



The King and I

*Stories told by Jesus about
God's kingdom*

by Pete and Anne Woodcock

Leader's Guide



Introduction

Welcome to the leader's guide for *The King and I*.

The King and I introduces people to Jesus Christ and his teaching, by looking carefully at seven stories Jesus told about God's kingdom, recorded in chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel, in the New Testament part of the Bible. In just four sessions, we aim to present the Christian message in a non-threatening way, either in a small group or one-to-one, to people who may know little or nothing about the Christian faith and Jesus Christ.

The King and I is part of the *Jesus and You* series of four-session introductions to Jesus Christ. To get started, you will need *The King and I* handbooks for each person who joins the group, the DVD and this leader's guide.

Note: You can find plenty of helpful information and ideas about setting up and running a *Jesus and You* group in *How to run a Jesus and You group*. It's worth reading if you are new to doing this, or are introducing the Christian faith to people who may not be familiar with one or more of the following:

- the English language
- church or any "religious activity"
- reading, studying and discussing a text, like the Bible

How to run a Jesus and You group is available as a free download from The Good Book Company websites:

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk/thekingandi

USA & Canada: www.thegoodbook.com/thekingandi

Australia: www.thegoodbook.co.au/thekingandi

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz/thekingandi

This leader's guide gives target answers to the questions in the handbook. These are what you should be aiming at in your group discussions. *How to run a Jesus and You group* (see above) includes useful advice about how you can best help your group get the most from discussing the questions.

At the end of the leader's guide you will find scripts for the "Downloads" (DVD talks). If you cannot use the DVD in the sessions, you will need to present the "Downloads" yourself.

1 The four soils

Matthew 13 v 1-23

This first part of *The King and I* introduces people to the fact that Jesus came to teach us a message from God—“the word” or God’s word. We shall see that this message is like no other because only Jesus’ message can give us life for ever. So it is supremely important that we listen to the message of Jesus.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about... messages.

What messages have you received today? Where or how?

Which ones do you follow most?

These introductory questions aim to show people that all day and every day messages are communicated to us, some of which we ignore or reject and others which we follow. First suggested answers might include text messages, emails and phone calls. Give a couple of examples to help people think about “messages” in a broader sense: advertisements, the words of songs, the storyline in a soap or film, traffic signs and directions, shop displays etc. Which ones people are most likely to follow probably depends on two things:

1. Who gives the message? Do they have authority over us (eg: a policeman or boss)? Or are they someone who we love and trust (eg: our partner or a good friend, rather than a stranger)?
2. How much do we think it will benefit us to follow the message? Eg: A weather report for our local area, compared with one for people on the other side of the world.

As we shall see in *The King and I*, Jesus’ message is the most important message for us to follow, both because of who he is—the King sent to us by God—and because of what his message can do for us—we can have life for ever.

The story

Pages 21-28 of the Handbook contain the Bible text for all four sessions, and can be pulled out of the centre of the Handbook, so that people don’t have to keep turning pages between the questions and the Bible passage.

There are two ways in which you can present the Bible passage:

1. Read it aloud with your group following the text on p22 of the Handbook. For tips on reading aloud with groups who may need extra help, see ***How to run a Jesus and You group: Getting started / Getting into the Bible / Reading aloud.***

2. If you are using the DVD, you will find “The Story” as an option on the menu for each session. The words appear on the screen as the passage is read out.

Test yourself: How much can you remember?

(**Note:** The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It’s **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn’t have to be done as a strict memory test—let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

- A c—in a boat
- B c—a farmer (it doesn’t matter if he was good or bad)
- C b—most of the seed grew, but didn’t produce a crop
- D b—The disciples learned the meaning of Jesus’ story from Jesus
- E b—they are stubborn (they don’t want to listen and understand)
- F c—the good soil, where the seed produces a crop

ONLY HALF THE STORY

(From Matthew 13 v 1-17)

1. *Who heard what?*

- ***The crowd (v2-3):*** They heard the story but not Jesus’ explanation afterwards.
- ***The disciples (v 10):*** They heard the story and the explanation.
- ***Why did the disciples hear more than the crowd?***
Because after the story they came to Jesus (v 10).

2. *Imagine you leave with the crowd after hearing Jesus’ story (after verse 9). What might you think was the message in the story? [See Handbook p7 for a list of ideas.]*

Let people choose the idea that most appeals to them, or give an idea of their own. There are no right or wrong answers here. This question aims to show how people might give many different meanings to this story of Jesus. None of these meanings are even close to Jesus’ meaning. This shows that we won’t understand what Jesus is saying in this story unless we also listen to his explanation.

Note: This is how many people can make the Bible say anything they want it to say. If we want truly to understand the Bible, we mustn’t simply decide ourselves what we think it says.

3. Most people didn't come to Jesus for an explanation. What does Jesus say about them in verse 13?

He says they look, but they don't really see; and they listen but they don't really hear or understand. There is no change in the way they think.

4. Look at verse 15. Why don't they come to Jesus?

Jesus says they are stubborn ie: they **refuse** to listen to him. At this point, just make sure that people take note of the word "stubborn" and explain what it means if people don't know. (The first question after Download 1:1 will again ask them what "stubborn" means.) The rest of verse 15 will be explained later in Download 1:2. If people ask about verse 15, make a note of that and make sure you come back to them after Download 1:2.

DOWNLOAD 1:1

Approximate length: Pete—6.00 minutes; Lizzy—5.50 minutes.

(**Note:** This summary is printed on p44 of the Handbook.)

- *Jesus says that this story of the farmer and the seeds has a meaning. It's about "the message about the kingdom".*
- *"The message about the kingdom" is God's message to us. It's all about Jesus—who he is, why he has come and what he has done.*
- *All other messages in our world can only help us in this life. They can't do what God's message can do; they can't give us life for ever.*
- *Only the disciples heard Jesus' explanation of his story, and so only they heard God's message. They were not cleverer than the crowd. It was because they came to Jesus and listened to him.*
- *You can't separate "the message about the kingdom" from Jesus. It's like trying to join the kingdom, but rejecting the king.*
- *If you don't come to Jesus to find out about God's kingdom, you are an "outsider"—the message of the kingdom is like a secret. But when you come to Jesus, he will help you understand God's message.*

5. Look at verse 15. People don't listen to Jesus because they are stubborn. What does it mean to be stubborn?

If you are stubborn, you refuse to listen to what someone else tells you. The crowd fail to hear the meaning of Jesus' story, not because they have hearing problems, and not because what he says is too difficult for them, but because they just don't want to listen to him.

- **Why do you think they are stubborn?**

The rest of verse 15 answers this question, and this will be explained in the next download. For now, just get people to think about why someone might not want to listen to Jesus, even though he is telling them the only message that can give us life for ever. You could look again at the opening discussion (Handbook p5) and the reasons people gave for following messages (who is telling the message; what benefit people can get from the message) to work out why the crowd might choose not to listen to Jesus.

6. *In verse 16 Jesus says his disciples are “blessed”. What does it mean to be blessed?*

Some people may not understand this word. Others may have the idea that a “priest” blesses you. People may know the expression: “God bless you”. For many, this word sounds definitely religious and a bit weird, and certainly they don’t think it has much to do with their everyday life. Get people to say what they think it means, and if necessary, tell them that it means to be “truly happy”. This means that actually all of us will want to be “blessed”.

- ***Why are they blessed?***

Jesus says they are blessed because they see and hear. In other words, they understand the message of Jesus’ story. This is not because they are cleverer than the crowd. It’s because they came to Jesus and he explained it to them, whereas the crowd didn’t bother.

Ask yourself

- *Who am I most like—the crowd or the disciples?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

FOUR KINDS OF SOIL

(From Matthew 13 v 18-23)

1. *The different types of soil are pictures of different types of people. Look at the first three types of soil (v 4-7) and people (v 19-22).*

This question helps people to look closely at what Jesus says in his story and what the true meaning of the story is. Download 1:2 will explain later what the types of people mentioned here might look like to us.

A. The path (v 4)
What happens to the seed at first?

It falls on the path but doesn't grow.

What stops the seed growing?

Birds eat it.

B. The rocky soil (v 5-6)
What happens to the seed at first?

The plants come up quickly.

What stops the seed growing?

The plants dry up in the sun because they have no roots.

C. The weedy soil (v 7)
What happens to the seed at first?

The plants start to grow.

What stops the seed growing?

Thorns crowd out the plants.

The people (v 19)
What happens to the message at first?

People hear it but don't understand it.

What stops these people understanding?

The evil one steals the meaning of the message. (The Bible teaches that God has an enemy—known as the devil, Satan, or the evil one—whose goal is to ruin God's work.)

The people (v 20-21)
What happens to the message at first?

These people receive the message with joy.

What stops these people producing a crop?

They give up the faith (following and trusting in Jesus) when it causes them trouble or suffering.

The people (v 22)
What happens to the message at first?

They hear and receive the message.

What stops these people producing a crop?

The worries of life and the false promises of wealth crowd out the message.

2. **Look at the fourth type of soil/person in verses 8 and 23. Why does the fourth type of person “produce a crop” when they hear the message about the kingdom?**

They not only hear Jesus’ message about the kingdom but they truly understand it, and so nothing stops them following the message—not the evil one, nor suffering, nor the worries of this life, nor the false promises of wealth.

• **What does “producing a crop” mean, do you think?**

This will be explained in Download 1:3. For now, just get people to notice that Jesus is looking for people whose lives “produce a crop”, and let people make suggestions about what that might mean.

3. **What do we need to do to understand Jesus’ message about the kingdom?**

People may have lots of ideas about what they need to do but it’s important to get the answer from the Bible passage. We need to come to Jesus and listen to him in order to understand the message. We need to be like the disciples and not like the crowd.

Note: Some people may be puzzled at the idea of coming to Jesus, especially if they know only that he lived and died 2,000 years ago. You may need to tell your group about the resurrection (one of the things that shows that Jesus is the king sent by God). The resurrection means that Jesus is alive today, and although now he doesn’t live in our world, he is still at work in the world, he still helps people and he still speaks to people today through the Bible.

Discuss with your group what it would mean for them to come to Jesus, like the disciples.

DOWNLOAD 1:2

Approximate length: Pete—7.35 minutes; Lizzy—7.10 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p44 of the Handbook.)

- *The four different types of soil show four ways to respond to Jesus’ message about the kingdom. Right now every person is responding to the message in one of these ways.*
- *The path is a picture of people who don’t want to listen to God’s message. Their hearts are hard. The message goes in one ear and out of the other.*
- *The rocky soil is a picture of people who follow Jesus while everything is going well. But as soon as being a Christian causes problems, they give up.*
- *The weedy soil is a picture of people who follow Jesus but they want other things too. The worries of life and the false promises of wealth take over and squeeze out King Jesus.*

- *We respond to God's message in these ways because we are blind to who Jesus is. We think the messages of this world are better and that life with God would be dull and miserable.*
- *Jesus is the word of God. Life in the kingdom of God begins with him. To ignore him is complete madness.*

4. *In what ways have you seen people living like one of the first three soils?*

Get people to share from their own experience (anonymous) examples of people who are like:

the path—those who are completely hostile or indifferent to the message of Jesus (perhaps someone who has given them a hard time for coming to this Jesus and You course).

the rocky soil—perhaps people who went through a “religious phase” when they were younger but who lost courage when faced with difficulties and who have now given up.

the weedy soil—perhaps people who admire the faith of others or often mean to go to church but who are always too busy or distracted to actually get involved themselves.

Be ready to give a couple of examples yourself to get the discussion started. You could describe someone and see if people can work out which kind of “soil” they are.

Ask yourself

- *Up till now, which soil best describes me?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

GOOD SOIL

1. *Jesus says people are blind and stubborn. So what hope is there for us?*

In Jesus' story the hope is that there is good soil, and the seed planted in that soil produces a crop. When Jesus is speaking to his disciples later, the hope is that eyes see and ears hear (v 16), and knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (v 11) is given to those who come to Jesus.

DOWNLOAD 1:3

Approximate length: Pete—2.00 minutes; Lizzy—2.00 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p45 of the Handbook.)

- *The good soil is a picture of those who both hear the message about the kingdom and understand it.*
- *They understand that Jesus is their king and nothing stops them following him—not the evil one, nor suffering and troubles, nor the worries of this life, nor the false promises of wealth.*
- *You can see that they have understood the message by the difference that it makes in their lives.*
- *No one is born like the good soil. People become like the good soil when they come to Jesus, just as the disciples did.*
- *What will you do with God’s message about the kingdom?*

(Note: At the end of this session the DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians: Tom [5.30 minutes] and Sue [4.55 minutes], each of whom has been helped by God to understand truly the message of the kingdom. Choose the one that’s best for your group and play it after Download 1:3.)

THE BIG QUESTION

Take your group through “the big question” on p11 of the Handbook and let them think about how they will answer.

End your time together by reading out the verse printed in the Handbook (John 5 v 24). Briefly explain what it means:

This is Jesus speaking. He wants each of us to hear his “word” (his message) and to “believe” or trust in God—the one who sent Jesus. Jesus is saying here what we have already learned—that his message brings us life for ever. Anyone who hears and believes has “eternal life”. At the end of this life, they will not be punished for all the years when they have rejected Jesus, the king sent by God. Instead they will be able to live in God’s kingdom for ever.

You could finish with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see ***How to run a Jesus and You group.***)

2 The weeds and the wheat

Matthew 13 v 24-30 and 36-43

Last time in *The King and I*, we learned that Jesus is the king sent by God, bringing God's kingdom. This gives rise to the question: Why isn't the world full of peace and goodness? Can Jesus really be king—does he really have any power to rule over us—when there is so much wrong and evil going on around us. This is a question that will be answered by the next of Jesus' stories about God's kingdom in Matthew 13—the story of the weeds and the wheat.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about... our world.

What things make people ask this question: "Why doesn't God do something about the bad stuff in this world?"

Invite people to mention things that spoil our world and lead to people questioning whether God exists or whether he can be truly good. Perhaps these are questions which they have asked themselves at some point. This opening discussion should highlight to people the fact that this world is very far from what most of us would like it to be. Certainly it's very far from how God wants it to be.

The story

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- a. T
- b. F

- c. F
- d. T
- e. T
- f. T
- g. F
- h. T
- i. F

A MIXED-UP WORLD

1. Look at verses 24 and 36. Who heard what?

v 24: The crowd heard Jesus' story.

v 36: The disciples heard the story and Jesus' explanation.

• Some people didn't hear everything that Jesus said. Why?

Jesus left the crowd and went into a house. The disciples followed Jesus to ask him about the story. But the crowd didn't, so they couldn't hear the explanation.

2. What does each thing in the story mean? (Look at the verses to find each answer.)

This question gives people the opportunity simply to look closely at Jesus' explanation of his story.

STORY

The man who sows good seed

The field

The good seed

The enemy

The weeds

MEANING

v 37: The Son of Man ie: Jesus. (See the note explaining "The Son of Man" on p13 of Handbook.)

v 38: The world

v 38: The people who belong to God's kingdom (explained in Download 2:1)

v 39: The devil, also known as the evil one (v 38)

v 38: The people who belong to the evil one (explained in Download 2:1)

The harvest

v 39: Judgment day. (The Bible teaches that one day Jesus Christ will return to this world, and will judge everyone who has ever lived. This is explained more in Downloads 2:2 and 2:3.)

The servants/workers

v 39: Angels (servants of God)

3. *In Jesus' story there are weeds among wheat. This world isn't a place of peace and goodness because of those weeds. Why is this world full of weeds? Find two answers in Jesus' story.*

v 25: Because God's enemy, the devil, is working in our world to ruin God's good work. This is how Jesus explains the enemy sowing weed seed.

v 29: Because God has chosen not to judge our world yet, so that not everyone will be destroyed. This is how Jesus explains the fact that the farmer waits until the harvest before he destroys the weeds. (This second answer will be explained more in Download 2:2.)

DOWNLOAD 2:1

Approximate length: Pete—7.45 minutes; Lizzy—7.10 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p45 of the Handbook.)

- *If Jesus is the king sent by God, bringing God's kingdom, why isn't the world full of peace and goodness? Because people refuse to have Jesus as their king.*
- *The wheat seed represents people who belong to the kingdom of heaven. The weed seed represents people who don't belong to God's kingdom. Instead they belong to the evil one, God's enemy.*
- *People who belong to the evil one may look like people who belong to the kingdom of heaven. But over time the difference becomes clearer. On judgment day the difference will be clear for all to see.*
- *In this world good and evil grow side by side and everyone belongs to one of these two groups.*
- *The thing that divides everyone into these two groups is this: do you or don't you accept Jesus as your king?*
- *Many people think that they are living good lives but actually they are rebels against King Jesus.*

4. ***According to Jesus, what kind of person is “wheat”? And what kind of person is a “weed”?***

This question reviews what has just been said in Download 2:1. People who accept Jesus as their king are “wheat”. People who are rebels against King Jesus are “weeds”, even though they think that they are living good lives.

• ***Think of ways in which “weeds” might think they are “wheat”.***

One of the points of this story is that it is not always clear, before judgment day, whether a person is a weed or wheat. We ourselves may think that we are wheat, when in fact we are weeds. The “wheat” is people who belong to God’s kingdom. There are many reasons why people might wrongly think that they belong to God’s kingdom: because they try to live a good life; because they go to church or do some other religious activity; because they were baptised or christened by their parents; because they live in what is called a Christian country. But all of these reasons ignore Jesus, and the fact that he is the king sent by God to bring God’s kingdom. As we learned in Download 1:1, we can’t separate the message about God’s kingdom from the king—Jesus. The last part of *The King and I*, “The net”, will explain more about how people can think they are part of God’s kingdom, when actually they are rebels against God’s king.

5. ***Jesus teaches that there is an enemy—the devil—at work in this world. Have you ever heard of or thought about this before?***

Although “the evil one” was mentioned last time in “The four soils”, this is an opportunity to further discuss what people have heard and understand about the Bible’s teaching that God has a personal enemy.

• ***What difference should this make to you?***

Hopefully, people may begin to see that learning about Jesus and understanding his message is not just a matter of their own personal choice. If, as the Bible and Jesus teach, there is an enemy of God whose goal is to ruin the work of God, people need to expect that he might try to tempt them away from the message about God’s kingdom, through lies, difficulties or distractions.

Ask yourself

- *Am I a “weed” or “wheat”?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves.

Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

A MERCIFUL DELAY

1. Look at verse 28. What do the servants want to do?

They want to destroy the weeds immediately.

• **If this happens, what will be the result?**

The wheat will also be destroyed.

2. What does the farmer want to do? Why?

He wants to wait until the harvest. At that time both weeds and wheat can be pulled up, but the fruitful wheat will be stored whereas the unfruitful weeds will be destroyed.

• **What do you think this tells us about God?**

At the moment God allows wrong and evil to continue in our world. He is waiting for judgment day. On that day he will certainly judge those who belong to the evil one, and put an end to wrong and evil. But he wants all those who belong (and who will belong) to the kingdom of God to be saved. So he is willing to be patient.

3. People sometimes ask: “Why doesn’t God do something about the bad stuff?” What’s the answer from this story?

This is an opportunity to check whether people have understood and can explain what has just been discussed in the previous question—that God is patient for now in not putting an end to wrong and evil because he wants all of those who belong (and who will belong) to his kingdom to be saved. This is explained further in Download 2:2, following this question.

DOWNLOAD 2:2

Approximate length: Pete—4.15 minutes; Lizzy—3.15 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p45 of the Handbook.)

- *People often want all evil taken out of the world now, but Jesus is waiting patiently for judgment day.*
- *Just because Jesus is patient, we mustn’t think that he isn’t bothered about evil, or that he will never judge us.*
- *Jesus is patient because he wants us to hear the message of the kingdom and change.*

- *If Jesus judge evil now, he will have to judge us now. That means we will be destroyed like the weeds, not saved like the wheat.*
- *By the kindness and mercy of God, people who are “weeds” today can become “wheat”. They can be changed by Jesus.*
- *This time of Jesus’ patience is time for you to turn to Jesus and accept him as your king. Make sure you belong to the kingdom of heaven before judgment day.*

After the download, read through the sentence and the Bible verse in the Handbook, at the bottom of p17. Check that people understand this.

4. *People give different reasons for why Jesus doesn’t judge evil now. [See p18 of Handbook.] But why isn’t evil judged now, according to Jesus?*

Because God is patiently waiting until the time when all his people (the wheat) can be saved, and then all his enemies (the weeds) will be destroyed, just as the farmer waited for harvest, to gather the wheat and destroy the weeds.

Ask yourself

- *How am I using this time of God’s patience when he is not judging evil?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

THE MOMENT OF DIVISION

1. *From [Matthew 13 v 30 and 39-43], what is everyone heading towards?*

We are all heading towards judgment day.

2. *What does the farmer do with the wheat?*

(Both parts of this question simply remind people again of what Jesus’ story says, before we look more closely at what it means in questions 3 and 4.)

The farmer gathers the wheat and brings it into his storeroom.

Note: The important thing here is not that the farmer is going to use up the wheat to feed himself or to make money. What’s important is that the barn

is a good and fitting destination for plants that have done what they were designed to do—they have produced grain. The farmer puts the wheat in his barn because he is pleased with it.

- ***What does he do with the weeds?***

The weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire.

Note: Again, the important point is that the fire is a fitting destination for plants that have not produced grain and have only contaminated the crop. The weeds come to an end, but Jesus is not saying that those who belong to the evil one also come to an end (see v 42).

3. *What will Jesus do?*

Through his angel servants, Jesus will weed out of his kingdom all the people who belong to the evil one (v 41). He will throw them into a “blazing furnace”. The meaning of this is explained further in Download 2:3, but for now, simply point out that Jesus is using picture language here—he’s not talking about a real, physical furnace. For instance, in the fire people will sob and grind their teeth—they are not burned up (v 42). By contrast, God’s people will be brought into God’s kingdom (v 43). Point out how God is described as their Father, and also how splendid these people become—they will “shine like the sun”.

- ***Why will he do this, do you think?***

This will be explained in Download 2:3. For now, just get people to make suggestions about why they think there will be judgment day and why Jesus will separate for ever those who are “wheat” and those who are “weeds”.

DOWNLOAD 2:3

Approximate length: Pete—5.55 minutes; Lizzy—5.20 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p46 of the Handbook.)

- *Our lives are heading towards judgment day. So what we do with Jesus now has consequences that last for ever.*
- *Jesus is the “Son of Man”. That means Jesus is the king of an everlasting kingdom given to him by God. And in Jesus’ kingdom there are people from every nation and language.*
- *These people have all been changed by Jesus—cleansed by Jesus’ death on the cross, and made into children of God.*
- *Only righteous people can belong to Jesus kingdom. Righteous people have been made right with God, through Jesus’ death on the cross.*
- *Jesus, the king of God’s everlasting kingdom, is the one who decides who will come into the kingdom (the wheat) and who will not (the weeds).*

- *What happens on judgment day will reflect our response to King Jesus now. Those who accept Jesus as king will live in the light, life and warmth of his kingdom for ever. Those who reject Jesus as king will suffer ruin outside his kingdom for ever.*

(Note: At the end of this session, the DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians: Jon [6:05] and Sarah [5:35], each of whom has been changed by Jesus from “weed” to “wheat”. Choose the one that’s best for your group and play it after Download 2:3.)

THE BIG QUESTION

Take your group through “the big question” on p19 of the Handbook and let them think about how they will answer.

End your time together by reading out the verses printed in the Handbook (1 Corinthians 6 v 9-11). Briefly explain what this means:

The apostle Paul is writing here to new Christians. He talks about how they used to live before they were changed by the message about Jesus Christ. They did wrong and evil things and were like weeds in this world. Paul is clear that people who live like this cannot belong to God’s kingdom. But because of Jesus Christ, they were made clean and right with God. The way they lived changed and they became wheat. They are a real-life example of why Jesus told this story, and what he can do for us.

You could finish with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see ***How to run a Jesus and You group.***)

3 Seeds, yeast, treasure and a pearl

Matthew 13 v 31-35 and 44-46

This third part of *The King and I* looks at four very brief stories that Jesus told about God's kingdom. The first two help us understand how Jesus can be the king sent by God, when he seems so different from all that we expect a king or world leader to be. The second two show us that Jesus is not only the king sent by God but the greatest treasure in the universe. Not only is there nothing more important than receiving Jesus as our king, there is nothing more worthwhile.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about... nations that are super-powers...

How do we know that a nation has become a super-power? How does it show that?

This opening discussion sets people up for the fact that Jesus' kingship and his kingdom are very different from the kings and kingdoms of this world. Get people to identify current super-powers (US; China; older people may remember the Soviet Union). Discuss what we see of that nation and its leaders on TV eg: impressive military displays and parades; imposing cities with sky-scrapers; luxury residences and conference venues; leaders surrounded by a large entourage of bodyguards and aides; leaders at the centre of group photos; huge media attention; news items and leaders' speeches from those countries make the headlines etc.

The story

Pages 21-28 of the Handbook contain the Bible text for all four sessions, and can be pulled out of the centre of the Handbook, so that people don't have to keep turning pages between the questions and the Bible passage.

There are two ways in which you can present the Bible passage:

1. Read it aloud with your group following the text on p22 of the Handbook. For tips on reading aloud with groups who may need extra help, see ***How to run a Jesus and You group: Getting started / Getting into the Bible / Reading aloud.***
2. If you are using the DVD, you will find "The Story" as an option on the menu for each session. The words appear on the screen as the passage is read out.

Test yourself: How much can you remember?

(**Note:** The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It's **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn't have to be done as a strict memory test—

let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

In the first story (v 31-32)...

- a. A mustard seed
- b. It is the smallest of all your seeds
- c. A tree, where birds can rest in its branches

In the second story (v 33)...

- d. It works its way all through the dough

In the third story (v 44)...

- e. He didn't own the field where the treasure was buried
- f. Everything he had—he sold it to buy the field
- g. Very happy

In the fourth story (v 54-46)...

- h. This man also sells everything he has, because he sees that the pearl, like the treasure, is more valuable than all he has.

THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE YEAST

1. *Jesus uses the picture of a mustard seed. What does he want people to understand about the kingdom of heaven, do you think?*

This will be explained further in Download 3:1. For now, just get people to make suggestions about what they think this story tells us about God's kingdom. You don't need to point out whether these answers are right or wrong.

2. *Jesus then uses the picture of yeast in a lump of dough. What does he want people to understand about the kingdom of heaven, do you think?*

Again, this will be explained further in Download 3:1, so again, get people to make their own suggestions.

3. *What's similar in these two stories? (Think about what happened to the seed and what would happen to the dough.)*

Both these stories are about something growing. The seed grows into a tree. When the yeast has been added to the dough, the dough will grow two or three times bigger.

DOWNLOAD 3:1

Approximate length: Pete—8.15 minutes; Lizzy—6.40 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p46 of the Handbook.)

- *The stories of the mustard seed and the yeast teach us that the kingdom of heaven is very different to kingdoms in this world.*
- *Like a mustard seed, the kingdom of heaven looks like nothing, and the king of heaven, Jesus, doesn't look impressive.*
- *But the message of the kingdom, when understood and planted into someone's life, has a massive effect in their life.*
- *The message of the kingdom is that Jesus died so we can be forgiven, cleansed and made new.*
- *The story of the yeast teaches us that the kingdom of heaven grows in a way that is unnoticed in this world.*
- *The story of the yeast also teaches us that the message of Jesus will change every part of your life, just as the yeast affects every part of the dough.*

4. *Some people think of Jesus' death as just the sad end of a good man. Why is that wrong?*

Download 3:1 has explained why Jesus died and what his death achieved for sinners, so this question gives an opportunity to check how well people have understood that.

Note: It's worth spending time on this question because it is very likely that this teaching will be new to people in your group. Most people only know that Jesus died on a cross because he was killed by his enemies. They may have some vague idea that this was connected with his love but usually can't explain how Jesus' death shows his love for us.

5. *Many people think the message of Jesus is out-of-date, dull and useless. They think other messages sound better (how to make lots of money, how to be happy). Why is that wrong?*

As we have already seen in Session 1, Jesus' message is the only message that can give us life for ever. It shows us how Jesus can make people who should be separated from God (that's all of us) right with him. When we listen and truly understand this message, it changes us in every part of our life. You might like to go again through the list of things, mentioned at the end of Download 3:1, that Jesus' death has achieved for those who trust in him: it is "God's power—to give us a fresh new start with God... to turn away from our old life... to trust in Jesus instead... to live for him first and foremost... even to become like him... and to bring us to the day when he will make us perfect".

Ask yourself

- *Where am I in the story of the yeast?*
 - I want nothing to do with the message of Jesus (like dough without any yeast).*
 - Jesus is an add-on (I only think about him when I come to this group or when I go to church).*

c. The message of Jesus is making me think about every part of my life (like dough with yeast in it).

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

1. *What do people think when they hear the name “Jesus”?*

The stories of the treasure and the pearl will show people that Jesus is the greatest treasure in the universe, and worth giving up everything else for. This question highlights how far that understanding of Jesus is from most people’s view of him, including perhaps that of some in your group. Answers might range from “a swear word” to “the Son of God” (be aware that most people who give this second answer won’t understand what that means). This question can help you to find out more what people in your group know about Jesus.

2. *Jesus uses the pictures of treasure in a field and a very valuable pearl. What does he want us to understand about the kingdom of heaven?*

That it is more precious and worth having than anything else.

3. *Both men in Jesus’ stories sell everything to buy the field and the pearl. What does Jesus want us to understand from this?*

Be aware that people may think Jesus is saying that we need to sell everything we have to come into his kingdom, or that we can somehow buy our way in. But Jesus’ point here is this: nothing is more valuable and worth having than belonging to God’s kingdom and receiving Jesus as our king. This will be explained further in Download 3:2 so you can allow people to make suggestions without feeling you have to correct everything—just point out that we will hear the answer to this question in the following download.

DOWNLOAD 3:2

Approximate length: Pete—7.25 minutes; Lizzy—6.30 minutes.

(**Note:** This summary is printed on p46-47 of the Handbook.)

- *In the stories of the treasure and the pearl, the two men look as if they are giving up everything. But in fact they are only giving up rubbish to gain everything.*
- *These two stories are a picture of the person who finds the kingdom of heaven because they come to understand who Jesus really is.*
- *Jesus is the only one who can bring us into the fantastic riches of the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus is the treasure and the pearl.*
- *Like the treasure in the field, the kingdom of heaven is hidden from us so we have to dig to find it. When you start to dig into the Bible, you find heaps of amazing things about Jesus.*
- *Everything you have or do in this world will end or die, but Jesus won't. Nothing you say or do or achieve can buy you a place in the kingdom of heaven, but Jesus can.*
- *These stories are not about giving things up to buy our way into God's kingdom. They are about understanding just how rich the treasure of Jesus is.*

4. Look back at your answers to question 1 above. Why do people miss the answer that is in these two stories?

The truth about Jesus is revealed to us in his own teaching, found in the Bible. But many people today know nothing about the Bible and have never given time to reading or understanding it. We need to understand what the Bible says about us—that our sin (our wrongness) needs to be forgiven and we need to be made pure. And we need to understand what the Bible says about Jesus—that he is the only one rich enough to pay for our sin, and who can bring us forgiveness. Only then will we see that Jesus is the greatest treasure in the universe.

5. Why is Jesus worth living for more than... money? your family? religion?

(**Note:** “Religion” = doing good and/or religious things to please God so he will accept us into his kingdom.) As mentioned in Download 3:2, our money, our family and our religion will all end or die, and none of them can give us a place in the kingdom of heaven. None of them can bring us life for ever. This question begins with money because it is relatively easy for people to see that these things are true of money. It is far more difficult for people to see that their family should not be the greatest thing in their life. Underline that families are a great gift to us from God, and yet no family can do for us what Jesus can. It may be even more difficult for religious people to understand that religion cannot give us a place in God's kingdom. You could look again at what the Bible teaches in Ephesians 1 v 7 (see Handbook p27): “We have been set free because of what Christ has done...”

After question five, read through the paragraph in the Handbook on p33. Check that people understand this. (You may need to explain “Crown Jewels” to anyone from outside Great Britain.)

Ask yourself

- *Most people just pick up bits and pieces about Jesus from other people. How much time and thought and questioning (digging) have I given to finding out the truth about Jesus?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

DIGGING FOR TREASURE

Note: There are no “Think about it” questions in this section.

DOWNLOAD 3:3

Approximate length: Pete—1.55 minutes; Lizzy—1.40 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p47 of the Handbook.)

- *These four little stories of Jesus are themselves like mustard seeds—when they are planted in our hearts, they produce life that changes everything in our lives.*
- *Perhaps you are interested in Jesus but you just can't see that he is the greatest treasure. Then be like the disciples and not the crowd. Come to Jesus and ask him to help you understand.*

(Note: At the end of this session, the DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians: Helen [3.45 minutes] and Chris [6.10 minutes], each of whom eventually found that Jesus is the greatest treasure there can be. Choose the one that's best for your group and play it after Download 3:3.)

THE BIG QUESTION

Take your group through “the big question” on p34 of the Handbook and let them think about how they will answer.

End your time together by reading out the verses printed in the Handbook (1 Corinthians 1 v 18 and Philippians 3 v 8). Briefly explain what they mean:

In 1 Corinthians 1 v 18 Paul shows how Jesus' message seems tiny and useless (like the mustard seed) and works in a way that is hidden (like the yeast in the dough). Most people think that it is foolish to believe and live for a man who died on a cross 2,000 years ago. But some people come to understand that this is the only thing that can save us on judgment day. They see that the message of Jesus is the power of God to give us life for ever.

In Philippians 3 v 8 Paul tells us what he thinks of Jesus. Paul is like the men who sold everything they had to own the treasure and the pearl. He is happy to give up everything else he has in life because he has come to understand that Jesus is the greatest treasure in the universe.

You could finish with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see ***How to run a Jesus and You group.***)

4 The net

Matthew 13 v 47-52

So far we have seen that Jesus is the king sent by God bringing God's kingdom. One day he will put an end to all wrong and evil. But for now he is patient, giving everyone the chance to be changed from "weeds" to "wheat". Only Jesus, through his death on the cross, can provide a way for us to be made pure from sin, and bring us into God's kingdom. So nothing is more valuable than Jesus. We need to listen to him, be changed by him and live for him. In this last part of *The King and I* we look at Jesus' final story about the kingdom. We will find out more about judgment day, about who will be accepted in God's kingdom and who will be shut out.

TARGET ANSWERS

Think about... exams, or medicals, or job interviews, or driving tests. Why don't we like them? What do they show us about ourselves?

This question prepares the ground for an aspect of Jesus' teaching that many find difficult and which is deeply unpopular today—the idea of judgment day. Most people can relate to disliking exams, tests and check-ups. Encourage them to work out exactly why they dislike them. This topic will be revisited in Download 4:1.

The story

Pages 21-28 of the Handbook contain the Bible text for all four sessions, and can be pulled out of the centre of the Handbook, so that people don't have to keep turning pages between the questions and the Bible passage.

There are two ways in which you can present the Bible passage:

1. Read it aloud with your group following the text on p22 of the Handbook. For tips on reading aloud with groups who may need extra help, see ***How to run a Jesus and You group: Getting started / Getting into the Bible / Reading aloud.***
2. If you are using the DVD, you will find "The Story" as an option on the menu for each session. The words appear on the screen as the passage is read out.

Test yourself: How much can you remember?

(Note: The purpose of this activity is to help people who are new to the Bible familiarise themselves with the Bible passage. It's **optional**—use it if you think it will be helpful for your group. It doesn't have to be done as a strict memory test—let people refer to the printed Bible passage if that is helpful for them. Be guided by your knowledge of the group and their preferences.)

- 1—net
- 2—baskets
- 3—judgment day
- 4—angels
- 5—separate
- 6—evil people
- 7—furnace
- 8—sob
- 9—understand
- 10—yes
- 11—owner of a house
- 12—treasures

SEPARATION

1. ***What happens in Jesus' story?***
(The first part of this question simply reminds people again of what Jesus' story says, before we look more closely at what it means in the second part.) Some fishermen catch some fish in a net. They sort them into two groups—good and bad. They keep the good fish and throw away the bad ones.
 - ***The meaning: What is Jesus saying about the future?***
Verse 49: Jesus says this is what it will be like on judgment day. People will be separated into two groups. Those that Jesus call “evil ones” (v 50) will be rejected.
2. ***Why are the fish separated into two groups?***
Because only some of them are good and can be eaten. The others are bad and cannot be eaten. They are no good for anything.
Note: Download 4:1 will explain exactly what Jesus means when he talks about “good” and “bad” fish.
 - ***The meaning: Why will people be separated into two groups?***
Verse 49: Because only some people have done what is right. The rest have done what is wrong.
3. ***Who will separate people into those two groups?***
Verse 49: The angels. Remind your group that we learned in the story of the weeds and the wheat that the angels are servants of the Son of Man, ie: Jesus. So Jesus will be in charge of separating people into two groups on judgment day.
4. ***Most people prefer to sort people into groups like this: [see Handbook p39]. Which group would you put yourself in?***

You may need to give people some time to think about this. Most will put themselves in group c, and some perhaps in group d.

- ***How would Jesus separate these people into two groups, do you think?***

People now know that Jesus will separate everyone into two groups. The problem here is where to draw the line between the two groups. What makes someone a person who does what is wrong, an evil one? And what makes someone a person who does what is right? How Jesus actually decides and who goes in which group will be explained in Download 4:1. For now, let people grapple a bit with trying to answer this question—don't leap in with the Bible's answer too early.

5. ***We can easily understand that there are two kinds of fish—good and bad fish. But why is it difficult to accept that there are only two groups of people—good and evil?***

Again, don't leap in with the target answer until your group have spent some time trying to work it out themselves. The aim of this question is to expose to people the truth that they find hard to admit. Most of us want to believe that we are good people who do what is right. We hope we can be included among the good fish. But deep down, most of us also know, to a greater or lesser extent, that we do wrong, not right. Therefore we know we should be in the group of those who will be rejected. Our preference for more than two groups (see question four) is probably the result of wishful thinking—hoping that we can be accepted by God while knowing that we deserve to be rejected by him. Some may point out that they are only like everybody else—a mixture of good and bad. This begs the question: since everyone does some wrong, is Jesus really going to reject everyone on judgment day? This possibility is likely to be quite shocking and very different to how people have thought of Jesus or God. So they will work strenuously to find reasons why this must be wrong. The problem is that Jesus' story here leads us to that very conclusion: since everyone does some wrong, it must be that Jesus is going to reject everyone on judgment day.

DOWNLOAD 4:1

Approximate length: Pete—9.00 minutes; Lizzy—7.50 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p47 of the Handbook.)

- *Jesus' story of the net is about judgment day, when Jesus will return as king of the universe to bring this world to a close.*
- *At that time, God's people had lots of religious rules about food. The good or "clean" fish are those that could be eaten. The bad or "unclean" fish are those that must not be eaten.*

- *Jesus says all people will be separated into those who are clean (who have done what is right) and those who are unclean (who have done what is wrong).*
- *Jesus says that the wrong things we do show that there is something wrong with our hearts. This puts us all in the “bad fish” category.*
- *If Jesus is not your king, you are under the wrong flag, and everything you do is wrong—even the right things!*
- *Jesus lovingly warns us that if we say “No” to Jesus as our king, we will be separated from God’s love for ever.*

6. *Read [Isaiah 64 v 6, see Handbook p40]. How is God’s view of good and evil different from our view?*

As mentioned in Download 4:1, we do things that we think are good, but God views them as evil. This is because, even when we do “good” things, we are still living in rebellion against God and against Jesus, the king he has sent. We are continually breaking what Jesus called “the first and most important commandment” of God—to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind.

7. *Think about what you have learned. This could be very new to you. How do you feel about Jesus’ teaching here?*

This question allows time for people in your group to reflect on Jesus’ teaching here about judgment day. Perhaps they have never heard this before. It’s also likely that they will find some aspects difficult to accept. If it’s helpful, why not talk about how you felt when you first heard Jesus’ teaching about judgment, and what you have learned since then?

Ask yourself

- *Whose flag am I under?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

NEW TREASURES

1. *Jesus has told seven stories about his kingdom. What is the big thing that Jesus now wants to see in his disciples?*

He wants them to understand his message.

2. What do you think Jesus means by “understand”?

You could ask your group to think about the following situation:

Imagine a smoker reads the message: “Smoking kills” on a packet of cigarettes. They can speak English and they can read so they know what that means. But they carry on smoking. Do they truly understand the message?

In Download 4:2, when we look at what Jesus says next in v 52, we will see that the kind of understanding Jesus is looking for leads to a changed life.

- **How would you know that someone understands Jesus’ teaching?**

In the illustration of the message on the packet of cigarettes, you know someone has understood the message if they give up smoking. This should help people to see that when someone understands Jesus’ teaching, their life will change. At this point, you could go back over some of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 13 and talk about how someone’s life might change when they understand this. For example, in the story of the four soils we learned that Jesus’ message is the only one that can give us life for ever. When you understand that, nothing will stop you listening to, learning and following Jesus’ message—not the evil one, nor suffering, nor the worries of this life, nor the false promises of wealth. Go through the other stories of Jesus in the same way.

- **If they don’t fully understand, what do they need to do?**

This question takes us back to what we learned from the first story of the four soils, when the crowd only heard Jesus’ story, while the disciples heard the story and its explanation. Whenever we don’t truly understand Jesus’ teaching, ie: our life is not changed by it, we need to come to Jesus and ask him to open our ears and eyes.

DOWNLOAD 4:2

Approximate length: Pete—5.10 minutes; Lizzy—4.35 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p47-48 of the Handbook.)

- *Although the story doesn’t say this, Jesus has come to make unclean people clean before God and good in his eyes. The king has come to bring you into his kingdom.*
- *For this to happen we need a radical heart-change and only Jesus can do that.*
- *Jesus is saying that if you have understood his message, then it will make a change in your life.*

- *Instead of bad things, treasures will come out of our hearts—the treasure of Jesus. Changed hearts are hearts that love, follow and live for King Jesus.*
- *Jesus says that even the worst people, like the teachers of the law who hated him and who were far away from God, can be changed by Jesus and join the kingdom of heaven.*
- *If someone like that can have a heart-change, then so can everyone.*

3. *Is there any reason why Jesus can't change your heart?*

The point of this question is to answer any objections to the point made in Download 4:2, that Jesus can change anyone. People might believe that Jesus can't change them because... they have done something terrible in the past and they are beyond changing; or because they are the “wrong” kind of person (not religious, or come from a different religion); or because they tried Christianity in the past and it “didn't work”; or because they are afraid of being changed. Ultimately there is only one reason why Jesus cannot change a person's heart—because they don't want him to.

Ask yourself

- *Do I want Jesus to change my heart?*

Read out the “Ask yourself” question and give your group a few moments to think about it. You could ask them to share answers if they want to, and if that is right for your group. Or you could get them to think about their answer by themselves. Or you could ask them to go home and think about their answer, or write it down, or talk about it with someone.

WHO WILL BE YOUR KING?

Note: There are no “Think about it” questions in this section.

DOWNLOAD 4:3

Approximate length: Pete—1.30 minutes; Lizzy—1.25 minutes.

(Note: This summary is printed on p48 of the Handbook.)

- *Jesus wants us to understand all the things he teaches. It's not enough just to hear them.*
- *These are not just nice little stories—they are matters of heaven and hell, your eternal destiny, and who your king is.*

- *We have learned a lot about who Jesus is—the greatest treasure, the seed of life, the gleaming brightness of God, the one who gave up his life for us, the only one who can pay the penalty for our sin, the one who can change us, the king.*
- *Is Jesus your king?*

(Note: At the end of this session, the DVD includes a choice of two real-life stories of Christians: “Yusuf” [5.45 minutes] and Alan [6.30 minutes], each of whom eventually found that Jesus is the greatest treasure there can be. Choose the one that’s best for your group and play it after Download 4:3.)

THE BIG QUESTION

Take your group through “the big question” on p42 of the Handbook and let them think about how they will answer.

End your time together by reading out the verses printed in the Handbook (Philippians 2 v 8-11). Briefly explain what they mean:

Here Paul explains what Jesus, the king sent by God, has done so that all who trust him to save them and follow him as their king, can come into the kingdom of heaven and have life for ever. Here we can see how different Jesus was, during his time on earth, to any earthly king—he died on a cross. But King Jesus is like the tiny mustard seed that grows into the largest of all garden plants. He is like the treasure, at first buried in a field, but when you discover him, worth giving up everything else to have. God has lifted him to the highest place and given him the greatest name. And one day, when he comes back on judgment day, everyone—whether they are his people or not, will bow to worship him. The Bible teaches that whether you want it or not, one way or another, Jesus will be your king.

At the end of *The King and I* explain the three ways in which people can respond:

1. You understand and accept what you have learned about Jesus.

Then it is time to decide to trust in Jesus. This means you will have your sins forgiven, you will be saved from rejection on judgment day and brought into the kingdom of God, to follow Jesus as your king and receive life for ever. (Explain what is available for people like this. See *How to run a Jesus and You group: What next?*)

2. You can’t yet decide and you want more time to think about things.

Then you need to keep learning about Jesus and about what God says in the Bible. This is good, but you need to realise that you can’t sit on the fence for ever.

(Explain what is available for people like this and encourage them to join in. Options could include: another *Jesus and You* group, inviting them to suitable church meetings or events, meeting one-to-one to read the Bible etc.)

3. You have decided not to trust in Jesus.

Then you need to know that the Bible says you are outside the kingdom of God. You are like the weeds and the unclean fish, which will be rejected on judgment day. You are missing out on the greatest treasure in the universe. You are facing death and then eternity outside God's kingdom. You can only be rescued from this through Jesus and his death on the cross.

(It may still be very early days for people like this. Although they are clear about not wanting to commit themselves to following Christ at the moment, it is still worth keeping up friendly contact and, if possible, getting them to continue learning from the Bible. Explain what is available for people like this and encourage them to join in. See suggestions for 2 above.)

You could finish with a short, simple prayer. (This is optional—see *How to run a Jesus and You group*.)

DOWNLOAD SCRIPTS

In this section you will find all the scripts for the Downloads (the DVD talks) used in *The King and I*. If you are unable to use the DVD in the sessions, you can use these scripts to present the Downloads yourself.

We recommend that you watch the DVDs first to see how the Downloads are presented. If possible, try to “talk” the Downloads to your group rather than simply reading them aloud. This will make it far easier for your group to listen to you. It will mean getting to know the scripts well enough so that you can present the Downloads without having to read from the scripts most of the time.

Please note:

1. Some of the illustrations are personal to the author. You will need to think about how to present these to the group.
2. The wording used in the scripts often ties in closely with the NIRV translation of the Bible and the questions in the Handbook, so it’s best to stick as closely as possible to the original wording.
3. The DVD also contains the real-life stories of people who have become Christians and whose lives reflect some of the points made by Jesus in these stories about the kingdom of heaven. These can only be presented to your group by showing the DVD.

Session 1: The four soils

Download 1:1

There are messages and words everywhere. We are bombarded with them—printed words, spoken words, emails, text messages, tweets, adverts... And all these words and messages are desperate to get our attention. They want us to buy... to spend... to be influenced. They tell us where to go, what to do, what to be. They want to take root in our lives.

We're looking at this story told by Jesus— a story about a farmer who plants or sows his seed. So in verse 3 Jesus says: *"A farmer went out to plant his seed. He scattered the seed on the ground."*

Then in verses 18 and 19 Jesus explains to his followers, the disciples: *"Listen! Here is the meaning of the story of the farmer. People hear the message about the kingdom."*

So the seed in the story is "the message about the kingdom". Jesus came to teach people about God's kingdom. He also calls it the kingdom of heaven. He wants us to know what this kingdom is like, how we can be part of it, and what the king—that's Jesus—has come to do. Now, we're not told in this story what the message about the kingdom is, but in other parts of the Bible Jesus explains it.

So, what is this message about the kingdom? Well, there's loads of stuff in the message, but here's some of it:

- It's the message that God has sent Jesus to be the **rightful King** over our lives...
- But we humans rejected that, so we're shut out of God's kingdom.
- Instead of a place where Jesus rules, we've landed ourselves in a place where death rules. In fact, we could call it the kingdom of death. So we live in a world where life is now fragile and ends in death...

- But Jesus isn't just the rightful King – He's also the **Saviour King**. He brings a message of how we can be forgiven and brought into God's kingdom.

So, in a nutshell, "the message about the kingdom" is all about Jesus—who he is and what he has done. But more than that—he is in fact the message. He hasn't just sent a letter—he has come himself.

All the other messages that bombard us—however good, however helpful—are only messages to help us in this life. In the end they are dead words. That's because they can't do what God's message can do: they can't give us life for ever. They're not seed packed full of new life. Jesus is telling us that **he** is the only message, the only one, who can give us life for ever. So it is essential that we allow this message, like a seed, to take root in our lives.

We've already seen that the crowd and the disciples **all** heard the story of the farmer sowing his seed. But it was **only** the disciples who heard the explanation, and therefore only they really heard the message. The crowd may well have gone home with a nice bedtime story in their heads about a farmer and some seed. But they had only heard half the story.

There's a famous story from history—I don't know if it's true—about people getting only half a message. It comes from the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, when the British forces, commanded by the Duke of Wellington, fought the French army under Napoleon. At the end of the battle a message was sent to the British using flags. But halfway through, a fog hid the end of the message. So people only got: "Wellington defeated". This was the worst news possible. But when the fog lifted, the whole message came through: "Wellington defeated Napoleon". It was **good** news.

In the same way perhaps you have received only half a text message, or you've heard only half a story and got things completely wrong.

The disciples are the ones that come to Jesus—in verse 10—and ask him questions. That’s why they get the whole story. The disciples didn’t understand the story any better than the crowd. But the main difference was that they came to Jesus.

So Jesus tells them in v 11 and 12: *"You have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. It has not been given to outsiders. Everyone who has that kind of knowledge will be given more. In fact, they will have very much. If anyone doesn't have that kind of knowledge, even what little he has will be taken away from him."*

So what Jesus is saying is this: you can’t separate the message about the kingdom from Jesus. You can’t try to join the kingdom when you’re rejecting or ignoring the king.

Did you notice the phrase: “secrets of the kingdom”? They are only secrets if you don’t come to hear what Jesus said. Notice the phrase: “not given to outsiders”. You are only an outsider if you don’t come to hear what Jesus said.

And when you listen to him, you’ll be given more—you’ll understand as he explains life, as he explains God. Just like a seed grows, understanding will grow in you. But if you don’t listen to him, what you have will be taken away, like a seed being swallowed by a bird.

Download 1:2

Why isn't everyone who hears the message about the kingdom like the seed that produces a crop? Why do some people accept Jesus as king but others don't? Jesus shows us that the answer is to do with the soil.

There are four different types of soil in the story. And there are four ways to respond to the message about the kingdom. Every person is responding right now to the message in one of these ways. The story covers every possibility. **Your** heart is here—you are one of these soils today. Let's look at the four soils.

Jesus describes first what happens when the seed falls on the path. Lots of people walk on the path, so the soil becomes very hard. When seed is sown on it, it just lies on the surface and birds come and eat it.

This is a picture of someone with a hard heart. They don't want to hear the message of God. Not interested! The message goes in one ear and out the other. It's like asking a child to lay the table for a meal when they're in the middle of playing.

Perhaps this type of person thinks they don't need any message from outside of themselves—they feel strong enough and happy enough as they are. Perhaps they might say: "This isn't for me right now. I'm going to put it to one side. I've got more important things to listen to." But what's really happening here, Jesus says, is that the evil one—God's enemy, the devil—has taken away the seed.

The writer CS Lewis wrote a book called: *The Screwtape Letters*. He made up a story about a senior devil writing to a junior devil, explaining how to stop people from hearing the message of God. He gives an example of a man who starts thinking about God. But as soon as these thoughts come to him, the devil makes him feel hungry. So he goes looking for food and is soon distracted by the ordinary busyness of life, and forgets his thoughts about God.

You can talk to some people about heaven and the love of God, and about hell and the right anger of God, but it's like water off a duck's back. They're more interested in 25% off underwear than the life-giving message of God.

The second type of soil that Jesus describes is rocky. There was just enough soil for the seed to start sprouting. It sprang up quickly at first. But when the sun came up, it soon withered because the soil was shallow. The plant couldn't grow roots.

This soil is like someone with a shallow heart. Very emotional. You know the people—they want to join immediately. They say “Yes” straight away. But it doesn't last. They join gyms in January but give up by February. They join Weight Watchers in June but have put on loads of weight by August.

As long as everything is going well and things aren't difficult, these people will follow Jesus. But as soon as they suffer problems and troubles for being Christians, they give up. Sometimes the hardship that makes people give up is when it's unpopular or uncool to obey Jesus. They have never really understood what it means for Jesus to be king.

The third type of soil is weedy. The seed sprouts and starts to grow. But there are thorns and they are desperate to take the same light and food and energy. They suck up all the water from the soil. The thorns grow side by side with the seed and eventually take over.

This soil is like someone with a crowded heart. It's as if they want everything. But if Jesus is king, then other people or other things cannot be king as well.

The worries of this life and all of those things that money and wealth promise us—like, “You'll be happy if you have more”—start to rule the heart. So do you see what's happening? The real king of this person is not Jesus, the king sent by God. Instead, the kingdom they're living for is this world. They're taken up with all the worries about things that only last as long as we live in this world—our weight, our job, our

home, our pension, our children's education, what car we will drive... These things rule us and boss us around, like they're our king.

OK. 3 soils. 3 hearts. And 3 ways to say "No" to Jesus. Why isn't everyone who hears the message of Jesus' like the good soil? Why do our hearts naturally want to squeeze him out?

Listen to how Jesus explains it back in v 15: *"The hearts of these people have become stubborn. They can barely hear with their ears. They have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes. They might hear with their ears. They might understand with their hearts. They might turn to the Lord, and then he would heal them."*

There's a stubbornness, a blindness and a self-destructiveness in us— because, if we did understand the message of God, Jesus would heal us. When Jesus puts it like this, it sounds crazy. Well, that's what he is saying! We **are** crazy, preferring almost anything instead of Jesus ruling as our king.

We believe we know better. We believe the messages of this world are more worth living for than God's kingdom. We treat God and his message just like a chain smoker treats the message about cancer on a packet of cigarettes. We are so addicted to life without God that we think life with God, with Jesus as king, would be dull and miserable.

In the Old Testament part of the Bible, in the book of Jeremiah, God says this: *"My people have sinned twice. They have left me, even though I am the spring of water that gives life. And they have dug their own wells. But those wells are broken. They can't hold any water."*

You get this crazy picture of a man in the desert, crawling past a fountain of life-giving water, and not seeing it, not hearing its cool gushing. Instead, he's digging his own well, which can only produce poisonous sludge. It's the same picture as verse 15—people closing their ears and hearts to Jesus so he can't help them.

Jesus has come into this world with the living word or message of God. He **is** the word of God, and life in the kingdom of God begins with him. To ignore him is complete madness.

Download 1:3

The fourth kind of soil is the good soil.

Not only do these people hear the message of the kingdom, but they understand it. Even though the evil one will try to take the message away... even though there may be suffering and troubles... even though there are the worries of this life and the false promises of wealth—these people are so rooted in the truth of Jesus being king that, Jesus says, they produce a crop. They are the only ones that are really alive—they're growing a crop. You can see that they have understood the message by the difference that it makes in their lives.

Now you could get the wrong idea from this story—that there are some people born like the good soil, and others who are not, and we can't change. But this is not what Jesus is saying.

We've already seen that the only difference between the disciples and the crowd was that the disciples came to Jesus. And that's the great hope in this passage. You are right now one of these soils. But whichever one you are, you can become the good soil. And you become good soil by coming to Jesus, listening to him, following what he says.

The important thing is not what you've been in the past, but what you do with this message now. Will you listen to King Jesus and will you keep listening to him? Will you ask God to give you true understanding so that the message will take root in your life, and change you?

(If using DVD testimonies: Now let me introduce you to someone who God has helped to understand the message of the kingdom...)

Session 2: The weeds and the wheat

Download 2:1

Jesus teaches that he is the king sent by God, bringing God's kingdom. So why isn't the world full of peace and goodness? Why is there evil in the world? In other words, where is this kingdom of heaven? And in what sense is Jesus now the king?

There's a famous story about a Christian speaking to a crowd in the open air in London. Someone shouts out: "Christianity's been around for 2000 years. Why is the world in the state that it is?" The Christian, noticing the man has a filthy neck, shouts back: "Well, soap has been around for 3000 years. Why is your neck in the state that it is?!"

I love that answer because it makes the person think about their **personal** responsibility to **listen** to the Christian message. In other words, just as the man refused to use soap, so people refuse to have Jesus as their king. We saw this in Session 1. People are stubborn and won't accept Jesus. That's one answer to our question. There is evil in our world because people reject Jesus as king. But the story we're looking at today gives two more answers.

Again it's a story about a farmer and seed. But we need to remember that it's a different story and it's going to tell us different things, so we should try not to muddle the two stories.

A farmer is getting on with his job of sowing seed—the very best variety of wheat; it's called "good seed". And when all the hard work has been done, he simply has to wait for the harvest. That is when someone plays a mean trick on him. While everyone is asleep, an enemy sows weed seed in order to ruin the harvest.

The word for the weed seed in the original language is "bearded darnel". This plant looks almost exactly like wheat. You can only tell the difference between the two plants when they're fully grown. Bearded darnel is poisonous—it carries a poisonous fungus.

Panicking, the workers rush back to the owner and suggest that they pull up the weeds. But the owner knows that because of the small size of the crop at this stage, and the intertwining of the weeds among the good plants, both weeds and crops would be destroyed. No—far better to wait, let the two kinds of plants grow together until harvest time, and that is when the final sorting will take place.

Jesus is talking about the time we are now living in— the time before he returns as king to judge the world. And in this time now, the good seed and the evil seed grow together. Jesus, the sower, is at work sowing good seed; and God’s enemy, the devil, is at work sowing bad seed.

And this is the second answer to the question: *If Jesus is king now, why isn’t the world full of peace and goodness?* It’s because the farmer has an enemy whose goal is to ruin the farmer’s good work. And for the moment, he is allowed to sow his seed—his work is not uprooted.

In the first session, we saw that the evil one took away God’s message, like a bird taking seed, to stop it growing in people’s lives. But now, in this story we see him sowing bad seed. This weed, bearded darnel, was also known as “bastard wheat”. In other words, the people this seed represents are not people who belong to the kingdom. No, they are illegitimate. The weed seed grows into what Jesus calls “people who belong to the evil one”. This seed explains why there’s selfishness and evil in the world.

But the seed that the evil one sows, at first, may look no different from the seed that Jesus, the Son of Man, sows. That’s why the farmer decides to wait until harvest time before separating the wheat and the weeds, because then the difference will be clear for all to see.

We see this sort of thing happening in the lives of people. Remember that at one time Hitler was a lovely little baby. It wasn’t until he was fully grown that people could see the evil in his heart.

Judas is another good example of this. Judas was one of Jesus' 12 closest friends. For several years he looked really good. But in the end he turned out to be "weed seed". He ended up selling Jesus for money—rejecting the king of the kingdom of heaven.

Now it's easy to see—at the end of their lives—that people like Hitler and Judas belong to the evil one. But many people seem ok all the way through their lives. It will only become clear at Judgment Day what kind of seed they are.

So the world we live in now is a mixed-up, muddled-up world, where good and evil grow side by side. At the moment there are two groups of people in this world—those who belong to the kingdom of heaven, and those who belong to the evil one. So what is the thing that divides all of us into one of these two groups?

It's whether or not Jesus is your king. Remember, this is a story about the **kingdom of heaven**—and therefore, it's about the **king of heaven**: Jesus. We see that someone is "wheat"—a person who belongs to the kingdom of heaven—because they live under the rule of King Jesus.

And the weeds, the people who belong to the evil one, are not just those who do really awful crimes—like murder and rape. They include everyone who doesn't accept Jesus as their king.

There are some very strong lessons here for us. Jesus is telling us that there is an enemy working against him. This enemy sows weeds that look like, and grow alongside, wheat. This is one of the classic tricks of the devil—counterfeit, or copying and deceiving.

So many people think that they're living good lives, but actually they are rebels against King Jesus. People may look ok but because they have rejected Jesus as king, they are just counterfeits.

God's enemy is at work and so this world is full of people that belong to the evil one. That's the second reason why the world isn't full of peace and goodness. But then, how can Jesus really be the king sent

by God? If he's king, why doesn't he root out all the evil from the world right now? We'll find out in the next Download when we discover the third answer to our question.

Download 2:2

Jesus teaches that he is the king sent by God, bringing God's kingdom. So why isn't the world full of peace and goodness? The two answers we've seen are:

1. People are stubborn and reject Jesus as king; and
 2. The evil one, God's enemy, wants to ruin God's work.
- We're now going to look at the third answer Jesus gives, which also shows us why, if Jesus is king, he doesn't root out all evil right now.

Sometimes we might like to have all the evil removed from this world right now, but thankfully Jesus doesn't do that just yet. There is a deliberate delay.

The servants ask: "Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?" because they want action now. But Jesus, who has every right to destroy all who rebel against him, is patient. He says: "Hold it! Let's wait." There's no hasty judgment.

Don't think that because Jesus isn't weeding out evil fully now, he's not bothered. Or that he's not actually ever going to judge us. Nothing could be further from the truth. There will be an end to evil. And that's what Jesus means when he talks about the harvest. He is talking about judgment day, when he will make a once-for-all decision about what will happen to each of us.

But Jesus is patient. And his patience is giving us an opportunity to hear the message of the kingdom and change.

Now, when we see an act of terrible evil, it's easy to call for justice and judgment. But, as a friend of mine says: "If you call the bin man, make sure you're not in the bin!" If you ask Jesus to come and judge, he'll come to judge you and me as well.

In other words, before you call for judgment to come, make sure you are right with God. If Jesus had come to judge the world in 1978—the year before I started to follow Jesus—I would be in hell!

Here is the third answer to why the world isn't full of peace and goodness: If God gets rid of everything wrong, he has to get rid of everyone who does wrong. That's all of us. But God has made a way for us to be made right and that's why he sent Jesus. So now he is giving us time to understand Jesus' message about the kingdom of heaven, and to accept Jesus as our king.

Peter, a disciple of Jesus, writes this in the New Testament:

"The Lord ... is patient with you. He doesn't want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins."

By the kindness and mercy of God, the weeds of today may become the wheat of tomorrow. So now is the time to examine yourself. This time of patience is time for you to turn. Don't waste God's patience.

Another Bible writer, Paul, says:

"Do you make fun of God's great kindness and favour? Do you make fun of God when he is patient with you? Don't you realise that God's kindness is meant to turn you away from your sins? But you are stubborn. In your heart you are not sorry for your sins. You are storing up anger against yourself. The day of God's anger is coming. Then his way of judging fairly will be shown."

Download 2:3

Judgment delayed is not judgment denied. Slow judgment doesn't mean no judgment.

*“The Son of Man (that’s King Jesus) **will** send out his angels. They will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin. They will also get rid of all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace. There people will sob and grind their teeth. Then God's people will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Those who have ears should listen.”*

This is where history is heading to—but not only history. This is where each of us is heading to. That’s why what we do with Jesus now has consequences that last for ever.

It’s worth reminding ourselves again that Jesus is king—not just some religious leader. In fact, you may have noticed that he calls himself “Son of Man”, in verses 37 and 41. This is a title that Jesus often used about himself. It comes from an Old Testament book, written by a prophet of Israel, called Daniel. He described the Son of Man like this:

He was given authority, glory and a kingdom. People from every nation and language worshipped him. His authority will last for ever. It will not pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

This tells us that Jesus is king of a kingdom that lasts for ever. This kingdom, the Bible tells us, is made up of people who come from every nation and every language, and who have Jesus as their king. Remember, we have thought about how you can change from weeds to wheat. All the people in this kingdom have been changed by Jesus.

The Bible talks about Jesus washing us and cleansing us by his death on the cross. The Bible talks about how Jesus makes people into the children of God—those who know God as their Father. They are the ones who will be in this kingdom.

See how the “wheat” is described in v 43. They are described as God’s people. In fact, the word that is used is “*righteous*”, which

means that they are *right* with God. The only way we can be made right with God is through what Jesus has done for us. They will shine like the sun, it says in v 43. This kingdom is full of those who know the light and life and warmth and glory of God.

For Jesus' kingdom to be like this, it has to be pure. Weeds can't grow there. Darkness can't live there. Evil can't be there. This explains Jesus' words in verses 40-42:

The weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire. That is how it will be on judgment day. The Son of Man will send out his angels. They will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin. They will also get rid of all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace. There people will sob and grind their teeth.

Jesus, the king of this everlasting kingdom, will sort out who comes in and who doesn't. There will be a division. The weeds will be pulled up and burned in the fire. His servants will weed out everything that causes sin and get rid of all who do evil.

This is very powerful and strong picture language and we are meant to get something of the horror of this. It probably doesn't mean people will be actually, physically, burning, but it's a picture of something even worse. These people are ruined for ever. They have said "no" to God, the God of life... they have said "no" to Jesus the king... they wouldn't listen to the message of God... and they have no intention of coming into God's kingdom.

These people are not sobbing because they want to repent and change. They are grinding their teeth because they hate God. On harvest day you see what each plant produces. The wheat produces a crop that God wants to take into his barn. The weeds are only that —weeds, poisonous.

What happens to us on judgment day will simply reflect our response to King Jesus now. Are we going to keep wishing he would go away? Or stay out of our way, hidden somewhere in the stories of Christmas and Easter but shut out of our lives? Will we carry on rejecting his

rule? Then one day we'll face his rejection, shut out of his kingdom for ever.

Or, will we come to Jesus and accept him as our king? Will we start living under his rule? Then we can look forward to being his people in his kingdom for ever. That's the meaning of the story of the wheat and the weeds.

(If using DVD testimonies: Now let me introduce you to someone who Jesus has changed from "weed" to "wheat"...)

Session 3: Seeds, yeast, treasure and a pearl

Download 3:1

We are looking at a part of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is teaching about the kingdom of heaven, God's kingdom. But when people in Jesus' day heard the term "kingdom of heaven", they thought of power and riches and style—stuff that everyone could see and be impressed by.

And, of course, we're the same. When we think of a kingdom, we think of a place, a political state, military power, a ruler with all his people and his line of cars, his police escorts and bodyguards and his palace. When we think of a kingdom growing, we think of land and people to be conquered.

But the ways of God are not the ways of people. And so, to show how God's kingdom is different from the kingdoms of this world, Jesus tells us these first two stories—the story of the mustard seed and the story of the yeast. These stories show that the kingdom of heaven grows—in fact, it is unstoppable—but the way in which it grows is different from any other kingdom.

When Jesus talks about mustard, he means a tree that grows in the Middle East—not the mustard and cress that we can grow on a windowsill.

A mustard seed is smaller than a pinhead. Jesus calls it "the smallest of all your seeds". There was an expression at that time: "As small as a mustard seed", which meant that something was tiny and useless.

But Jesus is saying that what appears tiny and useless grows into a tree full of life. From the smallest beginnings comes something so impressive that you can't miss it. As we would say: "From acorns grow mighty oaks".

So the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed—this tiny seed that's so easy to miss. There are much more important-looking seeds

around. Think of the size of a coconut—that’s an impressive seed! But the mustard seed looks like nothing.

This is how many people think of the message that Jesus brings. This is a message from God—but it doesn’t look like that because it comes from a first-century travelling Jewish preacher. It looks like nothing.

This is the message of a lone man, dying on a cross between two thieves. It’s the story of a peasant preacher who, it seems, was destroyed by the power of the Roman empire and the hate of the religious leaders. Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem. He grew up in the nowhere town of Nazareth. He never even visited the super-cities of the day, Rome or Athens. He never wrote a book, never had a qualification, never owned a home, never had a wife and children, never went to college, never travelled more than 200 miles from the place where he was born. Hardly impressive!

He ended up dying on a cross. His life, his teaching, his message all seem just like a little mustard seed. You can blow it away with a puff—it’s all so “nothing-y”.

But it’s at that very scene of death that we see the powerful love of God. Because at that very scene, Jesus was dying in our place. All the things in our life and our thoughts and actions... All the things that we haven’t done that we should have done... And all the things that we have done that we shouldn’t have... All those things that exclude us from being accepted by God and being part of the kingdom of heaven... All of those things that separate us from God and leave us only as part of this world—which is dying...

... All of these things were placed on Jesus, so the punishment that we deserve from God himself would be taken by Jesus. So that we could be forgiven... we could be cleansed... made new. That message—when understood and planted into a life—grows into the most powerful force that affects everything.

You see it again with the story of the yeast. The stories of the mustard seed and the yeast are similar but not identical. Both are about the kingdom of heaven growing, but the yeast shows how the kingdom of heaven grows in a way that is unnoticed in this world.

Just a pinch of yeast is mixed into a much larger lump of dough. You cannot see it. You cannot see it spreading. Some of you may have bread machines at home. Perhaps once or twice you have left out the yeast— and nothing happens! But if you put in the smallest pinch, in an hour or so the dough has risen to three times its size. The yeast is small and acts in a way that is unseen, but it affects every part of the dough.

The message of the kingdom of heaven is to be like that yeast in our lives. Jesus isn't to be just an add-on to your life, a little bit of religion that you keep just for Sundays. He's not like an app that you can put on your phone or your computer. The message of Jesus is more like a whole new operating system on your computer. The yeast goes throughout the whole dough and it has a huge effect.

So how does the message of Jesus change someone's life? When you understand the message of what Jesus has done to bring God's forgiveness, it enables **you** to forgive people. When you understand what he has done to bring you into God's kingdom, it enables you to live for something bigger and grander than just your own plans.

It's the message of the kingdom of **heaven**. It's seed from heaven, yeast from heaven, that changes people. No other message can have this effect, because only this message is the power of God at work.

Just think for a moment about a mustard seed. Every branch, leaf, flower and seed of the tree that it will grow into is inside that tiny speck. We can't see it yet but it's already there. Astonishing!

It's just like the message of Jesus—that Jesus is our rightful King, sent by God to bring us into his kingdom. Within that simple truth there's so much! There's God's power—to give us a fresh new start with God... to turn away from our old life... to trust in Jesus instead...

to live for him first and foremost... even to become like him... and to bring us to the day when he will make us perfect. Jesus' message, like the mustard seed, is a creation of God.

So these first two stories tell us that the kingdom of heaven may look like nothing, but it's the power of God to change people.

Download 3:2

Can you imagine each of these men finding their treasure? A quick gasp of breath—the eyes almost popping out of their heads—the licking of dry lips—the missing of a heartbeat.

Then they suddenly realise that they don't own the treasure. The man who found the treasure in a field didn't own the field. The man who found the pearl didn't own the pearl. Then comes the instant decision—"I must have it whatever the cost".

Now imagine if these two men lived next door to you. They're pretty ordinary neighbours, but now they're running home like footballers who have just scored a goal. They quickly write out a "For Sale" sign and put it outside the house. They open up their garage for a garage sale and fill up the boot of their car for a local car-boot sale. Everything is up for sale—even the latest smart phone, the games consoles, the 56-inch flat-screen TV...

Here is a picture of reckless sacrifice—someone giving up everything, wildly selling all they own. At least, that's what it looks like to you, the neighbour.

But from the point of view of these two men, they're not giving up anything: they're gaining everything! The choice they face lies between worthless bits and pieces, and treasure in the field or this fantastically valuable pearl. There's nothing noble about this—they'd be incredibly stupid to keep what they've got and lose what they haven't got.

Here's the first thing we learn: Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like this. Actually, the treasure and the pearl are more than that because you can't separate the kingdom of heaven from the king of heaven. So Jesus is really talking about himself. He is the great treasure. He is the fantastically valuable pearl. And these two stories picture the person who comes to see who Jesus really is.

If you look through the Bible, you can see that it talks about Jesus—and Jesus talks about himself—as much more than an ordinary

person, or even an extraordinary person! When you start to dig a little, you'll see the Bible says tons of amazing stuff about Jesus.

Unlike every other person born into this world, Jesus has always been alive. Listen to what he says about himself in the Bible book of Revelation: "*I am [the one] who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*". Which is another way of saying: "I've always been and I always will be because I am God".

The Bible tells us:

The Son is the gleaming brightness of God's glory. He is the exact likeness of God's being. He uses his powerful word to hold all things together. He provided the way for people to be made pure from sin.

Jesus is the treasure because of who he is. And who is he? He is the exact likeness of God... the gleaming brightness of God's glory. He is God... BUT hidden in a field—the human body that he was born into as a baby in Bethlehem.

There's no one more valuable than Jesus and there's no one who's done anything more valuable than he's done. The Bible tells us:

He provided the way for people to be made pure from sin.

And the Bible also says:

We have been set free because of what Christ has done. Through his blood our sins have been forgiven. We have been set free because God's grace is so rich.

Who is rich enough to pay for our sin? Only Jesus.

So Jesus is the treasure. He is the pearl.

The second thing we see is that the kingdom of heaven seems to be hidden. The treasure was hidden in a field. I'm sure many people walked over it and never saw anything.

After telling these stories Jesus went back to his home town of Nazareth, but people didn't want to see anything more than that he was the carpenter's son, and they knew his mother, brothers and sisters.

On the beach, have you ever seen those people going up and down with metal detectors. They're the ones who have a chance of finding treasure because they're looking below the surface.

The third thing we learn is that we join the kingdom of heaven when we see that nothing is more valuable than Jesus. In both stories the men sell everything because nothing they have is worth more than the treasure or the pearl. And that is the point of the stories.

Now we've got to be careful here because we could get these stories wrong and think that the way we get into the kingdom of heaven is by selling everything—a bit like trying to buy your way into heaven.

Religion is full of this sort of thing. "If I give up this or I give up that... or if I stop doing this or I stop doing that... God will be happy with me." But that is not the point here. The point is: Trust in Jesus Christ, because nothing is more valuable.

There's an old Christian hymn that says:

*"Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling."*

How liberating it is to know that nothing we can bring to God will do anything to get us into the kingdom of heaven. It doesn't matter who we are, what we've done, or what we've not done. The message of true Christianity isn't "Do good" or "Be better". It's "Trust in Jesus"!

Nothing is more valuable than Jesus. Think about it—everything that you could possibly have in this world will end or die, but Jesus won't. Nothing you could do or say or achieve can buy a place in the kingdom of heaven, but Jesus can. You could add up everything about your life, even religion, and it's worthless compared to the treasure of Jesus!

We need to understand who Jesus is, so that he becomes who he should be in our lives—the king: the one we worship, love and adore. He is the only one worth living for—not even good things like your family, or work, or your community compare with the treasure that he is.

Download 3:3

We've seen four very short stories that Jesus told. They themselves are like little mustard seeds. On the surface they're insignificant little stories—nice thoughts. If you look at them from that surface angle, you won't get much from them.

But if you do what we've tried to do in this session and dig a little, you'll discover that these stories are the word of God. When they are planted in our hearts, they produce life—they can touch every area of our lives. That can completely affect our understanding, what's most important to us and what we see life is about. These stories Jesus told become like yeast going through all the dough.

You might still be sitting here, thinking: "I just can't see Jesus as this great treasure. I'm interested in him. I'm happy to learn about him. But I don't get what these stories of the treasure and the pearl are saying. It still hasn't clicked."

That's all right but remember what we learned in the first session. The disciples didn't get it either, so they came to Jesus and asked him. Whereas the crowd didn't get it, but they just went home!

So keep digging... keep listening... and learning... and asking Jesus to help you.

(If using DVD testimonies: Let me introduce you to someone who did just that and who eventually found Jesus to be the greatest treasure there can be...)

Session 4: The net

Download 4:1

“Don’t judge me!”

“Are you judging me?”

“You’ve got no right to judge others.”

Have you ever heard people say this sort of thing?

And yet, life is full of judgments. And we really don’t like them. In fact some of us will try to avoid them at all costs.

Exams are a kind of judgment—they tell you what you actually know instead of what you think you know. A medical check-up is a kind of judgment—it tells you what’s really going on inside. It might tell you something that you’d prefer not to know.

All these things judge us and reveal us. They get below the surface and the way we cover up what’s really going on inside. And that is one reason why we get so nervous about exams and hate them. And it’s also why this story of Jesus is not the most popular. You wouldn’t hear the story of the net in a school assembly!

That’s because this story is about judgment day—the day when Jesus will return as king of the universe, with his angels, to bring this world to a close. *“This is how it will be on judgment day,”* Jesus says. There will be a great separation— a gathering in and a throwing away.

The fisherman separates his catch into good fish and bad fish— edible and non-edible fish. Actually, the people Jesus was talking to, the Jews, thought of fish as clean or unclean, because they had lots of religious rules about food. At that time God’s people were allowed to eat some kinds of fish and they were called “clean”. They were not allowed to eat other kinds, and they were called “unclean”. The bad fish—the unclean ones—were no good to them, and so they were thrown away.

That's the fish. But Jesus says all **people** will be separated, into those who are unclean and those who are clean—those who have done what is wrong and those who have done what is right. And he even calls those who do wrong “evil ones”. So who exactly are these two groups of people?

First of all, who are the ones who do wrong, these “evil ones”? When I think of an evil person, I think of murderers and paedophiles and people who sell drugs to children and the Hitlers of this world. So, hopefully, I can squeeze myself into the good group. After all, I love my children; I'm happy to help my neighbour; I recycle my waste paper.

But what does **Jesus** mean by this term “evil ones”? It's important to know because he's the one in charge of the separating, not me. He's the judge, not me.

At best, we like to think of ourselves as good people who have done a few wrong things. We know we're not perfect, but we think we're quite good. But Jesus doesn't think like that. He says that those wrong things show that there is something wrong with our hearts.

Jesus says this: *"What comes out of people makes them 'unclean.' Evil thoughts come from the inside, from people's hearts. So do sexual sins, stealing and murder. Adultery, greed, hate and cheating come from people's hearts too. So do desires that are not pure, and wanting what belongs to others. And so do telling lies about others and being proud and being foolish. All those evil things come from inside a person. They make him 'unclean.' "*

Notice here that Jesus says we are **unclean**. That puts us all squarely in the “bad fish” category—among the unclean fish, the ones that are thrown away.

When we really think about ourselves, we know that our hearts are not good. We don't even live up to our own standards, let alone God's. When someone lies to us, we know that is wrong, but it's so

easy for us to lie to others. And we all have things that we're ashamed of, that we try to cover up and pretend don't exist.

I heard someone talking about an advert for a computer program designed to get rid of dodgy stuff on your computer. The advert went something like this:

"You're in serious trouble! Don't think that you can protect yourself just by deleting your internet history. All the web pages, photos, films, videos, emails, and chat logs on your computer—in fact, everything you have done in cyberspace—can be recovered. It can all come back to haunt you. Imagine someone finding this information and then passing it on to your loved ones, or your boss, or even the media. That's how easily your life could be ruined!"

This advertiser really understands what we are like—that in private and in secret we get involved in things that we would be ashamed for others to know about. This is a much more truthful picture of who we really are and it's very different from how we want others to see us.

Jesus shows us what is wrong with our hearts. But to rub this in, let's look at what Jesus says will come out of a clean heart. Jesus explains God's commandments like this: *"Love the Lord your God with **all your heart** and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind. This is the first and most important commandment."*

So of course you might do good things. You could probably list loads of them. But the question is this: Who has your heart? Who is the one you live for? Or, as we have seen before in Matthew chapter 13, who is your king?

Some of you may remember the British children's TV programme called "Captain Pugwash". He is the captain of a ship called "The Black Pig". Pugwash and his friends have many adventures together. They are good fun; they help each other out. But... on their ship they fly the skull and crossbones flag, which means that they are pirates. If you just look at what they do on the ship, they seem to be quite good. But actually, everything they do, even the good stuff, is wrong

because they are under the wrong flag. They're not flying the king's flag. And what happens when pirates get caught? They will be in big trouble. They will never enjoy their pirate life again.

If Jesus is not your king, you are under the wrong flag and everything you do is wrong—even the right things! You are unclean fish, and you will be thrown away.

Listen again to what Jesus says: *“This is how it will be on judgment day. The angels will come. They will separate the people who did what is wrong from those who did what is right. They will throw the evil people into the blazing furnace. There the evil ones will sob and grind their teeth.”*

This sounds like a horror movie when you hear these words. But remember who is speaking. Jesus is not a hard, angry, religious weirdo who hates other people. Jesus is full of compassion—he loves the people he is warning. In fact, this warning is part of his love. If we say “No” to Jesus as our loving king, then this is where we will end up. The picture of throwing away the bad fish shows that we will be separated from God's love for ever.

As Jesus says: *“They will throw the evil people into the blazing furnace. There the evil ones will sob and grind their teeth.”*

Download 4:2

In Jesus' story there are good fish that need to be separated from the bad fish. But who can these good fish be? As we've already seen, we're all in the "bad fish" category.

Jesus' point in telling us this story is to warn us before the division happens, so that we can examine ourselves and see which fish we are before we get to judgment day. Although the story doesn't say this, there is a way of becoming clean before God and good in his eyes. Jesus has come to tell us this and to make it possible. The king has come to bring you into his kingdom. For this to happen we need a radical heart-change and only Jesus can do that.

In verse 51 Jesus asks his disciples a very simple question: "Do you understand all these things?" "Yes" they reply. And then in v 52 Jesus says this very strange sentence to explain what "understanding" looks like:

"Every teacher of the law who has been taught about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house. He brings new treasures out of his storeroom as well as old ones."

Jesus is saying this: "If you have understood my message, then it will make a change in your life".

Jesus talks about the "storeroom". In the language this was first written in, the storeroom means the heart. So everyone who has understood Jesus' message is bringing out of their heart treasures, new and old. In other words, there is a heart-change towards Jesus as king.

Just think about the huge change that Jesus is talking about. Remember what he says our hearts are naturally like:

"Evil thoughts come from the inside, from people's hearts. So do sexual sins, stealing and murder. Adultery, greed, hate and cheating come from people's hearts too. So do desires that are not pure, and wanting what belongs to others. And so do telling lies about others and being proud and being foolish. All those evil things come from inside a person."

That is what our hearts are naturally like. But now what comes out of the changed heart is the treasure of King Jesus.

As we've seen in the stories of the buried treasure and the fantastically valuable pearl, Jesus himself is the treasure. Changed hearts are hearts that love, follow and live for King Jesus.

But notice Jesus says: “**Every teacher of the law** who has been taught ... is like the owner of a house” (v 52). This is very strange because whenever Jesus talks about the teachers of the law—the religious leaders—he shows how wrong they are. They're really opposed to God himself.

The teachers of the law, although very religious, were the enemies of Jesus. All through Matthew's Gospel, Jesus shows what their hearts are really like. He talks about them having poisonous hearts, as blind guides, hypocrites, their hearts are far away from God, children of hell, pretending to worship God.

But here, Jesus is saying something positive about teachers of the law. If they understand who Jesus is, they will have a heart-change. So even a teacher of the law—who is an enemy of Jesus—can be changed by the message of the kingdom of heaven. It's as if Jesus introduces the teacher of the law to give us the worst case possible.

But now even these useless teachers of God's law—blind hypocrites, children of hell, people whose hearts are far away from God, people who think they are clean fish but are not—can join the kingdom of heaven. The bad fish can become good fish.

So, if these bad fish can become good fish, then any bad fish can become a good one. If someone like that can understand and have a heart-change, then so can you. But it's all down to receiving Jesus as the treasure of our hearts and the king of our lives. Isn't this fantastic news!

Download 4:3

“Do you understand all these things?” Jesus asked. Not just: “Have you heard them?”

It’s possible to hear these quaint little stories involving everyday scenes in ancient Galilee and not understand what they mean. So here we find Jesus pushing the disciples: “Do you understand?” These are not just nice little stories—they are matters of heaven and hell, your eternal destiny, and who your king is.

We’ve seen a lot about who Jesus is in these stories—the fabulous pearl... the great treasure... the seed of life... the gleaming brightness of God... the one who gave up his life for us... the one who is rich enough to pay the penalty for our sin... the one who can change us. So many wonderful things! And of course, the great theme that holds these all together—that Jesus is the king.

So listen again to Jesus: *“Do **you** understand all these things?”*

(If using DVD testimonies: Let me introduce you to someone who now understands that Jesus is the king...)