

The Gospel According to Luke
Luke 13:18-21
Reading: Matthew 13:31-33

Sermon #60
November 24, 2019

The Kingdom of God

Misunderstanding “The Kingdom of God”

This passage is short but contains major applications for life to be lived by inward and outward beliefs. Jesus stepped into the world that had been broken since the fall and had been under the influence of Satan for thousands of years. It was a natural response that his ministry was opposed from all sides; Satan did not want to give up control and knew well what it meant if Jesus was successful, the religious leaders desired to maintain the status quo and keep this positions of power and influence and even his followers opposed him at times because of their lack of faith or misunderstandings. It is the same today as the battle continues. Luke in his logical recording of Jesus’ life shows this progression of conflict more than any other writer. Luke also shows, as we have learned, that Jesus’ ministry was founded on preaching the Kingdom of God and compassionate miracles and healings that validated his authority and his divinity. The scriptures record the highlights of Jesus’ life; highlights that are more than enough to validate who he is and for us to believe, but as John ended his gospel account stating, “[Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.](#)” (John 21:25) So, those who followed Jesus would have heard the message of the Kingdom over and over, just as many of these themes found in the scriptures are preached over and over in our church. Repetition helps lock God’s Word into our hearts and minds and helps keep us focused on Christ and not the things of the world and this is exactly the model we are given by Christ himself.

At this point in time of Jesus' ministry - the disciples are troubled. They had seen Jesus perform a number of miracles and they had heard the message of the kingdom over and over, but they were not seeing anything that resembled the promised kingdom coming into existence now – they did not see the kingdom as they understood beginning in either their lives or the lives of the people or in Israel. Just like the disciples and we are people that often lack patience. The disciples believed Jesus was the Messiah and yet, they wondered as the Messiah who taught the Kingdom of God, why was there all this opposition to Jesus? Why was Jesus not beginning to set up his kingdom and his rule over Israel and the world? It was confusing for the disciples as they witnessed the religious leaders not submitting and worshipping Jesus, but on the contrary, they were becoming active in their opposition to him and his teachings. These leaders were rejecting Jesus and plotting his destruction. Further, Jesus was not helping matters as he called these leaders, these Pharisees and Sadducees, **“You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”** (Matthew 12:34) This approach certainly was not the man-made way of influencing one's enemies and making them friends. How was Jesus going to set up his kingdom if, as we saw last week, he calls these leaders, **“hypocrites!”** (v. 15) The disciples did not understand Jesus was not concerned about winning these leaders over, but his concern was the truth of God and that truth was - Israel, it's leaders and people had moved away from God as they had given into the influences sent by Satan to corrupt God's Word. I think the disciples believed - but they were struggling with how Jesus was going to bring about the Kingdom of God he was preaching. They were not seeing with their physical eyes the Kingdom coming into reality. Do you look at this broken sinful world bent on destruction and wonder what is God doing? After all it has been 2000 years, what is God waiting for? Why does he not destroy all this wickedness and bring in the reign of

Christ? God's has a plan for redemption and it is being played out in God's timing. Apostle Peter wrote concerning these same questions and the impatient desires of the early believers waiting for Christ's return, "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9)

In addition the disciples knew the prophecies, just as we do; like what the prophet Isaiah wrote, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. **The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**" (Isaiah 9:7) The disciples also knew that ²⁶ "The angel Gabriel *appeared to Mary ...* ³⁰ And ... said to her, ³¹ "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and **he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.**" (Luke 1:26-33) I can see why, at this point, there were some discrepancies in their minds between the preaching and the reality of Jesus. After all, he was being opposed from all directions. However, the problem was not with Jesus but with the disciples understanding of what God's Kingdom is about and what it looks like and how God's plan for salvation will unfold. Because of the disciple's confusion Jesus addresses what the Kingdom of God is like.

Understanding "The Kingdom of God"

It Is Spiritual

Please open your Bibles to Luke 13, verse 18, Jesus said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? ¹⁹ It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.” When you hear the word Mustard, what do you think of? *Picture of Mustard bottle*. Or the mustard plant that grew where I was raised? *Picture of field of mustard plants*. But the seed Jesus speaks of does not grow a field of plants, but a tree. *Picture of mustard tree*. The American equivalent might be the acorn and the oak tree. As you can see how small the seed is. *Picture of seeds*. They are so very small, but inside this small seed is everything needed to grow a tree, a tree large enough for birds to nest in. The birds roosting in the branches of a tree was often a symbol, in the ancient near east, of the nations of the earth as found in Ezekiel 17:23 and 31:6, and also Daniel chapter 4. The kingdom may begin small but will grow into God’s mighty church affecting and changing the world until Jesus’ return. God’s kingdom is universal for people from all nations will be found it. In Matthew chapter 24 that deals with the signs of the end times; things that must take place before Jesus’ return, we read in verse 14, “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” This is just one of the many reasons for patience and for taking the gospel to the world – in the forms of evangelism and missions, so that, none chosen by God will perish.

Now reading verses 20 and 21, And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.” Jesus also uses the comparison of a small pinch of yeast added to three measures of flour. Three measures of flour are equal to about 50 pounds of dough. It is enough to feed about 150 people. Yet, all it needed to cause the dough to raise was a small pinch of yeast. The yeast like the

mustard seed seems very insignificant, but although small, they produce great results.

What's Jesus' point? He wants the disciples to understand something very important. They were in the beginning stages of the Kingdom of God. It was small and seemed very insignificant up against the Roman Empire or the great realms of the day. It appeared to be making only a small dent in the wayward and false religious system of Israel. Jesus' point is that even though God's Kingdom then seemed small and insignificant, He did not want His disciples to be fooled into thinking that it was not going to grow. They were mustard seeds and leaven that would grow to impact the world.

The Roman Empire, like all man-made institutions came and went. What man creates is always temporary, even our own country. However, history shows us that God's Kingdom has lasted, it has outlasted all the man-made things and it is still growing and will continue to grow until Christ's return.

So, at the this time, the disciples were following Christ and also we are following to this day; the Kingdom is not one with borders and a capitol, but an invisible and spiritual kingdom. It is a kingdom that does not belong to the physical world but lives within the physical with a growing number of believers that restrains the evil of a fallen world. Whenever men and women and children accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and submit to God their Creator's authority – God changes their lives, he reins them in to live by his boundaries and the Kingdom of God is present and observable in their lives. This is kingdom of the heart - were stone hearts are changed into hearts of flesh believing in Jesus. It began small; at the time Jesus ascended into heaven the number of believers was only about 500 or so people. Now, almost 2000 years later the number, according to statisticians, is

2.4 billion Christians in the world. Now this number represents the broad church and not the number of true believers or the remnant, but the estimate of true believers, making up the remnant Church of Christ is 720 to 840 million. Even though these number are subjective they show the tremendous growth of God's Kingdom past to present. So, what the disciples witnessed in those days was a mustard seed's worth of God's Kingdom. The miracles of raising the dead and healing the sick was just the beginning, just a few hundred – but now, here today, we worship God with millions of brothers and sisters in Christ. From the small mustard seed and a pinch of yeast there are now millions – just think of the numbers of saints from throughout history and those living in the present and those of the future and image the myriads of believers and what the Kingdom of God will be like in its fullness. Know, my beloved, the Kingdom is growing and you are part of this growth.

It Changes From Within

Now we examine inwards growth that affects both us and the world. Reading Luke 13: verse 18 and 19, “**What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?**”¹⁹ **It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.**” Without experience, who would have ever imagined that from such a tiny seed a tree would appear? *Slide of seed & tree.* This tiny insignificant seed would produce a tree so large that birds actually build permanent nests in the branches. Reading verses 20 and 21, “**To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?**”²¹ **It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.**” Who would have thought that such a small pinch of yeast or leaven could permeate 50 pounds of dough and cause it to feed more than a hundred and fifty people? *Slide of bowl.* A small amount of leaven or yeast affects a

great deal. In other places in the scriptures yeast is representative of evil spreading and damaging good, but here the small yeast or disciples is good and can influence many for the Kingdom. At the time of Jesus, the Kingdom looked small and feeble and unable to withstand the Romans and Jewish religious leaders. The founder and King of the Kingdom was poor and died a horrible death and he left a small band of brothers. Those who preached after Jesus left were persecuted and martyred and yet, yet the Church grew and spread. Working in Muslim countries we observed that when people become believers there is a price to pay, much like the early church; rejection by family, persecution and martyrdom and yet, the church is growing, the Kingdom of God is advancing. When Joyce and I began working in one of the “Stan” countries there were only 2 believers, who had come to believe through visions of Jesus. These two brothers belonged to a people group of about two million and from this tiny seed of a beginning, there are now over 300 underground churches. The Kingdom will continue to grow until Jesus returns and reigns for eternity.

There has never been nor will there ever be a force on earth that can stop this growth. Wars will not stop it. Persecution will not stop it. Skeptics and atheists will not stop it. Satan will not stop it. The Kingdom of God will continue to increase. Jesus is not teaching the Postmillennial View that says that more and more people will be saved until **all** the world is Christian and then Christ will return. No, God’s Kingdom started very small and has continued to grow and will keep growing. The world will not be fully Christian when Christ returns, but the church will continue and it will grow and people will come to believe until Jesus’ return.

It Grows Through Submission

Reading again verses 20 and 21, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.” Not only does the leaven of God affect the world through the growing church, but there is another way in which this rule and rein of God continues to grow. As believers, it grows within. This is the picture of the yeast and the dough. Just as yeast permeates the entire lump of dough so God’s rule will permeate our entire being when we submit to the Holy Spirit within. The Kingdom is growing within our hearts and will continue to do so until we either die or Christ returns. God placed his leaven within each believer, his Holy Spirit and when one submits, they are transformed, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The disciples were confused and a little discouraged because they did not have the full picture yet. We have a bigger and clearer picture than they, but still we do not have the whole picture, so at times it is easy to become confused and discouraged as we live in this evil world. Have you ever been confused and discouraged? I certainly have. Let me ask, what about when it comes to your walk with Christ? Have you ever thought you would be farther along than what you are or that others around you would be further in their spiritual journey? Perhaps you have been discouraged at the growth in your own life. Take heart, my beloved, God is not finished yet. The secret is submitting and submitting - again and again. The secret is to stay focused on Christ through prayer and study of God’s Word. His Kingdom may have started small in your life but if you submit to him, it will grow and continue to grow until Christ completely rules and reigns in your life.

It was with this knowledge that Paul was able to write these true and encouraging words. Words that I hope and pray this morning’s teaching will add depth and meaning to. Reading out of Romans chapter 8, ²⁸ “We know that for

those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” *All things, both good and hard are meant to grow us in spiritual maturity and for us to be a witness to the world. Paul continues,* ²⁹ “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” *This is God’s plan for your life – that you be glorified in Christ and live to bring Him glory.* ³¹ “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn?” *We are to live such lives that no one may bring a charge or condemn us or the one Holy God we worship. “Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, in the Psalms of King David (44:22) ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:28-39) *The seed of faith God has planted in your heart and the gift of the spiritual yeast planted within you, the Holy Spirit, will enable you to live faithful and grow in spiritual stature. Then Jesus is truly our Lord and nothing “in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

The key in our passage today is to remember things may look small and insignificant in your life. Your faith at times may seem small and weak. Your ministry to others may seem insignificant. Your fruit may seem insignificant. But if God has saved you, you will grow and God will sanctify your life until you are glorified and as you live you will bring God glory and some people will notice and want to know your Jesus.

We must learn to trust what Christ says even though for now, much of it is invisible. His Kingdom is growing and someday when He returns it will cover the whole of the earth. We know from God's Word that Jesus wins, people are saved and Satan is defeated, for this is the story of the Bible.

Also, remember, do not be discouraged when it seems like your progress in following Christ seems small or insignificant. God will work in you as you work to know God and one day your faith will stand strong like a mustard seed tree and continue to grow into a great oak tree. Take heart, for now things may seem small, one day they will be seen for what they truly are... As God's Word says – so it will be! Amen!