



gracefellowship

Series: The Kingdom of God
Date: May 7, 2023

Title: The Advancing Kingdom
Passage: Luke 13:18-21

Scripture: Daniel 2:26-35

Series Recap:

- Luke tells us in Acts 1 that after the resurrection of Jesus, He spent time teaching the disciples about the Kingdom of God.
- The first thing we learn from Jesus about the Kingdom is that there is a King who is patient and gives extravagant opportunities for people to turn to Him by embracing His Son.
- Last week Kyle talked about the Kingdom being a family movement. When we enter God's Kingdom we are not just subjects, we are adopted by Him to become sons and daughters- we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

Today we are going to focus on the fact that as more and more people follow Jesus we see the Kingdom of God advance around the world.

The passage we are going to look at today is pretty short and simple, but it ties into another event in the life of Jesus and it gives us the ability to go back in history to the time of Daniel and understand God's overall plans for His Kingdom.

:: Luke 13:18-21

18 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?"

19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."

20 Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to?"

21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

This teaching of Jesus comes as a result of something that happened right before this. If you notice, Luke writes, "Then Jesus asked..." So something occurred before this that Jesus is tapping into to make a point. Go back and look at the verses before this starting in verse 10.

:: Luke 13:10-17

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues,

11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all.

12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.”

13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

15 The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?

16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Jesus is constantly doing things that challenge the cultural norms and reveal the heart of legalism in the religious leaders. This story in Luke’s gospel highlights the fact that as Jesus is doing ministry He constantly faces opposition. This kind of stiff opposition from the religious leaders of the Jewish people may lead people to think that Jesus’ Kingdom would not be able to prevail. But the truth is, no matter the opposition- human or spiritual- or how dark things may seem in the world, there is no stopping God’s Kingdom!

We often see opposition as a reason to stop. But when we understand the principles of God’s Kingdom, we can endure opposition and recognize that God works through our obstacles to grow His Kingdom. The Apostle Paul learned from Jesus about this approach to life in the Kingdom. I love Paul’s perspective on this in 1 Corinthians:

:: 1 Corinthians 16:5-9

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia.

6 Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go.

7 For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost,

9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

Paul didn't see opposition as a reason to leave his ministry and go somewhere else. He saw opposition as a sign that good things must be happening there for the sake of the gospel! If Satan is fighting you, he knows the Kingdom of God is advancing into his territory.

That's why Jesus teaches about the mustard seed and the yeast. After healing this woman and facing opposition to His use of divine power on the Sabbath Jesus asks the people this question: "What is the Kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?"

- Jesus is going to use simile to communicate his point. He doesn't say the Kingdom of God is a mustard seed or yeast, He says the Kingdom is like these things.
- What begins small and seems insignificant can grow and have major impact!
 - o The mustard seed grew way beyond its small origins to become a large plant that birds could rest in.
 - o A little yeast will spread exponentially. When you take a small amount of yeast and work it into dough it will permeate the whole batch and interact with the dough to make it rise.

When Jesus teaches us about His Kingdom in this passage He is telling us that what comes from small beginnings will grow to be an unstoppable force.

I think Jesus wanted His followers to know that His Kingdom was going to be different than what the expectations were for the Messianic kingdom. The Jewish people had an expectation that when the Messiah came His Kingdom was going to come with force and explode onto the scene. But Jesus is not building a political or physical kingdom. Jesus is putting His Kingdom rule and reign in the hearts of His followers. It's going to start small, but over time it's going to grow exponentially!

Illustration:

Think about a couple things that began small and now have global power.

- The United States as a country began as 13 colonies under the control of Great Britain. Since winning our independence we have grown in size and become one of the richest nations in the world and we have the greatest military capability in the history of the world! You can debate as to whether or not that is a good thing, but it's true, none-the-less.
- Amazon began in Jeff Bazos's garage! He started out by selling books online. Then e-books became a thing and they were the leading seller of

e-books. Then they launched their first product, the Kindle. Soon they started selling retail items and the rest is history. Today Amazon is worth approximately 1.65 trillion dollars! According to a study in 2021, if Amazon were a country it would have the 15th highest GDP in the world! The two countries behind Amazon would be South Korea and Australia.

Earlier this morning we heard a passage from Daniel 2 read to us. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and was so troubled by the dream he couldn't sleep. But rather than tell his wise men and astrologers the dream and ask them to interpret it, he imposed an impossible task on them: "If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble." No one could do what the king asked. But when Daniel found out about this, he asked for time to seek God and get help with the dream. Daniel and his friends prayed to the Lord and God allowed Daniel to see the dream and know what it meant.

In the dream Daniel saw a statue with a head of gold, its chest and arms were silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. Then a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. The rock destroyed the statue and the wind swept it away, but the rock became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

How does this tie into Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God? Let's look at the interpretation of the dream.

:: Daniel 2:36-47

36 "This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.

37 Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;

38 in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

39 "After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.

40 Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.

41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.

42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.

43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

44 “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him.

47 The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.”

Daniel was able to see future events as God made them available in this dream. There would be 4 kingdoms that would rise and fall, but eventually a rock not cut out by human hands would overtake them all and would grow to be a mountain, filling the whole earth and this kingdom would endure forever!

Again, we see this idea of something small coming in and growing to fill the earth. The rest of the kingdoms of the world will come to an end, but God’s Kingdom will go on eternally.

Illustration:

Every kingdom in the world has eventually crumbled. There was a time that it was said the sun never sets on Great Britain because they had global dominance and controlled territories all over the world. But now, that’s not the case. Babylon fell, Greece fell, Rome fell, Britain fell, and eventually the United States will look different than it does today. This is why we have to be careful not to put our loyalties too firmly in an earthly government system. Our first allegiance is to God- His Kingdom will never fail!

God’s Kingdom is the only one that will endure for eternity!

But if you don’t like conversations that seem too political, there have been examples in our recent past of companies that were giants and came crashing down!

Does anyone remember Blockbuster Video? Super power in the entertainment industry; no longer exists! Why? Red Box! These vending machines helped put Blockbuster out of business! You could find one at every Walgreens or CVS in the country! But now Red Box isn’t popular...who rents DVDS when you can stream movies! Hello Netflix!

When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God being like a mustard seed that grows into a tree, or a little yeast mixed into a batch of dough, He is saying that

from small, humble beginnings His Kingdom is going to grow and become larger than anyone could have ever dreamed. His Kingdom is a global kingdom as we embrace the reign of His Son in our lives. And Jesus had a strategy to grow His Kingdom- discipleship!

Jesus had no problem with thinking small and enjoying the start of His Kingdom having humble origins because He knew that the strategy He implemented would pay off in huge ways for the future. Jesus invested in a few. Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't plant a church and model for us what it looks like to grow a church as an organization? Why didn't Jesus have a mega-church? He could have! Crowds followed Jesus everywhere. But have you ever noticed what Jesus does in the gospels when the crowds got too big? He started saying weird things to them- things they didn't want to hear:

- Anyone who wants to follow me has to pick up their cross daily. Lose your life and you'll find it.
- If you want to follow me you have to eat my flesh and drink my blood!

And guess what happened when Jesus said these things? People left! It's not a good church growth strategy! But Jesus had a different strategy- He invested in 12 men and taught them how to invest in others.

Jesus did four things that allowed His Kingdom to become a global movement, and we are still practicing these things today as we disciple others:

- Share the gospel and share your life
- Connect people with the church and infuse relationship that points them to Jesus
- Teach others how to minister and be on mission with Jesus
- Train people to disciple others and release them to make disciples.

Mega-churches can reach thousands, maybe tens of thousands, but through discipleship the church can reach millions- and it's not limited to a location. Discipleship can be done everywhere. You can make disciples where you can't even have a physical church location. Some of the places in the world where the Kingdom is advancing the most are in areas where there is extreme persecution against Christians.

- The Christian Church in China, which despite being under extreme state persecution, surveillance, and regulation is now one of the largest and strongest on the planet, having grown from just 1 million members in 1976 to nearly 100 million today.
(Oxford University study: The Church grows under persecution and actually languishes when it has state support, Standing for Freedom Center 2001)
- Iran: "As Christianity grows rapidly in Iran, the Islamic government and the clergy in power are alarmed," he said. "Their only strategy to slow down this growth is through a campaign of fear, violence and intimidation

... We expect the persecution in Iran will increase as the Islamic government feels threatened by the spread of Christianity among Muslims in Iran.” Compared to roughly 500 known Christians in 1979, there are now approximately 500,000 (some sources say up to 1 million secret believers). <https://exponential.org/multiplication-face-persecution/>

- North Korea: If Christians are discovered, not only are they deported to labor camps or even killed on the spot, their families to the fourth generation share their fate as well. Communal worship is non-existent. Daring to meet other Christians for worship is a risky feat that must be done in utmost secrecy.
Yet Open Doors estimates the number of Christians in North Korea to be 300,000 strong and multiplying—disciple makers who are defying the unjust regime and following Jesus’ call to carry the gospel into every nook and cranny. <https://exponential.org/multiplication-face-persecution/>
- Christians in Asia and Africa have always had to compete with other faiths and are often heavily persecuted. A large contingent of African countries, for example, including Malawi, Zambia, Uganda, Rwanda, Madagascar, Liberia, Kenya, DR Congo, Tanzania, and Angola, are at the top of the list for growth in Christianity, with the number of Christians now over 700 million. Of those countries, only Tanzania has official government support. (*Oxford University study: The Church grows under persecution and actually languishes when it has state support, Standing for Freedom Center 2001*)

The Kingdom of God is advancing, despite opposition, despite persecution, despite governments and extremists trying to undermine it- the Kingdom of God will endure forever. As God’s Kingdom grows in you and you learn to live as a citizen, you will be an active participant in the advancement of His Kingdom, making disciples and shining light into darkness.

Let’s close today by reading one final passage from Isaiah 55.

:: Isaiah 55:10-11

10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Pray

Response

Life Group Discussion Guide

Ice Breaker: What are you most looking forward to as the summer months approach?

Pray as a group. Focus on praying for God to open your minds and hearts to His truth and ask the Holy Spirit to show you any area of your life that needs to align with His Kingdom.

Discussion:

Read Luke 13:10-21 as a group

- 1) What kinds of things does Jesus compare the Kingdom of God to in Scripture? (Ask for more than just what we find in this passage)
- 2) When Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed and yeast, what does He mean by that? What is Jesus communicating about the Kingdom?
- 3) What are some things you can think of that started small and have grown exponentially?
- 4) What does this passage communicate about God?
- 5) What can this passage teach us about our place in the Kingdom?
- 6) How are we meant to be part of the advancement of God's Kingdom?
- 7) What can you do this week to share the love of Jesus with others?

If time permits...

We have been talking about God's Kingdom for a few weeks; what are some of the things you see and understand better about the Kingdom and being a citizen in it?

Pray as a group and encourage one another to take steps in sharing your faith with others and inviting someone to church.