

A Mustard Seed and a Few Pecks of Leaven – Luke 13:18-30

The Gospel Age of Hope - #9

Introduction – The topic of the Kingdom of heaven is immense for it is the topic of God's gospel love for the world. This sermon focuses on just one aspect, commonly misunderstood, regarding the kingdom of heaven, and answering a common objection to this aspect. Finally, we will begin to consider and apply these truths in our situation.

Remember – “*Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’*” (Matt 4:17). All through the gospels we find recordings of Jesus describing what that kingdom is like through many parables.

How Does the Kingdom Come? (Luke 13:18-21) – After healing one infirm woman among a synagogue of Israel (vv10-17), Jesus describes what His kingdom is like. He makes clear that it is God's good pleasure that the kingdom of God does not arrive like a huge military invasion. While declaring victory over the whole earth, it arrives like certain kinds of small, hidden things: mustard seeds and leaven. Leaven is not a sign of uncleanness in this passage but rather of the gospel's intensive progress in the world. It will leaven the whole lump; everything will be influenced. The kingdom is like a mustard seed, the smallest in the garden (Matt 13:32); it is hardly noticed at first. But it grows to become the largest tree in the garden. Again, Jesus is calling upon OT imagery, this time depicting great empires as trees in which subject nations nest like the birds (Ezek 17, Dan 4:10-12). Though small and insignificant in its outward appearance at the start, the kingdom will grow upon the earth, becoming the greatest spiritual empire, and the nations will find refuge in its branches. It is not until the kingdom has grown to its appointed size that the Lord will come (cf. 1 Cor 15:24-26).

The Objection: Are There Few Who Are Saved? (Luke 13:22-30) – Many turn to this passage (along with verses such as Matt 7:13-14 and Matt 22:14 wondering how to reconcile this with an optimistic view of the salvation of the world. But let's follow the passage and see how it reconciles itself. Jesus is preaching through the cities on His way to Jerusalem (v22). Most likely due to the kind of response, “*one said to Him, ‘Lord, are there few who are saved?’*” (v23). Jesus responds regarding the generation that He is speaking to, those who will argue on the day in which He says, “*I do not know you,*” (v25) by saying “*We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets*” (v26). It will be too late for them once He has closed the door in judgment. All that will be left is weeping (great sorrow) and gnashing of teeth (great anger).

They are also the ones who will be distressed by the flowing in of the Gentile nations from all over the world (vv28-29). What we have is a picture of a well-attended feast and yet great underrepresentation of this generation of Jews. This faithful remnant was prophesied by Isaiah (10:22-23) and quoted by Paul (Rom 9:27-28) to describe the state of affairs in his day. The few that are saved are the remnant of Jews in Jesus' day; and then the Gentiles would stream in (see also Matt 21:43). And so, “there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30).

Kingdom Character – We do not bring in the kingdom through political maneuvering or military might (2 Cor 10:3-5). It is not a kingdom established by carnal rule which is why Jesus said, “My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). Christ was not claiming the kingdom was ethereal; rather He was contrasting its character from that of every other kingdom. His servants would fight if His kingdom were of the world. His kingdom, however, spreads through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom.

Citizens of the Kingdom (Rom 14:17) – There is a difference in the character of those in the kingdom for this is a kingdom of *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*. Whatever is going on in the world or in our lives, we have the ability not to despair or panic, and by means of the fruit of the Spirit we can stand against wickedness. As we do so, we are able to with a winsome peace, optimistic joy, and Spirit-wrought patience with an invitation to the gospel for all.

Center of Kingdom Work (Heb 12:28) – So how does the kingdom grow? How does this kingdom first manifest itself and shake up the world? It is here in our corporate worship that the work of receiving this kingdom is manifest to us, in us, and through us to the world.