

The King and The Kingdom Part 3

We are continuing our series looking at the King and his kingdom. Jesus came telling people to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The people listening to Jesus had their own ideas about what that kingdom would look like. “The kingdom of God must mean a son of David ruling on the throne in Israel. The Romans would be conquered and the people of God would rise in political power, influence, position and wealth in the world.” Maybe it was something like that. But the kingdom of heaven has a different nature with a different economy, different values.

The kingdom of heaven is best described as the rule of God, the establishment of his order, his values, his authority and dominion and we know his values are different. Jesus said, **“What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.” Luke 16:15** We strive for gold and cherish riches. God paves his streets with gold and cherishes people over riches. We strive for power and to be served. Jesus said the greatest in his kingdom would be servant of all. His kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms and Jesus is not like earthly kings. To explain the nature of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus told a series of stories, called parables. Last Sunday we talked about the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. This morning I want us to see what we can learn about his kingdom from three other parables found in this same chapter.

Look at the story he tells in verse 24. **“Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: ‘First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” Matthew 13:24-30**

There are a lot of different ways to interpret the parables of Jesus but it makes it much simpler when Jesus explains them. That’s what we saw last week and what he does with this parable as well. You’ll find the explanation in v36. Jesus said, **“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the**

kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” Matthew 13:37-43

Just let me point out a couple of things quickly. First of all, **If you are part of the kingdom of God you can expect to encounter the enemy trying to frustrate and defeat the plan and purpose of God in your life.** Last Sunday the seed represented the word of God. In this parable it represents us, the children of the kingdom. Jesus sows us into the field which is the whole world. He places us where he wants us to be, but don't be surprised to find that somewhere planted near you is someone or something standing in opposition to God's King and the objectives of God's kingdom. Satan opposes God's rule and influence in your life, in your family, your business, in our community, our nation, our world. Don't be surprised when sinners sin, when wicked people do wicked things, when the “sons of the evil one” as Jesus called them, act in ways that are in opposition to King Jesus. They are living according to their nature, just like we are supposed to be living according to our new nature in Christ. But what are we supposed to do about them?

They may be there to frustrate and defeat us. That's why the evil one sowed them there, near us. But Jesus sowed us in that field as well. I think he knew what was coming so what do you think he has in mind? What does he want us to do? Pull up the tares (weeds)? Try to run off all the sinners? “Let's identify them, put a big X on them and lock em up! Burn sinners and reprobates at the stake.” We tried that centuries ago and discovered it didn't work too well. We end up destroying the wheat with the tares when we start trying to separate them or pull them up. R. T. Kendall wrote, “The church's task was never to Christianize the state but to save souls. Once the church tries to pull up the weeds, it ruins the wheat as well.” Well, what are we supposed to do?

Here's what I think the priority of the parable would be. Jesus makes a point about what is coming at the end of the age. Judgement. Separation. I think what Jesus would expect us to do is to warn the “tares” as he calls them, that a harvest time is approaching. That harvest time

will include both a gathering of God's people into his eternal kingdom and the casting of those who have followed the evil one into eternal punishment and separation from God. He didn't call us to be the sheriff, arresting all the sinners and condemning them, he called us to be the ones proclaiming the good news. Remember Jesus said, "It's the sick who need a physician." I think he expects us to announce hope to the weeds, the tares. "There is hope. You don't have to live like that. You don't have to be controlled by the devil. You don't have to die and be lost. There is another kingdom, another king, another life. Come find Jesus while there is still time."

You may be living or working or going to school with some weeds like Jesus talked about. Announce the kingdom, share Jesus, offer hope. Be the wheat, the children of the kingdom he has planted you to be in that field!

Then Jesus told them another parable. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."** He told them still another parable: **"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."** **Matthew 13:31-33**

Jesus doesn't give us his explanation for these parables. We are left on our own and there are all kinds of interpretations from various bible scholars. I believe Jesus is showing us something of the stark contrast between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world and helping us understand again the nature of His kingdom.

Notice first of all, the small beginnings of the kingdom. Jesus pointed out the mustard seed is the smallest among the seeds the people planted. The seed is easily overlooked, hardly noticed it's so small. That's the way it is with the kingdom of God. In his kingdom God seems to focus on things and people most often overlooked by others. He chooses people to use that no one else would choose. People like you and me. Like the 12 disciples. Like Israel.

Consider what the bible says about the nation of Israel. God chose Israel when the other nations of the earth despised them or ignored them. They weren't many in number, no power or prestige among nations. The bible says, **"The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your**

forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery.” Deuteronomy 7:7-8

They were few in number, slaves in Egypt. He chose a group of former slaves to be his people! He chose them because he loved them and it started with Abraham and Sarah. Two people that obeyed God. Childless. Nomads wondering in search of the place God promised them and because they were obedient, God made a nation out of them and blessed all the people of the earth through them. Don't worry about how insignificant or small you feel, don't worry about your past or humble beginnings, if God calls, you obey and watch what he does. That's the kingdom of heaven. Ex-slaves become God's chosen people!

Paul writes to the church, **“Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus...Therefore, as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’” 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

We are mustard seeds. Small, insignificant, weak, lowly, not the smartest or the brightest, but God got hold of us, redeemed us by his grace and declared us to be his very own. He makes us part of his family and declares we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We started out a mess, but thank God for redemption! We've got nothing to boast about, but we can sure brag on Jesus and all he has done for us!

The Old Testament prophet Zechariah said, **“Who despises the day of small things?” Zechariah 4:10.** Zechariah knew not to despise things that look small or insignificant, not if God is in it. Just a few verses before this God spoke to the prophet and said, **“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel; ‘Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty.’” Zechariah 4:6** Zerubbabel was appointed to be governor of Judah by Cyrus, part of the first wave of exiles returning to Jerusalem. He was looking at the impossible situation of laying the foundation for the temple that had been destroyed. Feeling overwhelmed the Lord sends word by his prophet. “Don't despise the small things, the small beginnings, the mustard seed beginnings of the kingdom, because God's in this. He will enable you to do it, not by your might or your power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. He will bring it to pass!”

Jesus said the kingdom was like a mustard seed that a man took and planted in his field. It took time and patience to wait for that tiniest of seeds to grow into what the parable calls a tree the birds could nest in. You have to be patient with the King and his kingdom some times because His kingdom marks time differently than we do. Luke tells of another time when Jesus shared a parable. **“...he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.” Luke 19:11.** The people thought there would be a revolution, an overthrow of Roman power and God’s kingdom would be established by force, but the nature of Jesus’ kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms. Not here and now, all at once, but growing, steady, a process, like a seed planted that grows and produces a harvest and provides shade and a home, a place for birds to come perch in its branches. It’s the kingdom of heaven, spreading, growing, making a home for all. Be patient as God works in you, growing, producing a harvest, bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The life of the kingdom is happening in you. He is working through you. He is affecting change in those you are praying for. Keep praying and believing.

Consider again the humbleness of the seed and the tree that is produced compared to the other trees of the field. We read what Paul said about not many wise, not many noble were chosen. This tiny mustard seed grew up into what Jesus called a tree. Some sources said it could grow anywhere from 6 feet to 20 feet. It’s a big spreading bush or shrub, but it’s not a towering oak tree, it’s not one of the cedars of Lebanon the bible talks about. There is nothing grand or impressive about it. Once again, talking about the church, the people of God and the people of His kingdom, we aren’t supposed to be trying to impress people with our wealth and position, we aren’t building the kingdom of God or establishing his kingdom by political power or influence, we are the people of the cross, not the people of the empire!

No one looking at a mustard seed says, “that’s going to grow into something impressive.” No one standing at the cross watching Jesus die said, “Get ready because this is going to lead to something big.” No one was worried when the disciples met in the upper room and prayed for the promised Holy Spirit because Jesus their leader was dead and gone. What could twelve untrained Jews do. But the Spirit fell upon them and they would eventually leave Jerusalem just as Jesus instructed them and they became his witnesses, carrying the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth, turning the world upside down. That’s the kingdom and we are a part of it!

The kingdom is like a mustard seed, small, insignificant, but when it grows, it may never look grand and glorious, but what a difference that kingdom makes.

What about the yeast? The kingdom of heaven is like yeast a woman mixed into the dough. Once again, there are multiple ways to look at this parable. Yeast typically represents sin in the Scripture, but in this parable, the point I want us to see is the influence of the yeast. A little bit of yeast creates big change in the dough that it's mixed into. Paul writes, **“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” Galatians 5:9**

You can't see yeast at work. Cover the bowl, put it in a warm, dark spot. When you check it you discover the yeast has caused the dough to rise. We are talking about the influence of the kingdom. You show up every Sunday and you wonder if this is making a difference. You bring your children to church and Sunday School and to Wednesday night, you bring your teenager to youth service and you think, is this doing any good? Is this making a difference? You can't see yeast at work. You can't hear it working. It works in secret sometimes, but trust me when I tell you the king and his kingdom are at work. In you, in your life, your family. If you are surrendered, if you are obedient, if you keep trusting him, he is making a difference! Cooperate and let the Holy Spirit do his work in your life. Let the yeast of the kingdom work its way in your life, spreading his influence into every part of your life.

Let me wrap this up with this question: Are you ready to live the life of a mustard seed planter? Are you willing to live by his kingdom principles? Are you willing to live as a servant, serving others, caring for the least and the last and the lost? You'll never get rich or famous this way. You'll never make a name for yourself on earth, but you'll have godly influence, impact for the king and his kingdom. It's what you do when you share the love of Jesus with someone, when you feed the hungry, when you visit the sick and those in prison, when you forgive those who have wronged you, when you sacrifice for others, when you care more about others succeeding and you don't care if you are noticed or if you get the credit, then you are living the life of a mustard seed planter.

Two things about that. First, you'll need mustard seed faith to do it. It will look impossible. You'll be too tired and weary. The needs are so great and the hearts and lives you are trying to help are so broken and you look so small in your own eyes. Don't despise small beginnings remember. It's a mustard seed in God's kingdom and it's mustard seed faith. Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this**

mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:20-21

Mustard seed faith. The kind that looks at a mountain and says go in the name of Jesus! And secondly you’ll need mustard seed timing. Trust God and his timing. It’s not like yours but he is at work. He is the one who causes all things to work for his glory and for our good in his time. There will be days when you think nothing is happening, but trust him. That seed is growing. Obedience leads to provision. God’s at work. But what if I don’t have enough faith. Don’t worry. You’ve got mustard seed faith don’t you? It’s not so much about your great faith, but about your faith in a great God! He is at work. It’s happening. It’s the kingdom of God. Trust him.

Remember those weeds, the tares from the first parable we talked about today? Exercise that mustard seed faith toward those folks. It looks impossible. He’s so lost, she’s so broken, but you’ve kept planting mustard seeds and exercising that mustard seed faith and what do you know, it looks like something is happening. The ground is softening, their heart is opening to the gospel. Don’t stop sowing the seeds. Don’t stop showing Jesus. Don’t stop living out the principles of the kingdom of God. We are part of his extraordinary kingdom and we serve an extraordinary, glorious, wonderful, life changing King. Keep planting those mustard seeds! Remain faithful.

And don’t overlook the mustard seeds of the kingdom around you. Don’t despise the mustard seed planters at work. It’s not all the big splash, big crowd, big event, latest big thing. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.