Good morning everyone, it is great to be with you, before we get started, lets pray.

Matthew chapter 13 versus 31 to 46 are the lectionary readings for today the 26th of July. We will be looking at verses 31 to 35 and 44 to 46. The reason we will skip verse 36 through to 43 is because that passage is Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds which is the parable beforehand.

I remember as a young boy dreaming and imagining what heaven would be like. Often I would think of it as a place high in the sky with big white fluffy clouds and it contained everything that I at the time held most dear. Which was ice cream, my family, and in the middle there was a big lake where we could go water skiing. Surely I could not get bored of that. And I think I speak for most of us when I say that we often get a little bit excited when we read the words of Jesus "this is what the kingdom of heaven" is like. So then, maybe you like me will be surprised to learn that 'kingdom of heaven' in this passage doesn't mean ONLY heaven - but actually the present.

So why are the words "kingdom of heaven" being used here by the author Matthew? Matthew was being very courteous to Jews at the time. In their culture they saved using God's name for times of utmost respect or necessity. In the other Gospels, Mark Luke and John, they use the term 'kingdom of God". So when we read "the kingdom of heaven" in this gospel of Matthews we need to understand, Jesus is not just talking about heaven.

As an overview today we are looking at four parables which are used to describe the kingdom of God or as Matthew says 'kingdom of heaven'. The parable of the mustard seed and the leaven are a little bit grey in their interpretation as they are very unique and Jesus does not explain them. Jesus also does not explain the parable of the hidden treasure and pearl of great value but these are more straight forward in their symbolism. The message behind them however has more than meets the eye. In the conclusion we will look at the undeniable facts from the four parables together in light of the Gospel.

So, I want to start at verses 34 & 35. All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables, indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what is being hidden since the foundation of the world.

This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah which we will look at in a minute. This is key because it gives great evidence to the fact that Jesus, is the Messiah, the one and only son of God, this man is not a fake. He is the real deal, who fulfils the old Testament scriptures that promised the coming of God's son. This also shows that Jesus has understood what's been hidden since the foundation of the world, he has been since the very beginning.

Apart from fulfilling ancient prophecies, why would he speak to people in a way that conceals the truth to some but reveal it to others? Lets look at Mathew 13 v 10-17

***10*** *Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"* ***11*** *And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.* ***12*** *For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.* ***13*** *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

Let me interrupt here, Jesus is talking about understanding information, he is talking about knowledge. If you understand a little, you will understand alot, in abundance he says. But if you do not understand much, you will understand even less. Lets continue,

*14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:*

*"'"You will indeed hear but never understand,*
*and you will indeed see but never perceive."*
*15*
*For this people's heart has grown dull,*
*and with their ears they can barely hear,*
*and their eyes they have closed,*

*lest they should see with their eyes*
*and hear with their ears*
*and understand with their heart*
*and turn, and I would heal them.'*

*16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

What does this spell out for us? Our hearts grow dull without hearing Gods word, the truth. When we **do** hear and understand God's word, he will heal us.

When God, by his grace, removes our spiritual deafness and blindness, we begin to understand what is in these parables. It is my prayer that we begin to understand not just in our mind, but we understand in our hearts. Those who God is revealing himself to, those who are seeking God, those are the people who understand.

OK, so now we've established why Jesus spoke in parables, let's look at our first parable, the mustard seed.

*31 He put another parable before them, saying, z "The kingdom of heaven is like a a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."*

the mustard seed. This is a well-known parable particularly among gardeners and botanists. This is also a passage very popular among those who try to discredit the Bible or Jesus' intelligence. If you do some digging into the size of the mustard seed you will find it is **not** the smallest seed, however many people in Israel in that time knew it to be a, really small seed. As well as this, the mustard tree is actually more of a shrub than a tree. So does Jesus not know all things? Let's remember that this is not a fact file, this is a parable. Jesus has set up an image that his disciples could understand the concept of. So, the depiction is that this large shrub would grow so big, that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

In some parables, Jesus later gives an explanation to his disciples, leaving no question as to the meaning. But here, he has not. I have read a lot of commentary about this parable and there are a lot of very plausible explanations as to where we fit and where God fits into this story. For instance the man who plants the field, we have good reason to believe that that is God, for he plants the seed of truth in our hearts.  some commentators say that the field is our heart or the church and that he will grow us to be established, and birds of the air represent the church supporting others. Some commentators say that the seed represents the small faith which God gives us and then through his grace, grows to be mighty and rooted in him. Some say it means God's kingdom will grow to be not only for the jews but all nations. All of these are reasonable

interpretations, but today I don't want to insert us into this parable. What we *can* take from this is that Jesus is giving an example of something that is obscure and naturally shouldn't happen. a shrub cannot become a tree. This example would not have made natural, logical sense to anyone. Jesus is describing an impossible scenario.

Now let's look at the leaven.

*Verse 33 he told them another parable, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.*

Leaven is what we would know today as yeast, the key ingredient to making bread.

I'm not going to pretend to be an expert on breadmaking but I understand that once you put the yeast in you can't take it back out again. The whole dough is changed in its entirety by this ingredient. It's not done in part or portion but it's a natural reaction that completely changes the property of the substance, it cannot be undone. And on that note most times when yeast is being used as an example in the Bible it's negative. As if it's gone bad, a small amount of sin corrupts everything, one lie perverts the truth, but here Jesus, is using this as a **positive** thing to describe his kingdom.

I had a look at what three measures of flour actually is, it's roughly about 20 kg. That should produce enough bread to feed 100 people. So for the humble homemakers, hearing this parable, they would've thought "whooo! that's a lot of dough", you wouldn't normally make such a great amount. Also it begs the question, why would someone try and **hide** yeast in a huge amount of flour?

So again I read some commentaries, perhaps we are the flour and the leaven is God and he completely by his grace transforms us to be bread, figuratively. Or that Jesus, the son of man, through his death on the cross would change this hopeless world. Or that when you discover the truth of the gospel, the effect of that cannot be hidden in your life.

These are again reasonable interpretations, but one thing we can take for sure, it is **impossible** to hide yeast in flour, you can look at that risen, beautiful baked bread and know, someone has put yeast in that, likewise the kingdom of God cannot be hidden.

Let's now move to our next two parables about treasure.

There are so many times in my life where a friend has come up to me and said "Fraser! You have to have this new great thing, you have to have it, it will change your life! So naturally, I mentally prepare myself for my mind to be blown in amazement. I specifically remember the first r*obotic vacuum* cleaner. People would say it cleans when you're asleep! - And I go to see it and its stuck behind a chair, ramming incessantly trying to escape. Meanwhile, It's slowly running out of battery. I'm sure there are some of you who support the robotic vacuum cleaner regime, but I would hardly call it life changing.

Im sure you have hundreds of other examples where something or someone has promised fulfilment in your life but come up short. A few months ago I met a bloke who mines for opals down at lightning ridge. He explained to me that a lot of days he comes up short, but when he finds one, its like finding treasure. Each stone is unique with its own character. Finding such a stone brings up an immense amount adrenaline and dopamine which further drives the urge to keep digging. That one stone is just not satisfying enough. So what does Jesus say about hidden treasure?

V44

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

Jesus describes a man who is working away in a field. He is not the owner of it, yet. He isn't searching for anything. He is just humbly working away, looking down at his feet watching the soil turn in front of him, at this point in the story I can relate to it a lot. I've spent a lot of hours in a field watching dirt be shifted ever so slightly by a plough or a cultivator and I can promise you, I have never found anything except for more dirt. But this man, something shiny catches his eye something unusual something intriguing of all places in the middle of a field finds treasure. After realising it's great value he buries it again and goes and sells everything that he has and buys that field. this man saw incredible value. And he wasn't looking for it.

Similar story, the parable of the pearl of great value - *again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant, in search of fine pearls who, finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

very similar to the previous parable, the merchant finds something of great value, sells all he has gives everything up to buy it. Except this time a merchant. Typically a merchant is someone wealthy, who trades and deals with fine jewellery all the time.

Through all of the precious jewels he has seen in his life, he finds this one pearl that is worth selling up everything just so he can have it. I wonder what my mate mining in the Lightning Ridge would think of this! Would there ever be an opal he'd sell everything for?

What's interesting about these two parables is the first man working in the field was ***not*** looking for treasure but he sees and immediately recognises, It's infinite value. In contrast the merchant ***is*** searching for pearls and gems and finds the pearl of infinite value. He immediately recognises it's immense worth and does the same thing, sells everything to have it.

But what would happen if these men didn't recognise the treasure?

I was once desilting a dam, and before I started I walked around the edge and on the ground, found a small fossil of a leaf. I picked it up, thought "oh yeah, that looks cool, there will probably be heaps of them" and I chucked it away. It probably wasn't worth much and it sure wasn't treasure. But it was rare. And I desilted that dam for another 2 days and each time I would get out to survey the job, I never found another fossil.

What if the man working the soil did a "fraser", found the treasure, picked it up, not recognising its importance, threw it away. It would seem that some people walk through life searching for the reason of their existence and others walk **aimlessly.** Likewise there are people who know **of** Jesus Christ. Some may say his name everyday. But they refuse to believe that he is the way the truth and the life. Jesus in these parables is telling us plainly and simply, The kingdom of God is true treasure, and it is worth giving up everything to have it.

These two men sold their material possessions to acquire the treasure, So does this mean we can buy salvation? No absolutely not. There is no payment plan, no barter system, no option to make a deposit up front, pay in small bits and receive when its all paid off.

So how can we purchase the Field?

Sometimes we can be lulled into the illusion that we can buy some favour with God through our actions. More commonly its not an abrupt thought, but the mentality can slither in. For example, "I've read my bible this morning, now I've earnt some time to doom scroll Facebook". Or "I kinda ripped a bloke off because he didn't know any better, instead of giving the money back, Ill tithe a bit more to smooth things over."

When I think of times in my life where I have done this, it really makes my gut churn. Its the equivalent of putting a bandaid on a gunshot wound, it does no justice.
Or have you ever seen the meme of a woman throwing a small bucket of water on a massive burning house with the caption 'me trying to wash away my sins with my works'. We use self justification to slowly make amends for our failure, and in doing so we think it pays the debt. We, myself included, need the constant reminder not to be tempted to try and smooth things over with our self reliance. But in every moment, rely on Christ Jesus and his gift of grace.

For myself I have often struggled with comfort. On one hand I love it and on the other hand I can't stand that I constantly need it. What if I went and became a minimalist? got rid of the tv, the couch, the dishwasher, the dryer. What if I drive a car that costs more to constantly repair than purchase a reliable one? I get into the delusion that if I make my life difficult enough, I will be able to stand before God and say "Oh I did it tough Lord, please let me in" This will not buy the field.

What if I sit in a church pew every Sunday? **will that be enough to buy the field? No.** God calls us to gather as believers and encourage each other in the ways of the Lord absolutely, but we as individuals need to first understand that we need to repent from our wickedness and trust in the Lord for his salvation.

Paul's letter to Titus chapter 3: v5-7 declares -

*5 He (Jesus) saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness,*
*but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Those those of you who are in Christ - let us never forget the miracle of what He has done for us when he brought us from death to life. Like turning a mustard seed into a habitable tree & changing flour into risen bread, he has done the IMPOSSIBLE by saving us. And if you're feeling a little monotonous, stuck in the daily grind, let us remember the beauty of this treasure we have found! Our Lord is the most beautiful, glorious and wondrous treasure to behold and because He has taken away our sin we can enjoy Him and treasure Him all of our days. No matter our earthly circumstance we have the greatest treasure!

For those not yet in Christ, please recognise the impossibility of your situation - that you cannot fix yourself. None can wash their own sin, but Christ the Saviour has taken it for you on the cross. Come to Him and trust in His work alone. When He died he declared 'It is Finished!' Declaring that the price for sin had been paid once and for all. His work is a sure thing and like leaven added to flour, cannot be undone. Come to Him and He will bring you from death to life. This greatest treasure, peace with the God who made you and sustains the whole Universe by His word - is truly worth losing all we have in this world to have it.

The parable of the mustard seed explains to us that Gods kingdom is impossible to attain without him. He places the pearl of great worth infront of us. He gives us eyes to see it. He gives us the knowledge to understand its true value. When Jesus died on the cross he bore the wrath of God which was meant for us. He paid for us what was owed to God. Not only does he show us great mercy but he justifies us before the Lord. When we trust in Christs work on the cross, Jesus makes the impossible, possible. He takes our unrighteousness, and gives us his perfect righteousness, so that we can stand before God. So that we can have peace with him. And I testify to that there is no greater treasure than peace with the Lord God. Praise be to God for no-one and nothing can separate us from his great love. Like leaven that cannot be removed, like a tree that cannot be uprooted, like treasure in your hands. Lets pray