a different kingdom.
- *Church* – The church is the concrete presence of the kingdom on earth, the place where his will is being done, and where he reigns through King Jesus in the midst of his people

Key Observations

- *Read:* Matthew 13:10-17; 34-35; Matthew 4:17; 6:10; Luke 17:20-21;
 - In reading these passages what do you notice about the presence of God's kingdom? *The presence of the kingdom is always associated with Jesus, it is he who is proclaiming its presence (because he is the King).*

We also notice that it is the place where his will is done (in heaven, thus Matthew's language of the 'kingdom of heaven'). In other words, the kingdom is always present where Jesus is present doing God's will.

- Notice also the context of Jesus' explanation of the purpose of the parables in Matthew 13:10-11, what is significant about that? *What is significant is that Jesus is letting 'the disciples' in on the secret while others are left blind to it. In other words, the disciples represent the church, as those who have been let in on the "mystery" of God's kingdom. What is remarkable about the disciples is that they don't seem to be in any way different from those who don't see, they simply have been given the grace of being told the secret by Jesus. Hopefully this can humble us into recognizing that in belonging to the church we aren't "better" in any recognizable sort of way, we are simply those who have been let in on the greatest secret in the world.*
- *Read:* Read Matthew 13:10-17; 6:33; 2 Corinthians 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-3
 - What do these passages have to say about why people can't see God's kingdom? *These passages teach us that there are complex reasons why people cannot see the kingdom of God. One, is that God has intentionally hidden it so that we might seek it out. Two is that people don't want to see it, as the quote from the prophet Isaiah that Jesus uses reminds us; specifically, that people don't want to turn away from what their heart desires most, which is something other than the kingdom of God. Third people can't see it because they are being blinded by the work of the "god of this world" who is Satan.*

- How do the parables of Jesus function in relation to people’s blindness? *The parables of Jesus are used by him to do two opposite things at the same time – to reveal and to conceal the hidden kingdom. The parables, as stories reveal the secrets of the kingdom to those who desire to know but can’t yet see what the kingdom of God is like. The parables also conceal or hide what God’s kingdom is like from those who don’t care enough to seek. They view the stories as troubling, confusing, or even just silly, and continue on the course of life that they have been on.*

- *Read: Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18, 43*
 - What makes the proclamation of the kingdom of God “good news/gospel”? *What makes the proclamation of the kingdom of God good news is that what had been hidden in secret is now being brought to light – God’s gracious reign in and through his King has come and is available to all; most especially the kingdom has been made available to the last, the least, the little, the lost, and the dead. In other words, the availability of the kingdom isn’t to the smart, the put together, the wealthy, the powerful, the “in” crowd, the “have’s”, or to any sect or group. The kingdom is available by grace through faith in King Jesus to the very least.*

Listening

Responding to God

- In light of hearing this week’s sermon, our study together, and listening to God’s Word, how might God be inviting you to take a step of obedience?

Loving

Obeying God

- What is happening in my own life right now that I need to share and for which I need prayer?

- This week I am committed to praying for _____ about:

Checking Out

- What was most meaningful about this group session for you (*Give each person 1-2 sentences to share*)?

- Close in Prayer and Read Matthew 19:14.