

What is the Kingdom of God like?

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in the Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 13, Luke chapter 13, and that section that we read from verse 18 to the end, we're going through this Gospel, and it's a large section, but just again by way of overview, we'll read at verse 18, And he said, We've seen previously how the Lord had in the synagogue healed this woman with a disabling spirit, and in all probability, the Lord goes on to say or to tell or to give these two very short parables.

Just to look at them very briefly here as we move on.

And the mustard seed, as we see, first of all, as we know, the mustard seed is very tiny, and it would be impossible when you looked at a mustard seed to imagine just what it actually could grow into.

And so it is with a kingdom. It's very simple illustrations that Jesus was giving. But as people looked at Jesus and looked at his followers, nobody could imagine when Jesus was here 2,000 years ago what he was to bring into this world.

When he brought himself, when he brought himself, and when he brought his kingdom, because in his coming, in a very real sense, his kingdom came, and his kingdom has continued to remain in this world, nobody could envisage or imagine the influence and the power of that kingdom.

[2 : 40] The growth of that kingdom, the development of that kingdom, because it is the kingdom. And when you look at Jesus on the cross and the little band of dispirited followers that he had, who could ever imagine that all the years later, that not just hundreds and not just thousands, but that millions would come to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior.

And so Jesus is highlighting that the kingdom, that its growth is also very, although it is an incredible growth, it is largely a hidden growth as well.

But the kingdom of God will grow. And one of the things that I love out of here is how it goes on to say that it grew, the mustard seed that the man took, sowed in its garden, and grew and became a tree.

And the birds of the air made nests in its branches. And it's here you have this beautiful picture of rest, the picture of home. And that's what God's kingdom gives us in this world.

You know, we live today, we're living in the United Kingdom, and we are part of it. We have our passports, we have our identity, we belong to the United Kingdom, but we only belong to the United Kingdom for a short time.

[4 : 03] Because we're just passing through. We're only here for a few years. Then we're gone. We're just travelers. If we belong to God's kingdom, we are part of a kingdom that is an eternal kingdom.

We sang that, thy kingdom has none end at all. It goes on and on and on throughout the endless ages of eternity. And if the kingdom of God has come into your heart, in other words, if Jesus Christ is your Savior, then you have a place of rest in this world.

That those who do not have Christ cannot have and never will have unless they come to embrace Jesus Christ as Savior. There is a loneliness in this world.

There is an emptiness in this world. And it is only in Jesus Christ that we can get this sense of belonging, this sense of identity, this sense of security, this sense of peace.

And I would urge you today, if you do not know Jesus as your own personal Savior, that you would seek him in order to find him so that you would know this rest, this sense of belonging.

[5 : 14] That is pictured here. I love it, just that picture of the birds resting and nesting in it. Because we live in a cruel world.

A world that is so uncertain and so insecure. It is so fragile. Maybe today the world is very appealing to you. Maybe the world today has given you many things.

Maybe today you feel at home in this world, but it can change like that. It has changed in the experience of so many people. And the world that one day threw honor on them has turned against them and has kicked them.

The Lord will never do that. You seek the Lord that you may find that peace. And again, this parable is a great encouragement to going forward with the gospel.

Because there is an awful lot to discourage us. There is a lot to discourage us in our Christian life. We live in a day, in a climate that is not pro-Christian.

[6 : 15] We live in a very secular society. And there is an awful lot that is seeking to dismantle the very fabric of Christianity. But the fact is that even although things may appear low in our own day, as we said, there is only one kingdom that is going to remain.

There is only one. And God will see to it that his kingdom will grow. And it is the most encouraging thing for us to know that no labor in the Lord is in vain.

What an encouragement to go out and to speak to people. And I am sure that in here today there are many people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and are sitting here with a heart that is glad because somebody else spoke to them and told them about Jesus Christ.

It is a wonderful thing. And it is the great news. And so we need to be encouraged to go forward because the gospel, whatever it may appear to be in our own land, people are still being saved, people are still being converted.

Many people have been converted. But when you look at this world and some of the areas of this world, the church is experiencing phenomenal growth. I hope today you are part of this kingdom.

[7 : 34] Then again, the second parable we see here is that the Lord likens the kingdom of God. And he says it is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. That is about 50 pounds of flour.

So she took this like tiny wee bit of yeast and put it into this huge mass of flour, about 50 pounds of flour. And the thing was that this little bit of yeast managed to permeate the entire mass of flour. It manages to work its way in and through and affect it. Now, I believe that the picture that Jesus is painting here is a positive picture.

Some people tend to think that it is a negative picture. And some people think that Jesus is here when he talks about the leaven, is speaking about the evil influences that influence the church and that get into the church and that spoil the church and mar the church and hinder its church.

And the reason they say that is because they would say Jesus has previously used leaven as something that is bad. He says, beware, for instance, of the leaven of the Pharisees.

[8 : 51] So if Jesus has used the picture of leaven as being something that is negative, something that is not good, then that he's not now going to change and use leaven as something that is positive and something that is good.

And so people use that as an argument for saying that this is a warning. But the thing is that our Lord and the Bible use the same word to describe different things, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively.

For instance, take the animal, the goat. Now, in the Old Testament, the goat was a clean animal and was used, in fact, to picture the work, the very work that the Lord Jesus Christ does.

It was used when you go to Leviticus. It's there where we have the scapegoat, where we have the goat that was sent away out into the wilderness, picturing what Jesus Christ has done with our sin.

So you say to yourself, well, the goat is a clean animal and something that was symbolizing the work of Christ. And yet Jesus himself takes the goat on another occasion and uses it for something negative.

[10 : 09] Because he gives us the illustration of the sheep and the goats at the end of the day. When all humanity is brought together, he's likening it to the dividing of sheep and goats.

And on the one hand, the sheep are put to the right and they are welcomed into the kingdom, into the presence of the Father forever, and the goats to the left are told to depart.

So you see, the same animal can be used in a positive sense and in a negative sense. It's the same, say, for instance, with a serpent. In the Bible, a serpent is so often a symbol of evil.

And yet Jesus, on another occasion, says to his disciples, to them, that they were to be as wise as serpents. So you see, there can be an interplay with the same word.

So I have no difficulty on this occasion seeing it in a positive light when Jesus talks here about the yeast or the leaven. And I believe that very simply what it is saying is that the kingdom of God is like that little bit of yeast.

[11:18] And just as that bit of yeast moves in and affects the whole being, so it is when the Lord Jesus Christ comes into a person's life, that that good seed over the years develops so that the Christian is somebody who grows and develops and matures and becomes more Christ-like.

And over the period is somebody who is becoming more and more and more an ambassador for Jesus Christ in this world.

Of course we're still sinners and we will remain sinners as long as we live in this world. But we should be maturing. We'll still make mistakes. There will be times when we will be vexed with who we are and what we are, about our attitudes, about our inward spirit, about our motives, about what we say, about what we do, about our thought life.

There's so much about us. But, having said that, there still ought to be a development and a growth and a maturing and a progression. And that's what is happening.

That is what is taking place in the life of the believer. And so that's pictured here. And again, it speaks about the way that Christians influence society.

[12:47] Influence for good. And I don't think that we ever are able to understand or appreciate just the influence that the Christian has in society.

And we could even say, how God withholds his judgment. It's not something maybe we think too often about. Because of his people.

But the Bible tells us that is so. For instance, you remember Sodom, when Abraham was praying for Sodom. And he started at 50 righteous, down to 40, to 30, down to 10.

And the Lord says, if I find 10 righteous, I won't destroy it. Now, that is not saying, but that, and we know that sometimes disaster and trouble will fall on the righteous as well as on the unrighteous.

And God's judgments are often mysterious. But at the end of the day, his people will be eternally safe and secure. But the fact is that the Christian does influence society for good.

[13:56] And that is something that we really need to seek. That we will influence where we live. Influence for good the people we work with.

You see, Christian influence is not about the passing of laws. It's about the personal impact that your life will make on other people. In your day-to-day work.

Wherever you're working, if there's an honesty and integrity about your life, because you're seeking to honor the Lord, then that has an impact upon people. People are taking note of how a Christian operates in life.

And your influence will often be for good. I remember before I was converted the influence of Christians that I worked with. And I would see something about them that spoke to me.

It influenced. It impacted. And that is happening over and over and over again. And so we find something of that highlighted here.

[15:04] And then from verse 22, times we will move on quickly. Jesus is making his way through the towns and the villages. And somebody asked him, Lord, will those who are saved be few?

Will there be many saved, really? That's the question being asked. And it's wonderful how the Lord, he's so personal. And he turns the thing right round. And really what Jesus is saying, here it is, you make sure.

Asking that he's, you could see him homing in on the person who's asking the question. And he's really saying, the ultimate question is this, are you saved? You make sure that you are saved.

That's what he says. Strive to enter through the narrow door. You see, people can question themselves into a lost eternity.

People can have all these kind of questions and thoughts, and it happens so often. People are so caught up, and all that's happening. And of course it is.

[16:09] Our mind can be thrown in every direction when we look at the world situation and when we look at even things that happen in our own lives.

And we can question this and question that and question the next thing. Jesus is saying, look, there's one all important issue and question, and it is this. You strive to enter in at the narrow door. You make sure that you are saved. That is the all important issue of life. You see, many do, and it shows us that in order to be a Christian, striving is necessary.

Strive to enter the narrow door. You see, elsewhere Jesus talks about that there are two roads. There's a broad road and a narrow road. The broad road is a road that the mass of humanity are traveling down.

That's all a person needs to do to be lost is just to carry on as they are. Naturally, we do not want Jesus Christ. We may have an interest in the gospel.

[17:13] We may be affected by the word. There are many things that we'll say, wow, that's amazing. The bottom line is, we do not want this man to rule over us. There is an inbuilt, natural rejection of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And that is why the mass of humanity is traveling down that broad road. And the call of the gospel says, there is another way. There is another road. But on that road, that narrow road, there is a narrow gate.

There is a narrow door. And that door, we're told, is Jesus Christ. And it is through that door we must go. There is no other way of eternal life.

That door and none other. And we have to strive to enter in. Strive to enter in. You know, there's many people that would say, oh, just leave me alone.

I'll find my own way. Just leave me to myself. Because at the end of the day, I'm a decent enough person. I've done, by and large, what is right.

[18:22] And I've tried to avoid what is wrong. And people have this way of saying, well, I've been a decent neighbor and I've never really done anybody any great harm. And surely, at the end of the day, I'll be all right.

But you see, this is just viewing life at a very superficial level. And we need to come to hear what God says. Because we either have to go on what the Bible says or else we close the Bible altogether and forget it.

As many people do. But if we are following the Bible and believing the Bible as God's word, then we have to accept what is being said as true.

We haven't the choice. We cannot pick and choose what we want to have or what we want to believe or what we want to lay hold of. We either accept it all or we reject it.

And if we are accepting it, then we've got to listen to what it says. And Jesus says very clearly, our sin, and we're all sinners, our sin will disqualify us from heaven.

[19:30] We cannot go to heaven as we are without having someone dealing with our sin. and that person is Jesus Christ.

He is that narrow door. He is the one that we have to take and accept as our Lord and our Savior. And so Jesus is using the word strive. It is a word where we get our word agony from, to agonize. It's taken from the field of, from the world of athletics. This agonizing, world championships are on just now and you can see the effort. And it's not just on the day, but the total commitment that these athletes, they've given their life.

They have sacrificed so much. They have disciplined themselves. They have forgotten so many things. They have trained themselves to the point where they are just peaking.

It is total agony, total commitment. They have striven in order to achieve. And that's really what the Lord is saying.

[20:39] That's the word that is being used. This is not a kind of take it or leave it. This is not a sort of thing that you can just sort of amble around with and sort of play with. It's serious.

It's committal. It's complete. It's complete. My friend, don't remain outside the kingdom.

Please. And Jesus shows here that a day of opportunity can give way to a day where there is no further opportunity. That's what he says and it's a very solemn thing.

Strive to enter through the narrow door for many will seek to enter and will not be able. That's in other words when it's too late. When once the master of the door has risen and shut the door and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door saying, Lord, open to us then he'll answer, I do not know where you came from.

And then they'll begin to say, well, we ate and drank in your presence and you're taught in our streets. Now Jesus here is first of all talking to the Jews. These were the people of privilege and they thought that their background and their privileges would make them that they'd be alright, that they would enter automatically into the kingdom.

[21:51] And Jesus is saying no. And they're going to be saying, but you walked amongst us. We ate and we drank in your presence. And he says, I don't know you.

You see, they refused him as our Lord. He came to them, he came to his own and his own received him not. Jesus knows every one of his own and he knows every one who is not.

And he says to them, depart from me all you workers of evil. You know, it's a solemn thought that all that they did at the end of the day, it wasn't to him.

It was for other reasons and for other motives. And I think it's one of the most harrowing pictures to hear and to see this. I don't think a worse word can be heard throughout this, in this whole entire universe than the word of Jesus saying to a soul, depart.

It is a final word. It is a word that cannot be changed. And my friends, all of us one day are going to have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

[23 : 12] As surely as we're here today, in person, we will one day have to stand before Jesus. And there will either be the words of welcome, enter into the joy of the Lord, or the words depart from me.

It's one or other. And you make sure while you have the opportunity, while it is day, that you find Jesus so that on that day, you will be a friend of his.

And as it says, he will openly and acknowledge and acquit you on that day. Because if not, we see that there is this departing.

And it says that in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is a place of deprivation, a place of lovelessness.

It is a place where Christ is not. All that is good is gone. It is where all the lust that is within a person is given full reign.

[24 : 28] Where all these things of covetousness and anger and resentment, and all these things that are part and partial of our fallen nature, will be given full course, full display, where there will be no restraints, nothing to hold back.

You know, it is an awful thought. Forever. That is why Jesus, when Jesus was here, he was pleading with people. He was beside them.

The kingdom was here. Please, he was saying. And in fact, we will just see that in a moment. The time is moving. And then, verse 31, we find it is a strange warning.

Some of the Pharisees are warning Herod, are warning Jesus to get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you. And it is obvious that some of the Pharisees, and we know that, were sympathizers of Jesus.

But some of them wouldn't come out publicly because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. But it is very interesting because Jesus, he dismisses this threat from Herod.

[25 : 37] But what I find really solemn is this, where they say, get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you. Isn't that amazing? There was a day when Herod had a soft heart to the gospel.

When John the Baptist was in prison, it tells us in the gospels that Herod often went to hear him, and he heard him gladly. In other words, Herod used to go and visit John in prison, and he loved what John was telling him.

There was something about John's message. Herod knew this was truth, and there was an element or response in Herod's heart. But we know what Herod eventually did to John.

He had him beheaded, and he closed off God's mouthpiece, and now we see that Herod, rather than hearing God's word gladly, is now wanting to kill God's son.

Be careful what you do with the gospel, because it does one of two things. We either soften under it or harden under it. That's a solemn thought.

[26 : 47] Either our hearts are softening under the gospel, or they are hardening. And then Jesus shows and he says, well look, it doesn't matter what Herod is saying. He says, go and tell that fox, behold, and so on.

But verse 33, nevertheless, I must go on my way. Jesus was so determined.

I must. This was the divine I must. Here is the Savior. I must. I must save my people. I must do my Father's work.

It doesn't matter what threats come my way. I have a heavenly timetable. I must fulfill it. And then we have probably one of the most tender scenes in scripture where Jesus begins to, as it were, cry out over Jerusalem.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, he says. The city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?

[28 : 02] And you would not. Here is the mother hen. There is the little chicks running around and there is a danger. There is something threatening coming. And as mother hens do, they gather the brood, they gather the little chickens, they open up their wings and they gather the chicks into themselves to keep them safe and warm and secure.

A place of safety. And I am sure we have seen these pictures and if you have hens, you will have actually seen that happen. And that is what Jesus is saying.

That is what I want to do to you. There is so much danger around you. You are on a course of destruction. Death is there.

I want to take you in. I want to save you. I want to keep you close to myself in the warmth and the security and the love. But you won't.

You won't. Is Jesus saying the same thing today over any of you? That is a solemn and searching thought.

[29 : 07] Is he? Without stretched arms he is pleading to you in the gospel offering you life and hope and security and peace.

And is he saying over you, but you will not. I hope not. I hope that you will receive and accept this great offer. But you see what Jerusalem has been doing.

Jerusalem, God has been sending the messengers over the years. They've been stoning the prophets and now that God has sent his son, it's not just stoning, it's the most cruel death possible. They're going to give him. And Jesus says, Behold, your house is forsaken and I tell you, you will not see me until you see. Do you know this? I love that wee word until.

for the Jews and how they have suffered. The rejection of Jesus Christ and all that happened has been a fearful thing. But there's that word until.

[30 : 14] It doesn't appear to be a final, final judgment upon the Jews forever. you will not see me, Jesus says, until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

There is still the window of opportunity for them until they see him. You today are on mercy's ground.

Have you seen the Savior? I hope you have. Don't go from here and just dismiss this, ignore it, pretend it's, or bring your own logic to bear upon it.

I want you to bow under it, to submit under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Your future depends upon it.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the word and its challenge. We pray that we might indeed hear that we might receive what Jesus is saying and that if there are any souls in here without Christ today as Savior, that the challenge of the gospel will be a challenge that they will respond to.

[31 : 34] Grant us grace, Lord, in these things and help us to put our own house in order. We pray to bless us with spiritual blessings.

Bless us, Lord, in light of the coming communion. communion. We pray that it might indeed be a communion, communion with our Lord and communion with one another. Give us the desire to be prepared in heart and that we may enjoy the great blessings that God gives us.

Watch over us all, we pray, and do us good. Cleanse us from all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.