

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

Luke 13:18-35

Key Verse: 13:19

“It [the kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.”

In this passage Jesus begins what is called his Perea ministry. Perea referred to the region east of Judea, across the Jordan. There, Jesus spent about three months prior to his final ascent into Jerusalem. Among gospel writers, Luke gives the most attention to the Perea ministry, devoting six chapters to it (13:22-19:27). Matthew covers it in two chapters (19:1-20:28), Mark in one chapter (10:1-45), and John in just three verses (10:40-42). We are indebted to Luke for this account. In Perea, Jesus faced daily the thought of his imminent, sacrificial death. Jesus did not do many miracles in Perea. But he taught intensely about the kingdom of God. Jesus planted the kingdom of God in truth, which was contrary to human expectations. We can learn much about the kingdom of God in today's passage. In verses 18-21, Jesus tells us about the kingdom of God through two parables. In verses 22-30, Jesus teaches the importance of entering the kingdom of God. In verses 31-35, Jesus shows us how to live in view of the kingdom of God. Let's listen to Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God, and accept it in our hearts.

I. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (18-21)

Jesus' parables were stories from common life that illustrated truths about unseen spiritual realities. Jesus really wants us to accept the kingdom of God, which is not at all what we expect in our natural minds.

First, the parable of the mustard seed. Look at verses 18-19. **“Then Jesus asked, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.’”** A mustard seed was known to be the smallest of seeds. It is even smaller than a sesame seed. But it had life-giving power in itself. After it was planted in the ground, it grew slowly and steadily into a large tree that sheltered birds of the air. In the same way the kingdom of God begins with a small seed of life-giving power, and it grows steadily into a source of blessing for the world.

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

		
Mustard seeds	Mustard Tree	Yeast

We can see this in Jesus himself. In a divine mystery, God's life was planted in Mary's womb as a small seed. After nine months, Jesus was born as a tiny baby, placed in a manger. He grew as many other children of the time did, under the loving care of poor parents who lived in obedience to the law of God. Jesus did not drop from heaven as a fully developed Messiah. He grew, going through the same life experiences of any ordinary person.

At the age of 30, Jesus stepped forward to be baptized. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and began his public ministry. First, Jesus defeated Satan's temptations with the absolute word of God. Afterward, Jesus visited towns and villages, preaching the kingdom of God. At one word of Jesus, demons were exposed and fled. At one touch of Jesus, incurable diseases were healed. One encounter with Jesus, though it seemed small, changed the lives of people forever. Finally, Jesus went to the cross and offered his life to God as a ransom sacrifice for our sins, shedding his blood. On the third day, God raised him from the dead as the first fruits. Not many people in the world knew what was happening at that time. But through a specific act in time and space, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all people who obey him. Then, through his disciples, the gospel spread to the ends of the earth. Now we see people throughout Latin America, Africa, Asia, North America, Oceania and Europe, from nearly every tribe and nation, who have accepted Christ and been changed into new people.

We should realize that we cannot see the kingdom of God in the same way that we can see worldly kingdoms. Worldly kingdoms look glamorous and powerful at the moment. But in the course of time they disappear completely. On the other hand, the kingdom of God looks as small as a mustard seed. But it grows steadily until it covers the earth. In order to see a tree grow, we need time-lapse cameras. To see the kingdom of God grow, we need a sense of history. Mother Sarah Barry looks like many other ladies. However, the kingdom of God has worked mightily through her. She met Jesus as a college student and accepted his world mission command. She went to Korea as a young, single missionary in 1955.

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

It was right after a terrible war. The nation had been divided. What could she do? She had a conviction that she could share the gospel. She coworked with Dr. Samuel Lee to teach the Bible to Korean college students. Many of them accepted the good news of Christ. They found salvation from sin and hope that God could use them to change the world. They began to pray and go out into the world as missionaries. Now, over two thousand UBF missionaries from Korea have gone to over 90 nations in the world.

Then there is Hudson Taylor (1832-1905). He was the son of a lay preacher named James Taylor. As a young man, his father's Bible reading bored him. His mother and younger sister began to pray for him. Through reading a gospel tract, he accepted Christ personally and was born again. Sometime later, he heard one word from the Lord, "China." This word, like a seed planted within, sprouted and grew throughout his lifetime. His mind and heart were consumed with reaching 400,000,000 lost Chinese souls with the gospel. To prepare himself, he studied medicine, Chinese, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He learned to depend on God to meet his every need.

Taylor went alone to China in 1853. He risked his life to preach the gospel in the midst of a civil war, and in cities where foreigners were regarded as devils. Forced to return to England in 1860 for health reasons, he had a vision to send missionaries to every province of inland China. So he went throughout England, preaching in churches and sharing China's need for missionaries. God moved many young hearts to volunteer. God provided a generous offering to supply their needs. Taylor returned to China in 1866 with 24 volunteer missionaries. He trained them to wear Chinese clothes, including a pig-tail, and to speak Chinese. It was the beginning of the China Inland Mission (CIM). All told, Taylor ministered in China for 51 years and brought 800 missionaries. They directly converted 18,000 Chinese people and established 125 schools. The CIM was one of the great contributors in the growth of the Chinese church, which today numbers over 100,000,000.

The mustard seed grows into a huge tree. This is the character of the kingdom of God. So we should value small and life-giving works of God among us. Sharing one word of God with a neighbor or having a one-to-one Bible study may seem small, but they can bear fruit that reaches the world. Our American missionaries may look insignificant. But they have God's calling and they carry God's life in them. Our regional coworkers look few and scattered. But they too carry God's life in them. They are precisely God's hope to make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We should respect them more than the president. We should be ready to serve them with a meal, to listen to their

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

struggles, and to pray with them. In this way we can invest our love and labor in the always increasing, always advancing kingdom of God. Let's see the mustard seed of God's kingdom, honor it, and give out hearts to helping it spread to the ends of the earth.

Second, the parable of the yeast. Look at verses 20-21. **“Again he asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.’”** Yeast is small and almost invisible. But when it works through a batch of dough it causes the whole batch to rise. This describes the power of influence of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has power to change a person or a culture completely. Peter was changed completely. He once said to Jesus, **“You are the Christ!”** that is, “the King sent by God, and my Savior.” Right after that, Peter resisted Jesus' cross, revealing selfishness, fear of death, and desire for glory without suffering. He seemed too contaminated with sin to live a holy life like Jesus. But Jesus' word worked in him continuously. Finally, Peter repented his sins and accepted Jesus' grace of forgiveness and received the Holy Spirit. His inner man was healed. He became bold enough to preach Christ to his enemies. He was willing to sacrifice himself for God's sheep. He rejoiced to suffer with Christ. His changed life, together with that of St. Paul, worked like yeast in the Roman Empire, and finally turned it into Christendom in 300 years.

For example, Christian influence brought an end to gladiatorial games. Bishop of Antioch and Christian historian Theodoret (393-457 A.D.) tells us of Saint Telemachus. He was a quiet man of prayer who spent most of his time tending a vegetable garden and sharing the gospel with neighbors. One day the Lord inspired him to go to Rome. Upon his arrival, he observed a large crowd going into the Roman Coliseum, and he joined them. Then gladiators entered and shouted, “We who are about to die salute you!” Telemachus realized that they were going to fight to the death for the entertainment of Roman citizens. Horrified, he stood up and said, “In the name of Christ, stop!” But his voice was lost in the noise of the crowd. So he made his way into the arena. In contrast to the mighty gladiators, he was a small man. He continued to cry, “In the name of Christ, stop!” At first, the crowd thought he was part of the entertainment and laughed. As he persisted, they began to jeer. Then they became angry at his interference in the games, and they stoned him to death, spilling his blood on the Coliseum floor. His fight for the sanctity of life convicted bloodthirsty Romans of their wickedness. The Emperor Honorias was so moved that he banned gladiatorial contests from that day forward. Sometimes we think that our lives of faith are not effective. But they influence a watching world more than we know. When we have God's

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

kingdom in our hearts and community, it has power to influence all of America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

II. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door (22-30)

Jesus went through the towns and villages, planting seeds of the kingdom of God (22). Many believed, but committed followers were few. Moreover, the opposition of the religious leaders was growing more intense. The Messianic kingdom that many had expected was not materializing. In fact, sometimes Jesus' ministry seemed to be shrinking. So someone asked, **“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”** How did Jesus answer?

Look at verse 24. **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”** Jesus did not start a theological discourse on salvation. Instead, Jesus said, **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...”** This tells us that salvation is not easy. It is not automatic. We must make every effort. There are some who will fail to enter. Instead of asking, **“Are only a few going to be saved?”** we should ask, “Am I saved? How can I be saved?” Jesus said, **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”** What, then, is the narrow door?

The narrow door is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only way of salvation that God has provided. Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”** (Jn 14:6). St. Peter taught, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”** (Ac 4:12). Jesus alone is the way to God and his salvation; there is no other.

How, then, can we enter through the narrow door? In verses 25-27 Jesus tells a cautionary tale. The owner of a house closes the door. Some who are left outside begin knocking and pleading to be let in. But the owner tells them, **“I don't know you or where you come from.”** They claim that they ate and drank with him and that he taught in their streets. But he repeats, **“I don't know you or where you come from.”** **Then he adds, “Away from me you evildoers!”** First, we learn that timing is important. We must go through the door when it is open. When the door closes, it is too late. Yesterday, two young CBF members were baptized: Miriam Pierce and Moses Lee. They confessed their faith through the Apostle's Creed and shared their personal testimonies with many tears. They made a graceful entry into the body of Christ when the door was open. But many other children did not. They

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

may plan to do so later. But there is no guarantee that the door will be open next year. We must go through the door when it is open.

Second, we learn the importance of personal relationship with Christ. When we study Jesus' story carefully, we learn that mere human fellowship with Jesus did not guarantee having a personal relationship with him. People can hang around Jesus and his people without ever receiving Christ personally as Lord and Savior. Such people are unknown to Christ. To be known by Christ is to have an intimate union. We can have this union when we repent and believe the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit. This changes us on the inside, working in us like a growing seed or yeast, until we are completely transformed into the image of Christ. Then we can come to share Christ's sufferings, death and resurrection in intimate fellowship. We can begin this relationship even now by simply calling on the name of the Lord. The Bible says, "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

However, the picture that Jesus paints in verses 28-30 is not a completely happy one. Jesus clearly said that some who heard him that day would be left out of the kingdom of God. They would see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets eating at the joyful feast in the kingdom of God, but they would be left out. This is a warning to us. We must make every effort to enter through the narrow door when it is open.

III. Jesus shows us how to live in God's kingdom by faith (31-35)

Some Pharisees came to Jesus and told him that Herod had threatened to kill him. They expected Jesus to tremble and plan his escape. But Jesus replied, **"Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"** Jesus did not move according to Herod's threat. Jesus was sure that he would not die at random or by the crafty scheme of Herod. Jesus knew that according to God's kingdom purpose, he would die in Jerusalem. Jesus trusted his Father God, the Sovereign Ruler, and his almighty power. God's kingdom was advancing by God's power and nothing could stop it. All that mattered to Jesus was to follow God's leading. As he did so, he had no fear of worldly rulers or their kingdom.

In verses 34-35 Jesus broke into a lament for Jerusalem, saying, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her**

Jesus Teaches About the Kingdom of God

chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.””” Jesus expressed God’s broken heart for his people Israel. Jesus is not willing that his beloved people perish. When they are unwilling he weeps over them. As we advance in the kingdom we too see those who miss the chance to enter. It is the time we can learn Jesus’ broken heart for the lost and weep for them.

In this passage we learn mainly that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that grows into a big mustard tree. Though its beginning in us may be small, it completely changes us until we can enter the glorious heavenly feast with the patriarchs and prophets. It can change our nation into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Let’s make every effort to enter through the narrow door today. May God richly bless you.