**Jesus came to set up the Kingdom of God as taught in his parables.**

Three headings, actually questions;-

1) Why did Jesus use parables?

 2) What do the parables say about the kingdom?

3) What does it mean to be in the kingdom?

***Mark 1:14-15 gives us an introduction*** “*Jesus Christ, (*1:1 the Son of God*) went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

***1) But why then did Jesus choose to describe what the kingdom is like through Parables*** rather than in plain, direct language?

Jesus came to his own, but they did not receive him, The Jewish leaders would not accept the plain truths spoken by Jesus. The nature of the kingdom and Jesus’ own central role in its manifestation, was not what Israel expected nor wanted. Israel expected a crowned King coming in power and glory, bringing worldly victory and domination over the surrounding pagan nations and oppressors, and therefore establishing Israel as God’s unique people enjoying God’s gifts of peace, justice & prosperity, but they saw none of this in this man from Nazareth.

TRUE, Jesus taught with authority, BUT Mark tells us he ate with (2:15) *‘sinners and tax collectors’,* did not observe religious *fasting rules* (2:18); did *unlawful* things on the Sabbath (2:24); consorted with people *having diseases* (1:34), and,.. was not Jesus demonstrating *complicity* with the devil when evil spirits obeyed him and were cast out? But above all, he *blasphemed* by claiming to forgive sins which only God can do (2:5-7).

YET they were forgetting that their own Scripture spoke of ‘new’ things to come. The LORD had promised, (Is 42:9) *‘the former things have taken place, and new things I declare’*. (Jer 31:31) *‘I will make a new covenant with you’* (Ezek 36:24-27) *‘I will cleanse you, give you a new heart, a new spirit and put My Spirit in you’* I will (Jer 31:33-34)*‘write my Word on their hearts and they will know me, from the least to the greatest’*. I will (Is 61:1) *‘will bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and release those imprisoned in darkness’.* Which Jesus declared in the synagogue (Lk 4:16-21) was what he had come to fulfill. God’s focus was not about earthly, worldly ambitions, but transforming people from the inside, ***"My kingdom is not of this world. It is from another place, from God, and is within you."*** (Jn 18:36;Lk 17:21)

But many in the synagogues were not impressed by Jesus’ actions, words or parables. To which Jesus replied:

(Matt 13:13-15) : *"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'*

His parables were not deliberately intended to confuse or prevent understanding, that would be contrary to the whole purpose of God and of Christ coming into the world. Indeed, Jesus came to disclose things hidden since Creation, even of the kingdom. He who has ears let him hear. BUT Jesus knew that many of his hearers would be unable to grasp his message. To the hostile heart, or just casual mindset, the parables would remain simple stories, FOR The secrets of the kingdom are not found by natural insight, but by ***revelation*** as given by God

To quote from Prov 1:5, 7 *‘let the wise listen and add to their understanding of proverbs & parables. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge’.*

The parables are opened up to those who have a fear of the LORD. who have a loving reverence for God, his lordship and his word (Ecc 12:13), to those who have a heart for Christ Jesus, who seek every possible fragrance of Him. One has to be close to God to have revealed the things of God.

Jesus was always willing to explain the secrets of His kingdom to his devoted disciples (4:11), even adding increasing measures. But the religious leaders, lost in pious Temple rituals and worship, had little of God and were even in danger of losing Him completely. (Mk 4:25)

SO, these parables of the kingdom are spoken to the whole world but only those with a heart for Christ Jesus will understand, discern, and be wise as to their meaning. (Mk 4:11-12). Those on the outside (of Christ) *"will be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding’*. To them the Kingdom of God will remain a mystery, and so be closed off.

***2) So with the Spirit’s guidance let’s see what the parables do say of the Kingdom.*** (Mk 4, Matt 13, Lk 8,18)

The kingdom parables start with the Sower of GOOD NEWS. The SOWER is the Son of Man, the title Jesus used for himself, and like a farmer, he sows seed throughout his field, the world. (Matt 13:37) The SEED being sown is *‘the word of* God’ (Luke 8:11.). The Kingdom is being initiated.

Now the response is seen to be varied. Many hear the Word but the devil snatches it away, Others take it to heart but it doesn’t stick as the persuasions of the sinful flesh & worldly attractions overrule. How little did they see God in Jesus. How reluctant were they to humbly come close to Him.

But for those (Lk 8:15) *‘with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it’,* and obey, to them ‘the secrets of the kingdom of God are revealed, and they are declared to be, and blessed as, ( Matt 13:37) *‘sons and daughters of the kingdom.*

And this kingdom will grow, from small beginnings (like a mustard seed) but ever increasing in size, for through the Gospel, the ‘Living Word’, God dynamically works His power (Mk 4:26-29; Rom 1:16) nurturing, giving life, to the seed that has fallen on good soil, doing so as thoroughly as the pervasiveness of yeast in dough.

But Kingdom growth and size is not all it seems. FOR, as the Son of Man sows good seed that germinates, at the same time the evil one, the devil, sows weeds alongside. These weeds, like darnel (a grassy plant), initially grow indistinguishable from the healthy plants yet at harvest time produce no godly fruit and will be gathered together and burned. Furthermore, as the kingdom grows larger, *‘birds of the air’* (Satan’ agents Mk 4:4) *‘perch in its branches.’* (Mk13:32) ready to ‘hi-jack’ both the kingdom and the Lordship of Christ Jesus.

So today, in the present age, the visible kingdom, the church, will contain different sorts of people (seed) not all of whom will have been rooted in good soil and nurtured by the Holy Spirit. And at harvest time at the end of the age, (Matt 13:41-43; Mk 13:26-27)) ‘*The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the (eternal) kingdom of their Father’.*

The eternal age to come is only for the righteous who now live by faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ. FOR, just as only God is GOOD, that is HOLY, so is His kingdom (Heb 12:14) *‘without holiness no one will see the Lord.’* And it is Christ Jesus, God the Son, through His sacrificial blood, who alone can do the impossible, to cleanse of sin, to make people holy, release from darkness and so bring sons to glory, even calling them brothers in his own family. We read in Heb 2:11 *‘Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.’*

This family relationship within the kingdom between the King and those he has redeemed, is not specifically addressed in the parables but is key as to how we respond and live as kingdom people now, in the present age and in the eternal age to come. So….Finally..

***3)What does it mean to be in the kingdom? That we are All One in Christ***

In letter to Galatians the Apostle Paul refers to God’s covenant promise to bless Abraham’s seed, his offspring, his descendants. Paul declares that (Gal 3:16) this seed, is the ***‘one person who is Christ’***. AND (3:29) ‘*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed’*. For the Word, even Christ Jesus himself, is written, embedded on your heart, within your very soul (1 Jn 3:9)

So, King and kingdom members are spiritually united, together as ONE. AS Jesus so majestically describes it, (Jn 17:21) ‘*that all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us’*

AWESOME that we should share in this glory. YET that is how the grace of God is expressed through faith in Jesus.

And it means that as Jesus is the heavenly man, so every kingdom member is heavenly as He is. Just as God the Father embraced Christ Jesus as King, so he will likewise embrace the whole Kingdom body.

All the heavenly blessings that the Father intends for us are already in Christ Jesus and from him will we receive them, some in this life many more in the heavenly next.

So as Kingdom children, let Christ Jesus reign in us, let him be the first in our hearts, day and night, and He our vision while we wait for his return when we will be transformed to be like him and see him as he is, in all his glory. Meanwhile, sow the Word at every opportunity offered, for the kingdom has not yet come to completion.

***Prayer***: *Heavenly Father, may these thoughts and words be near to our hearts and minds as we live and seek to glorify You, even Christ, in the power & presence of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*