

# The Power of the Kingdom of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] I am a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. To be British means to be a citizen of a kingdom. We are subjects of a reigning king, King Charles III. But whatever our passports tell us, if we're Christians, we're members of an altogether greater kingdom, the kingdom of God. We're subjects of an altogether greater king than Charles, the Lord Jesus Christ. And whereas our majesty is little more than a figurehead in our nation nowadays, King Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth, in whom is universal glory, sovereignty, sovereignty, and power. Today from these verses in Luke 13, we want to talk about the kingdom of God, the reign of Jesus as king. And we want to see three things. First of all, the power of the kingdom of

God to divide, verses 10 through 17. And then the power of the kingdom of God to grow in verses 18 and 19. And then the kingdom, the power of the kingdom of God to transform in verses 20 through 21.

I'm very proud to be British. But to be a subject of King Jesus is the greatest privilege possible. First of all then, in verses 10 through 17, the power of the kingdom of God to divide, to divide.

Now, for religious Jews of Jesus' day, what they ate, how they dressed, and the way they observed the Jewish Sabbath were distinctive marks of being citizens of the kingdom of Israel. Most of these distinctives were taken from the teaching of the rabbis. The Jewish rabbis took the laws of Moses, and they added hundreds of other laws to ensure that the original laws were complied with. It's like telling our children, don't touch a hot kettle. That's a good law. Don't touch a hot kettle. But then adding to it, on no account must your children go into a kitchen just in case they end up near the kettle. They should not have any kind of hot drink made from water boiled in the kettle. In fact, better still, they shouldn't drink water just in case it had been boiled in a kettle. What was originally a law to keep children safe is added to you until the children aren't allowed to drink water at all and end up dying of dehydration. And if you asked a dying child, well, why don't you drink water? They'd say, my dad said it's bad for me. Well, as was his pattern, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus worshiped in a synagogue.

And on this occasion, a woman was there who we read had a disabling spirit. It's pointless trying to diagnose her condition. All that we know is that she had an evil spirit which meant that she was bent double.

[ 3 : 18 ] Totally unsolicited, Jesus calls her over to him and says, woman, you're freed from your disability. He lays his hands on her, and we read immediately, she was made straight and glorified God.

It's another one of these powerful miracles of Jesus where he makes straight that which evil had made crooked. He heals someone who's been in pain for the last 18 years of their lives.

But Jesus' compassion doesn't please everyone. So, the synagogue ruler, we read, was indignant. He wasn't angry because this woman was enduring such pain. He was angry because Jesus had made her well.

Rather than argue directly with Jesus, he looks down his nose at those gathered in the synagogue, and he says, there are six days in which work should be done. Come on those days and be healed, not on the Sabbath day. It's not entirely clear what the synagogue ruler's problem was. Perhaps he thought that by healing, Jesus was doing work. Or perhaps he was just annoyed that Jesus was in the limelight and not him.

Legalists never have a good reason why they do things. They're so puffed up with their own self-importance, they command their children, don't drink water. When all the time the law says, don't go near a hot kettle.

[ 4 : 50 ] Jesus sees right through it. You hypocrites, he says to them, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox and his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water? The manger is the

feeding trough filled with hay. And on a Sabbath morning, a Saturday morning, there was provision in the rabbinic law for owners to lead their oxen and donkeys away from the manger to give them water to drink.

There were many rabbinic laws concerning the health of the livestock, and that was the way it was meant to be. The Old Testament laws of Moses place a premium upon the welfare of farmed animals.

Jesus goes on, and not this woman, adopted of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for 18 years be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day. It's quite a weak English translation of what Jesus said. It's not just that she ought to be loosed from her bondage. She must be loosed from her bondage. Jesus telling the synagogue ruler, look, this is what the Sabbath is all about.

It's all about freeing, liberating, and loosing people from their bondage and the drudgery of their lives. God intended the Sabbath to free people up, not to chain them down.

Notice the premium Jesus sets upon this woman, a woman he doesn't know, a woman who didn't approach him, but whom he nonetheless heals. Jesus valued animals and livestock, but to him this woman is far more precious. Our king is so filled with compassion, he calls her a daughter of Abraham. He pleads her plight, whom Satan has bound for 18 years. Never had this woman a greater advocate than Jesus.

[ 6 : 51 ] Hypocrites, Jesus calls the synagogue ruler and his supporters, people who hide behind a mask of, a religious mask, their desire for insatiable power. That unhappy people who delight in making people entirely as miserable as they are. We all know people like that, don't we?

Well, King Jesus worked in the synagogue with power, and he spoke with power and love, getting right to the heart of the Sabbath law, which was intended for the healing and well-being of God's people. Here is the power of the kingdom of God at work, setting people free from their chains and the evil that afflicts them.

But what then of the response? In verse 7 we read, verse 17 we read, as he said these things, all his adversities were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at the glorious things that were done by him. Jesus' kingdom words and kingdom works divided opinion.

The power of the kingdom of God always divides opinion because Jesus divides opinion. And here there are two camps. The first camp is described as Jesus' adversities, or adversities, whatever side of the Atlantic you come from. They hadn't just become Jesus' adversities. They were his enemies all along. They were disgusted by the people Jesus chose to associate with, the things Jesus did, and especially by his treatment of the rabbinic laws. What made it even worse for them was that they knew that Jesus saw right through them. He was always one step ahead. You know, not to be irreverent, but if you were playing battleships with Jesus, he always knew who were on the grid to strike. Ultimately, they hated Jesus because he exposed the pettiness of their kingdom and exposed them to a greater power than they could ever hope to have.

The second camp is described as the people. They rejoiced in all the glorious things done by Jesus. At this stage in his ministry, public opinion is still behind Jesus, not just on account of this miracle, but all the glorious miracles he'd done. Not all these people really believed in Jesus.

[ 9 : 24 ] And the truth is that only a few of them really understood the message of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, at this stage, having seen all these wonderful miracles and heard the powerful words of Jesus, they were filled with joy at all the wonderful things he'd done.

Let's go back a step to the previous parable Jesus told of the barren fig tree we saw this last week, the picture of an unrepentant Israel from whom God demanded fruit but got none.

And finally, we read in that previous parable, God cut down that barren fruitless fig tree. Now, which of these two camps, the adversities or the people, most closely resemble that barren fig tree?

Well, of course, it's Jesus' adversities, the synagogue rulers, and their cronies who are so indignant at the works of Jesus. You can be sure that in our own day, the kingdom of God still divides opinion. As it's only too clear we live in a divided world, these divisions lead to tension and rest. I'm not saying these divisions aren't important, but what is of primary importance is our attitude to Jesus Christ.

[ 10 : 50 ] There are those who are angered by Him and there are those who rejoice in Him. There are those who couldn't care less about Him and there are those for whom He is their very life. There are those who reject Him and those who have faith in Him. There are those who are merely members of this world's passing kingdoms and there are those who are members of the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus.

It's the most important division because it represents not just temporary but an eternal division. Jesus warns us in the previous parable from last week about the barren fig tree, those represented in our passage by the adversities of Jesus. He says they will be cut down and thrown into the fire. It's also very needless. How can anyone take offense at the compassion, the love, and the power of King Jesus toward this needy woman? But they do because Jesus doesn't answer their questions as much as He questions as much as He says. They don't want to give up control to Him. They can't allow that, so they reject Him.

But for those whose eyes God has opened to see the glorious things Jesus has done, we can only but rejoice. There are two camps in our passage, the angry enemies of Jesus so set against Him, and the rejoicing people who with open eyes and hearts had seen what Jesus had done. Into which of these two camps do you fall today? Those who are threatened by the kingdom of God or those who welcome the kingdom of God.

There are only two kingdoms that aren't three. There are no undecided witnesses present in the synagogue that day. There are only two kingdoms, not three. In which kingdom are you today? [12:59] An enemy of Jesus or a friend of Jesus? Are you still bound by the empty regulations of religion and the man-made standards that you had when you were a kid?

Or are you liberated by a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ? Are you willing today to hand over the power of your life to our compassionate, loving, and faithful King?

The power of the kingdom of God divided, then it still does today. The question is not whether it does. The question is in which kingdom you are.

Jesus' enemies or Jesus' friends? The power of the kingdom of God to divide. The power of the kingdom of God, secondly, from verse 18 and 19, to grow, to grow.

Now, Jesus is still in the synagogue when He paints these two short word pictures, as Irene said, of the kingdom of God. This is what the kingdom of God is like.

[14:04] He says in this first short parable, It's like a grain of mustard seed. It's like a grain of mustard seed. A man takes it, sows it in his garden, and it grows, and it becomes a tree, and the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

It's a picture of growth, you see. The kingdom of God has power to grow. Now, of course, it doesn't look like it at this stage. King Jesus is hated and opposed.

His words and his works have attracted powerful enemies. It seems that the message of the kingdom of God is threatened by extinction. Jesus has so few real followers at this stage.

At this stage, the kingdom of God is as small as a mustard seed. In weeks to come, the pursuit will conclude as Jesus is arrested, tortured, and crucified.

It's as if a man takes a grain of mustard seed, and he sows it and buries it in his garden. The kingdom of God at this stage is so very small, but by Jesus' death, it's sown into the ground.

[15:11] It seems to die. But that seed will grow into a tree. That which was so small shall soon grow. Soon after Jesus' ascension, as the disciples preach the good news of the kingdom of God, thousands of people believe.

By the end of the book of Acts, Luke's sequel, the church extends over the whole Roman world in places like Rome, North Africa, and Europe, perhaps even into France and Spain.

The kingdom shall grow from its small beginnings here in Luke 13 to the tree at the end of the book of Acts. But this shall only be part of its growth. For in the 2,000 years since, the tree of the gospel has grown exponentially.

In Jesus' day, we could count the number of Jesus' real followers using our fingers. Now they number as many as the grains of sand on the seashore.

There are billions of Christians in this world. The kingdom of God has, is, and will continue to grow into a world-shaped tree.

[16:29] No matter how hard the enemies of the gospel try to stamp it out, the kingdom of God will continue to flourish. In this parable, Jesus is using the words and ideas of the later Hebrew prophets Ezekiel and Daniel.

In Ezekiel 17, 23 and Daniel 4, 12, we read of the great tree of the kingdom of God in which all the birds of the air build nests. Back then, and with Jesus, it was a picture of how people from all the nations of the earth will come to know the king as their savior.

The birds of the air who build nests in the trees are the nations of the world, the Gentiles. It shall not be those whose primary interest is in the religious laws of the rabbis, the way the Sabbath is

observed, what you eat and what you wear, but those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, here in this wee passage, Jesus is making it clear. His mission concerns not just the Jews.

It extends to all the nations of the world. Yes, the church shall include believers from a Jewish background, but shall grow exponentially as millions of Gentiles come to believe in Him.

[ 17 : 50 ] You know, the kingdom of God is bigger than you think. God's reign in human hearts is growing. Langham Partnership estimates that 65 million people every year on our planet are becoming Christians.

They're like birds building their nests in the trees of the gospel, the kingdom of God. Let me apply this in a couple of quick ways.

If there are any here who are pessimistic about the kingdom of God, take to heart what Jesus says in this short parable and replace your pessimism with realism.

The kingdom of God will continue to grow, grow, grow until Jesus returns in His glory. But if this is a parable designed to fill us with hope, it's also a parable designed to fill us with a determination to engage in mission.

To what extent are you personally and we corporately engaged in mission and the growth of the kingdom of God in Thornwood, Glasgow, and across the whole world?

[ 19 : 04 ] Are we praying for our fellows to come to know Jesus Christ? Are we sharing the good news of the gospel with those we can? When I was a student, I was highly influenced by an old missionary called Sam Will.

We named our son Samuel after Sam Will. When I would visit him in his wee flat in Holborn Street in Aberdeen, he would spread out a world map on his kitchen table and he would point to countries. Now, he was over 80 at the time when I was just a kid, but he would point to countries and he'd say, look, look, look at Mongolia. There are only a handful of Christians there. Colin, we need to pray for Mongolia.

And then he would move his finger and he would say, look at Indonesia, he would say. The Christians there are under incredible pressure. Colin, let's right now, let's pray for the Christians in Indonesia.

He engendered within me a desire for world mission to see all the birds of the air nesting in the tree of the kingdom, the peoples of the world coming to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

[ 20 : 17 ] Be encouraged. God is doing amazing things in our world today. In 1990, Mongolia had four known Christians in the whole country.

Four. It now has a vibrant and growing church. It has a population less than half of Scotland's. It now has more Christians than Scotland has and itself is sending missionaries into nearby nations like Afghanistan.

The kingdom of God is powerful in its growth. Nothing, nothing shall stop it. As the famous hymn says, Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run.

The power of the kingdom of God to grow. And then lastly, from verse 20 and 21, the power of the kingdom of God to transform. Transform.

Transform. If Jesus' emphasis in the previous parable is on the growth of the kingdom, His emphasis on this short parable of the yeast is on the power of the kingdom of God to transform.

[ 21 : 33 ] And He's talking about a woman who's making bread. And she's making a lot of bread because she's using 60 pounds worth of flour. It's a lot of flour. But into that flour, she adds a pinch of yeast.

There's so much flour. There's so little yeast. You wouldn't see the yeast in the mixture. But though there's so little yeast, it's thoroughly penetrated the whole mixture.

And as Irene showed us, its effect will be seen when the mixture is proved. That pinch of yeast, tiny as it is when mixed with the flour, has the capacity to transform the whole mixture.

It takes time because yeast doesn't immediately work. It must be left for many hours, but it shall change everything. It will transform dead flour into life-giving bread.

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to the transforming influence of yeast. Over time, it will transform everything with which it comes into contact.

[ 22 : 38 ] The kingdom of God, it doesn't burst in upon the scene. It quietly, but effectively, transforms individuals and societies.

The progress of the gospel is not on the front pages of the daily record. In fact, it doesn't draw much attention to itself at all. It so often works quietly under the radar, but gradually, over time, it works its influence, changing everything into which it comes in contact.

It shall, over the course of many years, transform a heart deadened to the reality of God into a heart made alive by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It shall, over the course of many decades or centuries, transform a society blinded by its own worldly philosophies into a vibrant society marked by its righteousness, compassion, and fairness.

I love the comments of the Puritan Matthew Henry, who writes, a little yeast leavens the whole lump, so the doctrine of Christ will strangely diffuse its relish into the world of mankind.

[ 23 : 59 ] But you must give it time. Wait for the issue of the preaching of the gospel to the world, and you will find it does wonders this is how the kingdom of God grows, and its transforming impact upon individuals and a society.

The slave trader John Newton believes in Christ, and he abandons his sinful lifestyle and becomes a preacher of the good news.

Many years ago, on one of our trips to our sister church, IPC Savannah, in Georgia, Walter and myself were privileged to meet with a prison chaplain called Pastor Hans.

Remember this, Walter? What is he? Yeah, remember them? Remember Pastor Hans? He was a beautiful man who carried with him the gentleness and winsomeness of Christ.

And he gave Walter and myself the following statistics. Listen to this. For prisoners who chose not to attend his Bible studies during the imprisonment, 97% of them re-offended when they left prison.

[ 25 : 31 ] 97%. For prisoners who chose to attend Pastor Hans' Bible studies during their imprisonment and subsequently professed faith in Jesus, only 3% re-offended when they left prison.

Their re-offending or recidivism rate is exponentially decreased by one's response to the gospel.

The gospel transforms those who take it to heart and exercise faith in Jesus.

Maybe Pastor Hans, this godly minister of the gospel should come and speak to our government and to the heads of our prison system. 97% of those who did not attend his Bible study re-offended when they left prison.

Only 3% of those who did attend his Bible studies re-offended when they left prison. Be sure today that if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, things will change in your life.

It may not be immediate. It will take time. But slowly and surely you'll begin to notice that you don't get as angry as you used to. You're more loving than you used to be.

[ 26 : 44 ] You've got a new outlook in life. The kingdom of God's work like yeast. You're beginning to look more like a citizen of the kingdom of God every single day.

Listen, I am ultra-proud to be British if I'm allowed to say that. But as we close, let me ask us all a question. Of what kingdom are we ultimately a part?

As part of which kingdom, Great Britain or the kingdom of God, do we find our ultimate security, identity, and belonging?

The kingdom which denies its children the water it needs to drink? Or the kingdom that continues to grow and continues to transform peoples and societies all around the world?

If today you want to be part of that kingdom, all you need to do is have faith in its king. King Jesus, who gave himself on the cross to take away all our sins.

[ 27 : 51 ] I am freely handing out from this pulpit today passports to the kingdom of God. All you must do is believe in Jesus.

God bless. All you must do is God bless. Peace.