

Scripture: Luke 13:18-30

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.”

²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, ²⁴ “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ²⁶ “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

²⁸ “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Gospel of Luke: Parables with a New Perspective

Mar 15, 2020: Little Now, Big Later

Christianity in Culture

Now, I know that **for all** who trust & follow Jesus as their Savior & Lord, you’re **also sent** to be missionaries in your own unique places

- Yet, for this moment, here we are – **called out** of the world to gather in **fellowship** with each other, united in our **worship** of God, and **listening** to His word
- And by doing so, we hope to find guidance and strength to prepare us to **re-enter** our lives in this world

As we’ve gathered here over the past months, we’ve been journeying through the Gospel of **Luke**

- And **each week**, we’ve looked at a different **parable** that Jesus has told, which helps us see the world from a new perspective – from His perspective
 - We’ve seen that His words are the only true foundation to build our lives on
 - We’ve seen the need to forgive one another, as He has forgiven us
 - We’ve seen the need to persevere in His word, being rooted in faith so that we can grow & be fruitful
 - We’ve learned to share the good news, that God is at work in this world, and to show it with our actions by being good neighbors
 - We’ve learned to pray, engaging in a regular conversation with our loving heavenly Father
 - And we’ve learned to store our treasure in heaven, not investing in things that won’t last

- But, all of these ideas are really quite **countercultural**; they would appear foolish to the average person, to the untrained eye
 - o But, as we learn to see things as they really are, to view the world through Jesus's eyes, we gain a better perspective on what matters most, what works, and how to live in response to these realities
- However, perhaps at this point we may **wonder** – *is following Jesus going to **distance** me from the world?*
- *Is the journey going to get **harder** and harder?*
- *Is there any hope for the world? Should I expect **progress**?*
- *How do I, as Christian, **relate** to the culture I live in?*
- This brings us to our **Scripture for today**:

In **Luke 13:1-17**, we can see both brokenness and healing; and we see Jesus experience both opposition and support

- And so, in response, we get some **teaching on the kingdom** of God
- Now let's be clear – he's not talking just about heaven
 - o Jesus is not saying that nothing in this life matters as long as we know where we're going
 - o Even the last chapter, which spoke of our heavenly hope, was meant to show us how to live our lives now – investing in the right things, and living free of worry
- So, by speaking of the **kingdom of God**, Jesus is actually referring to how God is at work in this world, now
 - o Remember the good news that Jesus shared – that the kingdom of God is near
 - o This was demonstrated through His miracles and loving actions – God is at work in this world
 - o And while His kingdom is not yet complete, He is actively working through His people to show

His love, spread His good news, and invite others to join while they still can

- *So, what is the **kingdom like**?*
 - o With the corona virus spreading fear, and the political elections spreading division, *how is God at work in this world?*
- **Pray**

Scripture – Luke 13:18-30

How the Kingdom Works

You may recognize these parables, or simple comparisons about the kingdom, from **Matthew 13**

- There, they are clustered with **other kingdom parables** – about the Sower, the wheat & the weeds, and the pearl
 - o So all of the teachings on one topic are clustered together systematically, according to theme – as Matthew helpfully does
- But here, these two parables are on their own, but followed by some **extra teaching** to drive home the point they make
 - o That's how Luke tends to share the words of Christ – mixing teaching, story, and parable to provide more context for a point that Jesus makes

18-19 – So, the **first** parable, or comparison, is fairly well-known

- The **kingdom** is like a mustard **seed** that grows into a **tree**
 - o Matthew emphasizes that it begins as the smallest seed, and ends up being the largest plant in the garden (sinapis nigra, 10-12 feet)
 - o God begins His work in small ways – like, in this chapter, Jesus healing a crippled woman
 - o But He tells us that this seed will grow to become a tree large enough for birds to nest in

- As Luke repeats in so many ways, this refers to God's plan to reach and include and unite all nations, all peoples, under Christ
- But, as Jesus works to bring people in, even in the case of this crippled woman, He faces opposition – even from the religious rulers, who are protecting their privilege and turf

20-21 – Now, the **second** parable is like the first, but a little different

- Here, Jesus compares the kingdom to **yeast** – like the seed, it's a small thing that makes a big difference
- If you've ever made bread, you know that you **don't need much** yeast to trigger an amazing chemical reaction that will **transform** 60lbs of powdery flour and plain water into warm fluffy loaves of bread
- So, while the **first** parable shows how God can start a small work that will **reach out** to include all peoples of the world the **second** parable shows how God can use small, subtle ways to **reach in** to people's hearts and work His way in to transform this world
- Perhaps you remember this **chart** that I've shared before, about different ways that Christians relate to their culture
 - If we have a pessimistic attitude toward the surrounding culture, not seeing much potential or having much hope for them, we can either passively withdraw into our own community, trying to stay pure, or we can actively fight against the culture, trying to defeat and replace it
 - But, if we are more optimistic and hopeful that there is good to be done and progress to be made, we can either passively try to fit in and cooperate,

or actively enter the world as change-agents,

seeking to show & tell the good news, as Christ did

- Now, as I've said before, there's a time to withdraw, a time to stand, and a time to cooperate
- But looking to Jesus as our example, we should seek to find ways to follow His model of incarnation – entering the world to make a difference
- That's why He calls His followers the light of the world – a little bit can make a big difference; and also the salt of the earth - just like our parables today, one reaches out, and the other reaches in
- God is at work in this world, to bring the **outsiders in**, and to transform us from the **inside out**

22-23 – Ok, so in response to all of this talk of working with **small** things, one might **wonder** the same thing that someone asks Jesus

- “**Will only a few be saved?**”
- This was asked while Jesus was **on His way to Jerusalem**
 - You may remember that the first 9 chapters focused on the beginning of His ministry in Galilee, where He grew up and called His followers
 - Then, at the end of ch.9, He started His final journey to Jerusalem, and prepared His followers to carry on His ministry without Him – by teaching them on the way, and sending them out to do what He did
- It's likely that He shared these kingdom parables multiple times, and at one point **someone asked Him** if the mustard seed and yeast of the kingdom meant that only a few would be saved
 - Now, that's not what He said – His point was that the kingdom would begin small and steadily grow

- And sometimes, when people ask the wrong question, Jesus redirects them to think about it differently
 - So Jesus gives **another parable**/metaphor/comparison
- 24** – He tells them to make every effort to enter through the **narrow door** – because many will try and not be able to
- *So, what is He saying here?*
 - The door is **the way to enter** the kingdom – into an eternal relationship with God that starts now and endures forever
 - There are many ways, many doors that people take in this world, but only Jesus is the way to life
 - The door is **narrow** – in **Matthew 7:13-14**, Jesus calls the way to life a narrow gate & narrow path, in contrast to the broad gate & path that leads to destruction
 - Apparently, fewer take this path than we might expect – when the time is up and the owner closes the door, some who ate and drank with him, who heard his teaching, will be locked out
 - *And the reason?* - He never knew them
 - So we see that the way to life is not by association – by joining the crowd, going through the motions
 - Just as today, being with church people and hearing sermons does not give us eternal life – that gets it backwards
 - Rather, it's our personal response to God's word, our faith, that brings us into relationship with Him – and through this, we are united in His family with one another
 - And, we see that this way, of trusting Jesus & loving God with our whole heart, is not the popular way
 - While the crowds take the path of self-reliance and conformity to the world, which leads to destruction,

- it may be surprising who responds to Jesus and sits at His kingdom banquet
- Jesus, here is speaking to the Jews – God's chosen people who were privileged to have God speak and work among them
- And yet, to them, he warns that they may be left out, and find other nations come in – for many who are last will be first, and many who are first will be last
- So, while not answering the question about how many will be saved, He warns that it may be surprising who is – as we already heard Josh and Henry preach about in the parable of the kingdom banquet in **Lk 14**, and the Prodigal Son in **Lk 15**
- So, in light of this, Jesus calls us to **strive to enter through the narrow door**
 - That doesn't mean we're saved by our own effort – but it does mean that some changes will be needed
 - Jesus calls us to put our faith in Him and enter into a saving relationship with God by His grace – but that will mean not putting our faith in other things
 - Jesus calls us to follow Him for a lifelong journey on the narrow path – but that will involve lightening our load and trusting Him to provide what we need; and as we do, and grow to become more like Him, we'll grow in our certainty of who we are and where we're going
- Jesus's lead follower, **Peter**, puts it this way (**2 Pe 1:3-11**):
 - *Perhaps you could read this with me?*

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in

the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That's a pretty **amazing list of virtues** to add to our life – maybe a little intimidating!

- But notice that **before**, it said that **God has given us** all we need for this life of following Him
- And **after**, we see that if we put this into practice, we can **confirm, or prove our calling** – to make our hope sure
- And also, notice that it's a **progression**, a journey, a path that we walk one step at a time, as we follow Jesus

Starting Small, Big Difference

So, from this, I believe we can take home some **helpful ideas** to chew on

- **First**, from the **seed**, we see that God can **grow** something big out of a **small beginning**
 - o He can sow a small idea, like the gospel of His grace – and, if received with faith, it can grow in a

person's life to produce fruit that will bless others (the birds)

- o *Has there been a life-changing idea from God in your life?*
- o *Has He helped you see things differently, which has led you to respond practically and grow, which has led you to be a greater blessing to others?*
- o I'd love to hear from some now – and perhaps next week at sharing time
- **Second**, from the **yeast**, we see that God can **change** us and this into something better, from the **inside out**
 - o Just as yeast can change juice into wine, or leaven dough into bread, so His grace and love, by the work of the spirit, can change our hearts to make us new
 - o And, just as a bit of bacteria can transform milk into cheese and yogurt (we call it bacterial culture), so God's people can enter this world, as Jesus did, and be part of transforming aspects of the culture to reflect God's peace, love, justice, and unity
 - o *So, if God has changed us in some way, how are we called to be change agents in the world?*
 - o *Where are we, like yeast, mixed into the world, to make a difference?*
- And **third**, from the **door**, we see that following Jesus involves taking a **personal step**, through the door
 - o The door is narrow, so you can't enter with the crowd; actually, the crowd often goes a different way
 - o But, as you take a personal step of faith through that door, you find a whole new world on the other side, and a new family and community who are on the journey with you
 - o *Can you recall any personal steps of faith you've taken, in following Jesus & breaking with the crowd?*

- Sometimes those become our defining moments that make up our life story, our testimony of what God has done and where He has led us

So, that's how God works in this world

- Sowing **small seeds**, ideas, truths, that can grow to produce new life for many
- Mixing in a **bit of yeast**, working in our hearts and the culture to transform it from within
- Opening a **narrow door**, and inviting us to enter with a personal step of faith, into a relationship with Him; breaking from the crowd to join His community on a lifelong journey of following Jesus

One small seed, a bit of yeast, a **single step** – that's **all it takes** for God to begin something new that lasts forever

- Let's take a **moment now to quietly reflect**, and listen for what God might have for us
 - In a minute, I'll close us with prayer
- If you'd like to **pray together** after the service, I'd welcome that

Benediction – Numbers 6:24-26