

Freedom of Repentance

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Date: 08 March 2009

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me to Luke chapter 13, and we'll be walking through the next 21 verses. It has been a delight at St. John's to walk with Luke through the story of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The passage today is about the kingdom, and the kingdom was very much on Luke's mind. As we look through it, he refers to it no more than 30 times, 31 times, far more than any of the other gospels.

But what was the nature of this kingdom? How was it to be manifest? How were you to see it? It was obviously an issue on the Pharisees.

In Luke chapter 17, we read that they asked Jesus when the kingdom would come. It was on the minds of those listening to Jesus in chapter 19, verse 11, we read, And the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once, even to Jesus' last meal with his disciples, when they were themselves arguing which one of them would be greatest in his kingdom.

Jesus had communicated to them that the kingdom that they were expecting was not the one that would come. It would be a far different kingdom. And I think this passage helps us understand in a more full way what Jesus was trying to communicate.

[1 : 36] I remember vividly going to get my books out of customs at the Karachi port. For those of you that may not be aware, we were missionaries supported by St. John's for many years in Pakistan.

And one of the challenges of being a missionary is you do a lot of packing and unpacking. And being a regent student, you also have a lot of books. And so we carried those with us.

And I went to the port. Eventually, I was told, you know, if you go into the port, you won't have to pay a big bribe. And so I went in, actually, inside the port. I wore a shelf of archimese and I speak the local language.

I look a little bit like a local when I work at it. And at that point, I had a good conversation with the local port people.

And they said, no problem at all. You know, you're here to work with us. And in fact, they didn't even charge me the port fee. And they gave me cups of coffee.

[2 : 34] And I was just getting ready to go. And then a message came and said, the director of the port wants to speak to you. So I thought, here we go. And I went upstairs to a big control tower at the top of the port.

And we looked over this whole massive port, larger than the port in Vancouver. It's a transshipment point from much of Europe to the Far East.

And in this port, this officer sat there. He had this massive beard. It was down to the middle of his chest, beautifully combed and henned. He had epaulets of a general. And I thought, I'm, you know, really in for a large bribe here.

This gentleman is not dealing in small change. So he told me to sit down. And he said, would you like a cup of tea? Do you like green tea or chai?

And I said, green tea would be nice. He said, I just have one question for you. He said, can you tell me who was a greater leader? Was it Moses or was it Jesus?

[3 : 34] Who do you think was a greater leader? Needless to say, I was really knocked over. What a question to get from an individual in such a position of power.

And we ended up talking for an hour. And my response was, that's amazing. There's a lot of Christians who wouldn't even ask that question. What led you to that question?

And we ended up speaking about how he came. He said, I read the Bible every day. I study it. In his mind, he was wondering who was a greater leader. Who was symbolic of what a leader should be?

Certainly within the religion of Islam, Moses is looked upon as a greater leader. Moses is one of the prophets of Islam and is a prophet who is looked upon as leading his people out of slavery into freedom.

In the same way, Muhammad was looked upon this way. And my friend in Ayatollah certainly saw Moses as a great leader.

[4 : 40] But he was entranced by the person of Jesus. There was something about him. And this is very much what Luke is showing us as we read through his gospel.

He's talking about a different leadership. He's talking about a different kingdom. I think there's three messages that I'd like us to take home with us.

The first message is that the kingdom is not as it seems. The kingdom is not as it seems. The second one is the kingdom is about freedom. And the third is the kingdom is entered by turning. The kingdom is not as it seems. I'll start actually at the end of our passage because it's at this point where Jesus draws and paints a small picture, an icon of the kingdom.

In verse 18, he said, He said, therefore, what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It's like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his garden.

[5 : 45] And it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches. And again he said, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened.

Something very small and ordinary. The most insignificant seed in the farmer's seed box.

The smallest and most humble of seeds. Yeast. Something just tiny. And yet both of them with tremendous influence.

I was talking with Jess Cantalong, a missionary in Israel, and he told me about the mustard seed in Israel. He said, it's interesting that it spreads like crazy.

He said, you plant the mustard seed and it self-replicates. It's not one of these seeds that you need to coddle and water and carefully watch.

[6 : 50] It's a seed that has its own internal vitality. It grows and spreads. And he says, without much work, it can cover a whole mountainside. That's the mustard seed.

So Jesus is wanting for us to see a different picture of the kingdom. Something small. Something insignificant. But something which grows and has tremendous influence.

And as we see that he, as he draws a picture of these icons of the kingdom as a mustard seed and as a, as a, as yeast, he's actually referring us back to the miracle that he just performed.

We've read it all. It's a very powerful miracle. And I believe this miracle is a picture of the kingdom. It starts off with Jesus teaching in a synagogue.

We know that his ministry had been quite influential. There had been people crowded to hear him. We can imagine this synagogue. People crowded in. I remember sitting in a, in a, in a, a church in, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

[7 : 59] And you sat in lines, cross-legged. And the first people come in would sit near the front. And then as more people came in, everyone just squeezed a bit closer until everybody was only sitting about a few inches from each other.

And I, I imagine that the synagogue that Jesus was in, it was like that. There he was at the front reading from the scroll. And then we read that there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for 18 years.

She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And we imagine a woman maybe coming in at the back. The women would be sitting at the back.

Anyway. And here was a woman who not only was not one of the influential members of the community, but she was suffering from an illness that had bent her over for 18 years.

The culture of the day looked upon illness as a, as a sign of God's judgment. Remember when, when Jesus' disciples spoke to, to him about the man who was born blind.

[8 : 59] And their first response was to say, Jesus, was this the man's sin or was it a result of his parents' sin? Very much, I am sure this woman had suffered under a huge amount of guilt that something she had done wrong had caused her to be bent over.

And there I can imagine her sitting at the back not wanting to be visible but desperate to hear the teachings of Jesus. I remember practicing medicine in Pakistan.

I would be in a clinic and the, the young and the influential would come forward. I remember seeing a family where there was a grandmother and she was very sick. She was coughing. They gave her

poor clothes to wear.

They didn't have much money as it was and she wore the, even the poor clothes. And she was sitting at the back and the, the, the family members came forward and presented the, the two children. They said, heal these.

I said, well, what about her? And, and they said, don't worry about her. We don't have money for her. Her life is over. Um, I, you know, deal with the kids. So in a, in a poor culture, oftentimes people like this are shunted to the back.

[10:07] They're looked upon and imagine after 18 years how many physicians, how many different things she had tried, how many scriptures she had read. I believe she was without hope. She had come in just to hear the words of Jesus.

I don't think she had any hope. She was sitting at the back. Then what happens? When Jesus saw her, he called her forward. Can you imagine?

Here she is bent over, sitting at the back, hidden. The, the, the, the crowd splits and this woman hunched over, looking down toward the ground.

Terrible disease that had bent her spine and she, she walks forward. And Jesus says to her, woman, you are set free from your infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her and immediately she was made straight and began to praise God.

What a picture. What do we see the result of the religious leaders? His response in reaction to Jesus interfering with his normal, well-organized synagogue practice.

[11:13] he rebukes the woman and indirectly Jesus for disturbing his well-ordered routine. There are six days on which to work.

Some come on those days and be healed but not on the Sabbath day. No sense of what a tremendous earthquake had happened in this woman's life.

So what does this picture tell us about the kingdom? What does it reveal to us? Because I believe that every word has been crafted by Luke to help us understand more fully what the kingdom was about.

Even if the mustard seed and the symbol of yeast were icons, little pictures, this more fully opens the doorway to the kingdom. The first is that Jesus sees in verse 12.

And when Jesus saw her he called her. I think it's very important for us to remember that none of our sorrows are hidden from him. None of the things that we have secretly gone through.

[12:23] None of the sufferings that we have experienced are hidden from his knowledge. He sees it all. We have a Lord who knows, who sees.

Secondly, in verse 12, Jesus calls. A powerful picture where God himself takes the initiative. The woman herself probably had been through so much she had no courage to go forward and seek. And maybe there was no place for her to go. She had come at the back. Jesus calls. What a powerful picture of a Lord who has come into his creation to seek those that are lost, to heal those that are wounded.

it's our responsibility to respond. Finally, Jesus proclaims her healing. Woman, you are healed from your infirmity.

And he laid her hands upon her. And later on, he goes and says very clearly that this woman has been bound by Satan for 18 years.

[13:34] I thought it was interesting that the collect for the day says we have no power within ourselves to help ourselves.

Luke says it very clearly in verse 11. She had this infirmity for 18 years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

She could not straighten herself. and we cannot straighten ourselves. All of us in some ways can resonate if we're honest with that woman.

All of us come with areas of our lives that are bent and incomplete. With stories that maybe we can tell to no one. With woundings that we have received sometimes from members of our own family, sometimes from friends, sometimes through no fault of our own.

All of us have been touched by a world that pulls us away from God. All of us have rebelled. All of us need the touch of God.

[14:48] I think it is beautiful that Jesus not only proclaims her healings but he puts his hands upon her. He touches her. A woman who I believe probably was shunted away and had hardly been touched by anyone.

Illness was looked upon in that part of the world as being tied up with uncleanness. If you were ill, especially if you were physically deformed, you were unclean.

And Jesus goes out of his way to touch her. What a powerful picture. The creator of the universe touches a woman and heals her.

And Jesus wants us to see a picture of his kingdom. To grasp it. That he has come. Not for a political agenda, not for a social agenda, but for an agenda to each individual's heart.

When Nancy and I returned from Pakistan some seven or eight years ago, it was not an easy time. There were areas in our own life that we needed healing.

[15:58] And by a dear friend here in St. John's, we were directed towards Living Waters. And it was one of the most powerful experiences of both of our lives. I remember very vividly the beginning of Living Waters, where all of the leaders stood up and gave a short two-minute testimony.

These are the people that were ministering to us. Each one told of an area of brokenness that God had healed, whether that was homosexuality, whether that was internet pornography, whether that was just a whole range of the most terrible things that we don't talk about.

And they stood up and declared, this is how God has touched me. This is how the Savior has taken my bentness and brokenness and straightened me up. And I was overwhelmed.

It was a tremendous time where I was aware of what the church was about. The church was about healing. The kingdom was there. The kingdom was taking people who were bent and broken and healing them that they could then touch other people.

So Jesus very definitely wanted us to understand that the kingdom was about individuals who have importance in his eyes. He wasn't interested in the big political agenda.

[17:16] He wasn't interested in what the greats of the world thought about him. He was interested in a woman who no one else cared about.

And he touched her. Finally, as we move backward in this passage, how can we enter that kingdom? What does it mean for us?

How do we enter? Chapter 13, Jesus, in responding to the obvious questions not implicit in the passage where the people were saying these people that died while they were giving sacrifice at the temple, their blood was mingled with the blood of the sacrifices.

These were obviously religious people who had gone to the temple and somehow there had been an event there. We have nothing in history to know exactly what this was. It wasn't recorded.

But certainly it was an event where these people's blood actually flowed in the same place where the animals were being sacrificed. What did they do? And Jesus turns the question around from a question of was there something that they did that was more sinful?

[18:34] And makes it general. Jesus says, do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered thus?

I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And here we have this word repent. Very powerful word.

Oftentimes interpreted feel sorry. Oftentimes interpreted by the word penitence. to say, I'm sorry. But it actually has a far greater meaning.

It means turn. It means change your whole manner. It means turn from one direction in another direction. Jesus is saying, unless you turn, you too will have such a fate.

Here Jesus is walking towards Jerusalem knowing, knowing what waits for him. Desperately wanting to tell people that unless they see the salvation that has come, unless they accept that and understand that, they too will perish.

[19:41] They need a change of mind. And he goes on to give a parable about a fruit tree that is without fruit. He's speaking in this parable that real change results in spiritual fruit.

Merely being penitent and going and doing the same thing again is not what he's talking about. He's talking about a change of our whole direction. And the only way that can happen is if we welcome him in, is if we allow him to touch us, if his spirit enters us and gives us the strength to do that.

Thus, Jesus clearly defines that entering the kingdom depends upon repentance. Yes, we are bound by Satan. Yes, we are slaves in many ways a picture, a very powerful picture that this woman was bent over.

But the choice to remain in that position rests with us. To change our will, to turn from a pathway of selfishness, to turn to face our Lord and allow his spirit to enter our lives and change us fully is a

choice that we have.

Thus, the option stands in front of us. We cannot straighten ourselves, but we can turn to the one who can and face him. Embrace the one who has died for us and wishes to free us and straighten us and make us a blessing to others.

[21 : 16] Thus, I believe that Jesus teaches us in this and Luke is communicating that teaching, that the kingdom is not as it seems.

the kingdom is tiny. It's individuals who have been changed. It's seeds that have been sown seemingly insignificant. I ended up having a discussion with Anaya Tool and I said, as our discussion went on, where did you start reading the Bible?

What led you to read the Bible? Here he is, he's a Patan. He said, I'm a Patan. Patans are warlike people. The Taliban are Patans. They love fighting. He said, I was a young man in Peshawar. He said, it was time of independence. This is 1948. Pakistan's independence. We had a young British teacher at our college.

This was Foreman Christian College in Peshawar. He was teaching religious studies. We Muslims didn't have to go to his lessons. The Christians that were there, he gave scripture teaching in the college.

[22 : 19] We decided when partition happened that we were going to get rid of this guy. We didn't want this guy in our college. We went into his room when he was away and we trashed it. We threw water over his books.

We tore his books apart. We followed his room. In the midst of that, someone saw us and reported us. They pulled us up in front of the court and the judge said, you may think that Pakistan is now free, but the rules are still in place and you have broken them.

They called this young teacher in and they said, these men have been caught doing this, these students. What do you want to do? He said, I want you to let them go. I don't want to press charges. These are young men.

Their life is starting. They've done something foolish. I forgive them. And Ayatollah said, from that day, myself and two other guys started attending his class.

And we started reading the Bible. And I've been reading the Bible for the last 40 years. A seed was sown, not through any preaching, not through anything powerful, but through forgiveness.

[23 : 21] a seed was sown. The kingdom of God is a seed. It's a single, small, tiny seed that spreads. The kingdom of God is the simple act of turning from the dark and welcoming Jesus to start a change in our life, inviting him to start a process that will transform you into a man or a woman that can stand straight.

the kingdom of God is in the name of Jesus pulling the plug on a computer filled with pornography and manufactured lust.

The kingdom of God is a group of slaves who had no value, who went out to dung heaps and rescued children that had been left there, who met together secretly, quietly, who were persecuted for their faith, but who eventually, through whom that faith spread and eventually conquered the Roman Empire because of the faith of slaves, because individual slaves had been changed.

The kingdom of God is a lonely man of God walking in the wilds of interior China 150 years ago, sowing seeds, passing out scripture passages, seeking to struggle with Mandarin language and seeing so little visible fruit, dying, seeing only a few scattered believers.

The kingdom of God is that seed that was planted, growing. The kingdom of God is now millions of believers scattered through house churches in China, praising God.

[25 : 01] And where are they looking and where are they going? They're going back to Jerusalem. They have been called to reach those countries in between. The kingdom of God is spreading.

It's like a mustard seed that you just can't stop it. The kingdom of God is a seed that was planted in Iran years and years ago.

When Khomeini came in, it seemed that that seed was destroyed. It seemed that that fruit was being totally broken. And yet, it was the very coming of Nazami Mustafa, the rule of Islam, the kingdom of Islam, that has opened up Iranians to the gospel.

And now one of the exciting things is not only Mehran, it's Iranians all over the world that are coming to God. You go to Istanbul, you go to Karachi, you look for gatherings of Christians from a Muslim background, there are Iranians wherever you go.

You go up to North Vancouver, there are Iranian churches, all of Muslim background believers. You go to Iran now, and there are thousands of Muslims who are in house churches and who are seeking God.

[26 : 13] The seed is spreading. We have the same Lord who healed a woman bent over and wants to heal us.

He wants to touch us. He wants to straighten us. He wants to make us like we were meant to be. He invites us to come.

He invites us to turn. He calls out, turn. I don't know your stories. I know some of you are going right now through very difficult times.

I know some of you are facing absolute walls that you have no way of knowing how you can get around. I know some of you are struggling with secret issues that you feel you can tell no one. But I can tell you we have a Lord who is alive. I can tell you we have a God. who sees and who hears and who calls and who touches.

[27 : 14] Let us pray that that kingdom may come in our lives today. Let us pray that that kingdom might come in this fellowship and in our city, in our country, in our world.

Amen. Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Between sentence prayers, I will leave a short period of silence for you to quietly intercede with the Lord.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your enormous love for us and the promise of your kingdom now and into eternity.

Your extravagance on our behalf is beyond our wildest imagining. In your great compassion for us, you sent your dear son to die for our sins and to rise again so that we might choose to respond to your call, to bring our bent and broken selves to you and experience your healing and freedom. Help us to turn again to you, to repent of our waywardness and sin that has so often kept us from you. By your Holy Spirit, soften our hearts, break our pride, and open our eyes to your desire to make us whole and straight.

[29 : 15] Father, thank you for opportunities to know your healing touch through organizations such as Living Waters. We pray for this ministry and its staff and volunteers that you might direct and guide them in all the work they do.

We also pray for the pastoral outreach in our own church family. Please sustain and encourage those staff and clergy involved in this ministry.

Father, enable us as individuals and as a church family to be your hands of healing to one another and the larger community. Almighty Father, we bring to you our world in which many countries suffer war and political unrest.

We remember particularly the Middle East at this time and pray for all those who labor for peace there. Give them your wisdom. And we pray for Afghanistan and our armed forces who work to maintain stability in this troubled land.

we pray for their safety and protection. Thank you, Father, for our country of Canada and the many freedoms we know here and often take for granted.

[31 : 19] We pray for honesty and integrity in the leaders of our federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Cause them to look to you for direction as they govern in these challenging economic times.

Thank you. Heavenly Father, we lift to you your church and particularly our Anglican communion throughout the world. We pray that the truth of the gospel would fill our churches, that error and false teaching would be corrected and reformed, and our church would be confirmed and strengthened in its mission.

We lift to you the Anglican network in Canada and pray for bishops Don Harvey, Malcolm Harding, and Ronald Ferris and their families. We pray for their strength and protection.

And we remember two Anglican congregations on Vancouver Island, St. Matthias in Victoria and St. Mary's Nanus Bay, who have been recently removed from their buildings.

[32 : 46] Father, in your great mercy and grace, be powerfully present to these church families. Keep them united and focused on you. Father, we are thankful for our own church family of St.

John's. we are blessed with our clergy and staff and pray that you would continue to strengthen and encourage them day by day. May we ever look to you for all we need.

May we entrust all that we have and everything we do into your loving hands. And now, gracious Father, we bring to you those within our church family in need of your healing touch.

We remember Gail, Ted, Lee, Paul, Rowena, and Ben and Nancy.

May these know the peace and comfort of your Holy Spirit surrounding them and giving them inner joy in your presence. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 18] Amen. Amen. Now, Father, we take a few moments for ourselves to bring to you that concern or burden which is foremost in our minds.

Amen. We offer all these prayers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.