

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon December 1, 2019
Luke 13: 18 – 21 “The Gradual and Total Victory of King Jesus”

10 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. 12 But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." 13 And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. 14 But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? 16 So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound--think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" 17 And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

18 Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches." 20 And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

22 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

31 On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." 32 And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' 33 Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem."

I. Introduction

- a. Calvin "...the Lord opens his reign with a feeble and despicable commencement, for the express purpose, that his power may be more fully illustrated by its unexpected progress"¹

¹ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 127). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

- b. Jesus is continuing in His journey to Jerusalem from the Mount of Transfiguration, on His way to die upon the cross for the sins of His people. Speaking of His death in John 12:23-27, Jesus said:
 - i. “Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. 27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”
 - 1. Jesus compares His death to the planting of a seed that goes on to produce many seeds by its death. The destiny of every seed is to die if it will be transformed into a tree and become fruitful.
 - c. Jesus has just completed a great miracle in the midst of a Sabbath synagogue service. He healed a woman who had been bowed down for 18 years, and when He healed her He stated clearly that her visible illness had invisible roots: (13:6)
 - i. “So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound--think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?”
 - ii. In today’s text, Jesus goes on from this healing to describe the Kingdom of God, in order to help these people understand what they had just witnessed. They were witnessing the Seed-power, the Leaven-power of the Kingdom of God. They were witnessing the Ultimate Authority of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Bock “Jesus raises the kingdom question because the woman’s release from Satan raises the issue of authority and rule.... Jesus develops the healing’s implications and desires to draw pictures portraying the kingdom’s character. By this comparison, Jesus reveals some kingdom qualities and the nature of God’s program”²
 - d. Today’s text: Luke 13: 18 – 21 “The Gradual and Total Victory of King Jesus”
 - i. Like a Mustard Seed v18-19
 - ii. Like Leaven v20,22
 - iii. Some observations about the Kingdom of God
 - iv. Questions to know, love and obey God our Father
- II. The Kingdom of God is like a Mustard Seed v18,19
- a. Jesus starts by asking two simple questions in v18: “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?”

² Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1225). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- i. Jesus says He is about to make a comparison. So, the Kingdom of God is not exactly the same as a mustard seed or leaven, but the Kingdom of God shares certain qualities with a mustard seed and with leaven. Jesus will go on to emphasize the qualities of each that teach us about His Kingdom.
 - ii. Kingdom = has a King, a people, a land, a law, and a purpose
 - 1. King = Jesus reigns now (approaching His reign at the time of this teaching)
 - 2. People = All those for Whom He died
 - 3. Land = The entire universe, especially focused on this Earth
 - 4. Law = God's Law of Love in His Word
 - 5. Purpose = Creation Mandate; Great Commission
 - iii. The focus of this teaching is upon understanding the Kingdom of God in its corporate aspect. Yet, all that we learn about the Kingdom of God is also true of what is occurring within and through each individual elect believer.
- b. "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."
- i. Mustard seed: usually about 1 mm in diameter. (1/1000 meter)
 - 1. Mt 13:32 "the least of all the seeds"
 - 2. Mark 4:31 "smaller than all the seeds on earth"
 - 3. Also used as example by Jesus in Luke 17:6 "So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.'"
 - 4. So, the mustard seed is put before the people as representative of the tiniest of items in creation, yet filled with so much power and potential.
 - 5. As we go on, we will see that our most exalted Lord is comparing Himself to the smallest of seeds.
 - ii. A man took and put in his garden
 - 1. Ezekiel 17:22-24 "Thus says the Lord God: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it."

- a. Bock “Ezek. 17:22–24 provides the closest OT parallel to Luke. Here God promises to plant in Israel a cedar tree from a sprig, probably an allusion to the restoration of Davidic rule. This rule will grow into a sturdy cedar that will become a comfortable place to dwell.”³
- 2. “A man took and put in his garden”
 - a. A gardener plants a seed in his garden.
 - b. As Jesus is teaching this Kingdom parable to these people, He is telling them God the Father will place His Son, The Seed Promise of the Garden of Eden, into His restored Garden (Abraham’s offspring) in the land of Israel.
 - c. A single seed is in view in this parable, so we see Christ as the First Seed of the Kingdom.
 - i. 1 Corinthians 15:20 “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”
 - ii. Galatians 3:16 “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.”
- 3. “and it grew and became a large tree”
 - a. The initial growth of the seed is basically invisible. Germination occurs under the soil or surrounded by soil and so slowly that it is usually unnoticed.
 - b. But, at some point, the seed grows out of the ground and becomes visible.
 - c. And, this tree, over time, grows from the smallest seed up to a “large tree”.
 - i. As trees grow, they need nutrients, sunshine, CO2 and wind to be strong and healthy.
 - ii. Have you ever seen a tree grown without any wind?
 - 1. Biosphere 2 studies: no wind growing environment “When plants and trees grow in the wild, the wind constantly keeps them moving. This causes a stress in the wooden load bearing structure of the tree. So, to compensate, the tree manages to grow something called the reaction wood (or stress wood). This

³ Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1226). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

stress wood usually has a different structure (in terms of cellulose or lignin content and more)”

- d. Bock “Jesus is saying that the kingdom will start out small but end up big....the small-to-large image suggests that [Christ’s] current era is the start, the church period is part of the period of growth, and the great culmination matches the end of the parable’s promise.”⁴
- 4. “and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”
 - a. This almost invisible seed, that began its growth unnoticed in the earth, has now grown into a prominent tree in the garden, even providing a place of safety and shelter for birds.
 - b. If the tree is like the Kingdom of God, what are to understand these birds to represent?
 - i. Bock “the kingdom will end up with significant stature and will be a place where people of all races can reside comfortably.”⁵
 - ii. The birds therefore represent all the nations of the world, who will be able to fly to Christ the King and find safety and solace in His kind reign. He is the Prince of Peace.
 - c. So, Jesus Christ is like the mustard seed. He fell to the ground and died, and in His resurrection became the firstfruits from the dead, leading the way for all His people, His little seeds, to follow. As we His people are brought into His Kingdom power, we grow up together in Him and as His Body in the earth, we become like a global tree that distributes His Word like shade, bringing forth individual salvation and cultural solace and safety, one nation at a time.
 - i. Revelation 22:1,2 “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
- III. The Kingdom of God is like leaven v20,21
 - a. And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."
 - b. Leaven = a single celled yeast organism.

⁴ Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 1225–1226). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁵ Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1227). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- i. Much smaller, even, than the mustard seed. Microscopic. 5 microns. Literally invisible. (micron = 1 millionth of a meter). ~200 times smaller than a 1mm mustard seed.
 - ii. Thousands upon thousands of yeast cells are added to the dough when making bread. So, before we saw one single mustard seed. Here we see many, many “seeds” in view.
 - iii. Yeast cells “eat” sugar from the dough and produce (in general) CO₂ and alcohol. When heated, the alcohol becomes a gas and along with the CO₂ contributes to the RISE and the FLAVOR of the dough.
 - 1. When the bread is baked, the yeast “eat” faster until it gets too hot and then they DIE. In order to complete the baking process, HEAT must be applied.
- c. “A woman took and hid in three measures of meal”
 - i. Unlike the man with the single mustard seed, here we have a woman with many “seeds”.
 - 1. The Bride of Christ is called to spread the Word of God throughout the entire world. And, each member of the Bride of Christ is called to be transformed by the Word of God into the image of Christ. We are individually leavened by Christ’s Spirit and Word working in us. We go forth and leaven this world as Christ’s Spirit and Word flow from within us, in expressions of Kingdom righteousness and love.
 - 2. “Hid” = the invisible aspect is again emphasized.
 - ii. Three measures = about 50 pounds of flour. A lot of flour.
- d. “till it was all leavened”
 - i. The woman had a goal. To leaven all of the flour. To see the entire batch of flour leavened.
 - ii. “all leavened”
 - 1. The leavening process causes the flour/yeast mixture to rise. The interconnected matrix of the dough stretches and grows as the gases increase within the dough. It becomes VISIBLY leavened as it rises.
 - 2. Also, remember the gases also FLAVOR the bread.
 - 3. Bock “The point is that the kingdom will eventually permeate the world. It may appear small and insignificant now, but it will eventually grow and be present everywhere.”⁶
 - iii. Also consider the inevitability of the leavening outcome. Jesus presents this as a certainty in this parable.
 - 1. Bock “One other note may also be suggested by the image: permeation is inevitable once leaven is introduced”⁷

⁶ Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1228). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁷ Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1228). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- e. So, the Kingdom of God here shows forth the Bride of Christ at work in the world, being filled with God's Spirit, made like Christ, spreading forth His Word into all the world. It is a gradual and total leavening that the Kingdom of God will accomplish in the earth as King Jesus sends forth His Spirit and His Word to save His people, conquer the devil, and bring His will from heaven to earth.

IV. Some observations about the Kingdom of God

- a. From very small to very large
 - i. Jesus came as a little baby to a non-descript Jewish family, not even born at home, but born in a stable. He was put to death on a Roman cross. His ministry on earth left behind only 11 disciples after His death.
 - ii. Now, we see Christianity is the largest religion on the earth, at 2.4 billion according to a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center.
- b. From invisible to visible
 - i. The spiritual aspect of the Kingdom is the beginning of its invasion of this earth. We are born again from above by the invisible Spirit of God, made new within our beings, by an invisible and mysterious process called regeneration. God by His Spirit makes us into new creations. This is an invisible occurrence.
 - ii. But, the invisible never, never stays invisible in God's Kingdom. The power of the inner spiritual Presence of Christ flows out of us as surely as the mustard seed became a very large tree and as surely as the dough rises up and becomes tasty bread. The Kingdom of God becomes a very visible presence in this world.
 - iii. The visible v the invisible church
 - 1. WCF 25.1 "The catholic or universal Church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."
 - a. This is the inner occurrence. Only God can see this. We cannot see this. It's invisible to us.
 - 2. WCF 25.2 "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."
 - a. This is the visible aspect of God's Kingdom in the earth. These people have expressed invisible Kingdom of God by professing true religion within the context of the visible church of God.

- b. When you hear “visible”, think first “local church assembly” = the visible Church throughout the world is made up of visible local churches filled up with church members who publicly professed their faith within the context of the local assembly. This “true religion” is professed and if indeed the true Gospel according to the Bible is professed, then the local church judges that person and accepts them into the membership of the local assembly. In the reformed tradition, this is one of the central responsibilities of elders.
 - 3. WCF 25.3. “Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.”
 - a. Ordinances of God = preaching of the Word of God, administration of the sacraments (Lord’s Supper and Baptism)
 - b. So, this pertains to how we fence the Lord’s Table here at Foothills. The Lord’s Table is an ordinance of Jesus Christ for His VISIBLE Church, and one of its key purposes is to serve as a visible mark of those who are in the visible Church and those who are not in the visible Church.
 - c. Both an objective and subjective guarding of the Table. Objective = church membership. Subjective = judge yourself to see if you are indeed a member of the invisible church.
 - c. The inevitability of victory vs the appearance of defeat
 - d. Death is a necessity for the Kingdom to grow in us and through us
 - e. Like wind for trees and heat for bread, we need the persecutions and trials of life to grow strong. (Give thanks always)
- V. Questions to know, love and obey God