

# The Unstoppable Advance of God's Kingdom

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn now briefly this evening to Luke chapter 13 from verse 10 down to verse 21. When you read these verses again you may have a question in mind as to how do they relate to the previous passages or even to the passages running after them.

Because as we said last time it is important for us to do this kind of study running through a book of the Bible and see how it hangs together, how all the different parts of it are fitted together by the way God has put it together for us.

So that we understand therefore the message in its entirety and in the way the topics relate to each other. Well how does this passage relate to the previous ones? Well the Bible is not a loose connection of books any more than this gospel of Luke is a loose connection of events that happened in the life of Christ.

There are specific connections to them and the key to this one I think is the way it mentions here and it will mention from now on a number of times the kingdom of God.

Because Jesus here teaching about the kingdom of God gives us the key to see how that relates to the previous parts of chapter 13 and also what comes afterwards.

[ 1 : 23 ] Now the kingdom of God is itself a large subject in the New Testament. The Lord is also there in the Old but especially something that came to be taught in the ministry of Christ himself.

And while it's sometimes not easy to define what exactly is the kingdom of God, briefly we could say that the kingdom of God is where God has his rule.

Now you say well that's everywhere. Well yes but where God has his rule but where people as his subjects or citizens of the kingdom willingly acknowledge him as their king.

In other words not everybody is in the kingdom of God. Not everybody in the visible church is within the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night in John chapter 13 quite convinced that he himself belonged to the kingdom of God. He was a teacher in the synagogue.

[ 2 : 24 ] He was a teacher in the synagogue.

entry point to the kingdom of God. And that entry point is in rebirth. In being born again. Within which you find such things as repentance and faith.

The kind of repentance. The very repentance indeed that Jesus was emphasizing in the first part of this chapter as we saw. so that fits into how you gain entry to the kingdom of God by the grace of God through being born again through coming to repent through coming to believe in Christ and accepting of him and God's provision in there and you also find of course the privileges we saw last time in verses 6 to 9 the privileges that are given to people under the gospel especially and this was addressed to the people of the Jews in Christ's own time but it's applicable as we saw last time to all who have gospel privileges today they're set in very favourable conditions these Jews of Christ's day were very favourably placed because they lived at the time that Jesus came into the world that the Son of God came into the world and Jesus Christ spoke to them and they saw Christ's miracles done in their very presence before their very eyes yet they didn't bring forth the fruit of righteousness that God himself required and what the passage was saying was that God's patience meant that yet more time was going to be given to them so that by his grace they would come hopefully to accept Christ which many of them did not yet despite that despite that fruitlessness despite the absence of acceptance on the part of these people the acceptance of Christ despite the absence of that or you might say despite the rejection on their part of Christ and everything else negatively that you find in these passages about how they regarded Jesus and we'll see that in this passage as well the ruler of the synagogue fired up with indignation with anger finding fault with Jesus for this healing on the Lord's day despite all of these things one thing is happening and they

can't prevent it what is it?

the kingdom of God is advancing and that's a huge source of encouragement to yourself and to myself as well as we try to learn from this passage tonight something applicable to our own age as well we may think something like we saw this morning of how small we are how insignificant we are how ineffective we are compared to other generations past perhaps we may think of the vast opposition the strong opposition out there to the gospel that you confront and you may become hugely discouraged and you may be discouraged in your own Christian life there are people you're praying for that they will come to accept the Lord it hasn't happened you may be praying for yourself and yet you feel in yourself at least that something yet has to happen in your life that you would like to see happen well it doesn't matter really at the end of the day it doesn't matter in this sense it matters very much to ourselves of course and to our relation to God but the fact of the matter is whatever you see and whatever people say the kingdom of God is advancing it's an unstoppable progress it was a terrible sight looking a few years back at the tsunami that hit the coast of Japan and looking at it as it was filmed and as you saw it and pictures on the television and so on just the sheer strength and weight of that mass of water and you could see for yourselves the massive buildings that stood in the way of it and they just toppled it swept virtually everything before it the kingdom of God is unstoppable there is no power on earth no power anywhere out with God that can stop the advance of Christ's kingdom and of course that is followed through you can see in the next part of the passage from verse 22

Jesus speaks about a narrow door there again is the entrance to the kingdom there is a door through which we have to proceed in order to get into the kingdom there is the lament then of Christ over Jerusalem that they have not accepted him despite the fact that they have all the privileges so it is all bound together in terms of the kingdom of God and its advancement and how it has got unstoppable progress whatever people make of it so first of all the kingdom advances if we come to the passage now before us tonight the kingdom advances you will see first of all from verses 10 to 17 the kingdom advances by setting people free the kingdom advances by setting people free every single person in this building tonight that has come to know the Lord for themselves as their saviour have been set free from sin have been set free from the guilt of sin have been set free from the power of sin to the extent in which it is no longer the dominant power in their lives

[ 8 : 51 ] God is the Holy Spirit is and the kingdom of God advances in that way by setting people free now this was a controversial healing this woman had a disabling spirit for 18 years she was bound bent over there was some problem with her spine probably the her spine was somehow fused together we are not told what had happened to her did she have an accident what it was but we know that she could not stand upright she had to go about bent over with her face to the ground for 18 years and Jesus called her over and you see that is interesting isn't it quite often in the scripture you find somebody calling out to Jesus blind Bartimaeus for example sitting by the roadside hearing the commotion being told

Jesus of Nazareth is passing by the next thing you find is he cries out after Jesus Jesus son of David have mercy upon me this woman doesn't do anything like that it is Jesus who takes the initiative it is Jesus who comes to call her over to where he is and that's important because it reminds us again of the sovereignty of Christ of the way that the kingdom advances because it's the kingdom of the king of the one whose will is done who knows the right time to do things and who knows people and their circumstances and deals with them as he knows them and he comes to call her to himself and he says woman you are freed from your disability and he laid hands on her and immediately she was made straight and she glorified

God but it was controversial because to the ruler of the synagogue and those who supported him it was something that ought not to have been done on the Sabbath day now the Pharisees people who had a charge of the religion of the Jews at the time over the many years as you know very well the laws of God in the Old Testament had been added to by laws that people like them had made up for themselves sometimes even to the most minute details specifying what was and wasn't allowable on the Sabbath you were allowed for example just because it comes into the picture there where Jesus replies leading an ox or a donkey from the manger along to waterhood you were allowed to do that obviously Jesus says that that they did that you could give them a drink but you couldn't hold the bucket that was work whereas actually giving a drink to the animal by letting it down letting the bucket down before them that wasn't regarded as work they did the work themselves

I suppose all of these kinds of minute details by which as Jesus said elsewhere the law of God had actually become obscured and people were tired of these tiny minute details that dominated their lives that the Pharisees and this ruler of the synagogue insisted on this man as a ruler of the synagogue would have been in charge of setting the program for the synagogue setting the services of the synagogue and here on the Sabbath day when he would be so concerned for all of these minute man made laws that they wouldn't be broken along comes this traveling preacher who performs this miracle on the Sabbath day and he's fired up with indignation and it's again interesting he doesn't turn to Jesus and speak to him he turns to the people and he said to the people there are six days in which work ought to be done come on these days and be healed and not on the Sabbath day you can just feel the weight of his anger his indignation coming through in the words the way they're recorded there by Luke he was filled in verse 14 with indignation indignant means really really annoyed really worked up maybe he felt his position somewhat threatened

Jesus hadn't consulted him before doing this miracle of course he hadn't it was his day he is the Lord of the Sabbath in any case this is what Jesus did maybe that's why he was indignant as well some people are like that they don't like their lives being controlled by others especially by an authority like Jesus the ruler of the synagogue was the ruler of the synagogue and for this man to come along and more or less take over from him on the Lord's day and do this with the crowd watching that was going to undermine this position and undermine as he saw the emphasis that they were giving to all of these laws and isn't that what you find in the way that they rejected Christ all along we will not have this man to rule over us and isn't that what's wrong with my own heart and your own heart as well doesn't that get to the real crux the real core issue of our sinfulness we do not want

[15:02] God to control our life we want him to control bits of it the bits that we're willing to hand on to him but to control all of it to control all of my urges and all of my appetites and all of my inclinations and to control all of the things that I can or cannot do that's Lordship well that's what he is and that's what being saved includes coming under the Lordship of Christ willingly coming to be a subject of the king a citizen in the kingdom whose Lord whose king is the Lord Jesus Christ well whatever it was it was a controversial healing for this man and for his supporters that's what they thought of it but Jesus gave a condemning reply the Lord answered him you see he didn't say anything to the

Lord directly he was speaking to the crowd but the Lord spoke to him and as the Lord spoke to him he included everybody else in what he was saying that were supporters of this man because he used the plural word hypocrites he didn't say you hypocrite to the man he said to the man you hypocrites every single one who thinks as you do and acts like you do and you see how devastatingly he spoke to this man does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey and lead it away to water and ought not this woman a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years the Lord knew we can't get access to this but somehow or other there was a satanic influence and a satanic involvement in this woman's condition that is what the Lord knew that's why the Lord said this ought she not whom Satan bound for eighteen years ought she not to be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day these are wonderful words because he's connecting together the loosing of the donkey in order to take him out for a drink of water and the loosing on his part of this woman from her disability and what he's saying to this ruler of the synagogue is yes you're happy enough to loose your donkey but you are annoyed that I have loosed this human being and not only this human being this daughter of

Abraham why did he call her a daughter of Abraham because she was a member of the covenant people she was a Jew she was somebody who came under the provisions of God in the revelation that he had given to his people and what Jesus was saying effectively to this man is that he was actually happy enough to bring an animal out of the stall to be watered but he was outraged at the thought of a woman of Abraham a covenant woman being loosed from her disability by Jesus it's a very solemn thing how mistaken ignorant prejudice can blind our minds to the truth just think what happened he saw a miracle he saw a woman healed by

Jesus from something that had a satanic element to it which no mere human being could have done and yet he is so prejudiced in the way he sees the Sabbath in the way he demands the Sabbath be kept he cannot see the miracle that's just been done before his eyes and that's a warning to ourselves because if we set things according to our rules and our way of doing things and our idea of what's right and wrong we are very often going to let that blind us to the truth what we set our

lives by is not our view of what's right and wrong but God's revelation this man ought to have seen in what Jesus did the very evidence of God at work he didn't see why because he was too prejudiced in following his own rules and sadly there are many many people who are like that still with

Jesus Christ they have an idea as to what would be good for them in terms of a Christian life they have an idea of what a Christian life is about they define it by their own terms they set their own rules and very often they are extremely prejudiced against the teaching of the Bible because the Bible destroys what they build up themselves and their own ideas now see tonight that you and I are not like that don't let anything other than the very word of God dictate to your mind what is and isn't right or wrong what is and isn't acceptable or unacceptable what is or isn't necessary or unnecessary and if you want as you surely do to be a member of the kingdom of God a saved citizen of the kingdom under the lordship of

[ 21 : 17 ] Christ prejudice will keep you out if that's what you want but here is a man who tells us the way Jesus dealt with him that we have to put prejudice aside our own views aside our own better ideas aside when it comes to Christ and to accepting and making choice of him the only thing that should be in our minds is God's recommendation because he comes with God's recommendation and he's designed for you and for me well there's the condemning reply and just in passing you could say too that Jesus is in a sense defining something of what the Sabbath means and it's important for ourselves still to see this and he does that in other places as well of course where people object to him doing things on the Sabbath day what he's doing by answering this man in this way is really saying this actually belongs to what is right and fitting and proper for the Sabbath day the Sabbath day is not just for church attendance and for formal occasions of worship the church the Sabbath day includes the spirit of compassion and works of compassion and things which come into that sort of category of Christian good works things they are not to be left aside on the Sabbath day the spirit of the

Sabbath demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves on the Sabbath as well as every other day the kingdom advances then by setting people free I wonder if the kingdom has advanced within this building this evening yet has there been another increase has it been the case with yourself that maybe you came to the service tonight not yet saved is the kingdom going to advance by your acceptance of Christ tonight or will you see to it that it doesn't there is the challenge for us has the kingdom advanced in our own midst tonight by your reception of the truth by your obedience to the Lordship of Christ well there is a contrasting reaction too as you see this

Paul as he said these things in verse 17 all his adversaries were put to shame and all the people rejoiced at the glorious things that were done to him and Luke deliberately puts these two reactions side by side the contrast between them is very very obvious all his adversaries all his opponents they were put to shame there was no reaction at all they just couldn't say anything against what he had done or said they were silenced they were put to shame while on the other hand the people common people the ordinary people who were following they rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him most of his adversaries were amongst the religious authorities they were put to shame but the ordinary people who had been longing for someone authoritative to come and release them from these burdens well here he is come unto me said all you who are burdened and heavy laden as they were and I will give you rest and then you find that the kingdom advances despite first appearances that takes us to verses 18 to 21 and in that

Jesus has two pictures for us or two parables of the mustard seed and the leaven the kingdom advances despite first appearances because first of all when you look at what he says there about the leaven which is yeast the kingdom advances because it grows from small beginnings here is the kingdom compared to a grain of mustard seed which 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 what's one woman compared to those that are opponents of Christ what's a small group of disciples compared to the world around them that hate them because they're following this traveling preacher called Jesus what is the church of the days of the apostles no bigger than can be contained in an upper room what is that church compared to the great cities that exist in the pagan world of the time like Corinth and Ephesus what is one person like Saul of Tarsus being converted what is that one person against that mighty opposition of pagan darkness what is this one person called Jesus put to death on a cross what is that in terms of comparing it in size or magnitude to the world that opposes it well look at what he says the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed we understand it's

the smallest of all grains just a tiny little speck but when you plant it and leave it to grow eventually after a time it actually reaches the height of a tree it becomes a tree the size of a tree it becomes a shrub the size of a tree so much so that birds can come and nest and host in its branches you would never say looking at that grain of mustard seed as you look at it in itself you would never say it contains within it the potential or the power to become such a great tree that the birds of the air can find a home in it yet

[ 28 : 20 ] Jesus says that's what it's like with regard to the kingdom of God people can despise the kingdom of God people can ridicule the kingdom of God people can say about this gathering tonight what are these people that's just a few dozen people who don't know any better than they meet every Lord's day and they don't accept the teaching of modern of the modern world they can't actually get it into their heads that they're really wrong about this religious stuff and the Lord is saying the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed you can't stop its growth and it becomes a great and mighty thing and you notice it says the birds of the air now that seems to be important because in the Old Testament some of the prophets referred to times of blessing in the future from their day in a way that referred to growth of such a plant as this and the birds coming to nest in it and one of these passages is in

Ezekiel chapter 17 I'm going to read a few verses there where the Lord is promising blessing and promising fertility and the sprouting of this twig that he's going to take he broke off the topmost of its young twigs this eagle came along with its talons and he came to Lebanon and took the top of a cedar tree a tiny little twig pardon even that and he set it in a city of merchants he took from the seed of that and planted it in fertile soil he placed it beside abundant waters he set it like a willow twig and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine and its branches turned toward him and its roots remained where it stood so it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs and there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage and the Lord actually saying by his blessing they come and birds of the air come in verses 22 and near the end of the chapter I myself he says the Lord will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out and it's probably an indication of the tiny remnant that came back from captivity in Babylon he would not say looking at them there was any future for these people I myself will take that says God and I will plant it on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar and under it will dwell every kind of bird in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest and all the trees of the field shall know that I am Lord every other tree he's making this picture of course of all the other trees watching on and looking on and looking at this tiny little twig that's taken and planted and all the other trees are pictured there as almost laughing at the prospect that that tiny twig will ever come to be as big as them but it outgrows them and the Lord says they will all come to know that I have the Lord every single person every nation every power will yet come to acknowledge that Christ is Lord that his kingdom advanced despite their best efforts that what looked to begin with like the tiniest little crumb the tiniest little seed of the mustard tree that it did in fact come to be a mighty great weight of people a great kingdom tonight you've planted your mustard seed you've been watering it carefully with your tears with your prayers you're not seeing much sign of growth yet be encouraged don't look at the size it was to begin with don't look at it in terms of your own estimation of its growth or what it can become in your eyes leave it to the Lord continue to pray because the beginnings are no indication of the end as you come to plant your mustard seed with your own life or in your prayers for someone else or in your witness to whoever you're witnessing to leave it to God to let that seed grow and when God brings it to grow nobody will laugh at it that it's tiny and insignificant here we are as a congregation what are we tonight?

what are we compared to that great world out there? what are we in comparison with the powers that exist in opposition to the gospel?

what are we in terms of numbers? how many are we tonight? you can count them very readily there are more empty pews even in downstairs than there are filled does that mean the kingdom of God has stopped growing?

[ 34 : 29 ] definitely not yes you want to see all of these pews with people sitting them and these as well the fact is we don't judge things by what we deem to be proper size much as we'd like that increase to be seen what shall I say the kingdom of God is like?

it is like a grain of mustard seed what God plans will grow and the growth that God brings about is unstoppable we may never have as many as we would like but God will have those that he has

appointed our business is to sow and to serve that God and it grows also secondly by a transforming power he said again to what shall I compare the kingdom of God it is like leaven which is yeast that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leaven now in terms of the mustard seed you're comparing the size at the beginning with the size at the end you cannot say looking at the size at the beginning that there's any indication of what the size at the end will be like it's not about size when it comes to the leaven although you might say the leaven itself the little batch of yeast that's worked into the big batch of dough this was a big batch of dough three measures of flour was something like half a hundredweight it's not about size though it's about influence it's about transformation the kingdom of God advances not just from small beginnings but by a transforming power because what happens to this batch of flour these three measures of flour this dough that the woman had put together and into which this yeast is then added what happens as the yeast is added and set to work inside the batch of dough it changes it it transforms it so that the properties of the yeast are transferred to every single molecule of that batch of dough it takes over and it transforms by being introduced into this batch of dough and he says that's what the kingdom is like it's not operating from outside of people's lives it's operating from inside it's operating because the power of God actually comes within people and then changes them from within the way the yeast changes these measures of flour and takes over and imparts the properties of the yeast to every single part of it

God comes into your life and mine and there isn't a single element of your life that's left unaffected the power of the kingdom the power of the king which is your mind your heart your emotions your conscience your will your affections your thoughts your motives everything is brought under the power of this grace of this power of God that's why the kingdom's advance is unstoppable once you put this little batch of yeast into this big batch of dough once you've introduced it that's it you can't extract it you can't take it out so that the batch of dough goes back to what it was it just takes over and that's how

God is although of course it's different in the sense that the person and the people into whom God comes is they are willingly receptive of God's truth they are made willing by his grace God doesn't come into them in a way that then forces them to accept his will to accept his lordship they come willingly to receive him and he comes to dominate their whole life well where are we tonight we've spoken about the congregation we've spoken about the church we've spoken about things individually as well that's where we have to leave it has your life been opened to receive the power of God to work in you have you admitted this great power of grace into your life that's not in any way to question the sovereignty of God in saving us the Bible is addressed addresses our responsibilities yes it tells us that God is sovereign and by his grace alone are we saved but it also says except you be born again except you repent you shall all likewise perish except you receive Christ you will not be in the kingdom except you come to be transformed from within we cannot come to possess and to enjoy the abundant life that Jesus has for his people let's pray gracious Lord we bless you for all the privileges we have and for the way in which we are brought especially into contact with your kingdom with your kingship and with its claims upon us and we pray for grace O Lord that our hearts may be ever receptive to those things of your kingdom and of your grace and of your demands and of your comforts for us we pray that your blessing will be accompanying your word to us at all times that we too may rejoice in being part of your kingdom a kingdom that is without end and a kingdom the citizens of which will continue to be so forever receive our thanks we pray for Christ's sake Amen