

The Message of Salvation and the Kingdom of God

Matthew 13:31-33 ESV He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32** It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” **33** He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

- I. We have spent 3 weeks comparing concepts that pertain to Christianity. We’ve analyzed justification and sanctification and contrasted what it means to assume salvation, versus being assured of it by God. Last week we looked at our union with Christ, and the communion with him that results. Today we conclude our series by looking at the simple message of salvation against the backdrop of the Kingdom.
 - A. Many never look at the Kingdom of God as bigger than Christ’s saving work. I hope this morning you will be challenged to do so. I have repeatedly pointed out our tendency to reduce the gospel to the lowest common denominator.
 1. Christianity for most of us boils down to a fact and a response. The fact: We believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, allowing us to be saved.
 2. The required response is to believe this is true, allowing our lives to be conformed to God by the Holy Spirit. This constitutes “Christianity 101”.
 - B. I won’t try to dissuade you from believing in Christ’s saving work, or remotely suggest you shouldn’t fully embrace that belief. It is central that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” and “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved”. However, the gospel means considerably more.
 1. While saving lost people is a vital part of the total message, it is just that...a **part** of a larger, even more satisfying, assuring truth about who Christ is, and who we are in relation to him. The gospel is bigger than we’ve imagined.
 2. “Kingdom” is more than religion; the church more than an equal part of society (like school, government, business); more than personal devotion.
 - a) A kingdom implies a ruling king. Kingship was understood when the Bible was written to imply absolute authority. In Psalm 2, God warns the entire world to reverence the King he has installed on his Holy Hill (Jesus). He says **Psalm 2:11 ESV** *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*
 - b) Our view of Christianity is often too Americanized and democratic. We decide to “join up” with God, and we might make some alterations in life, but not enough to be considered a fanatic in polite company. But we are in control of the arrangement. “Kingdom” doesn’t give us such options.
 - C. Jesus arrived pointing to a newly arrived kingdom. **Mark 1:14b ESV** *Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*
 1. He did not say “if my message appeals to you, come to me and be saved.” This was not an invitation, it was a command; and a final one at that. He said, “Time’s up. The King and his kingdom have appeared. Change everything, and surrender anything I demand in response to my arrival”.

2. This is the consistent message of the gospel. Paul made a similar point to the Greeks in Athens. **Acts 17:30 ESV** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but **now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31** because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed (His chosen King, Jesus!); and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”
 - a) We should take caution if we think too much of Jesus as an option, one of many possible religious paths. These verses say something different.
 - b) This is a message to the whole world! Jesus’ Kingdom announcement came to Jews, the prototype of God’s people for all time. Paul’s came to pagans who had gathered at the Areopagus to hear new philosophies. Both were commanded to repent and submit to the One True King.
- D. Understanding Jesus as King helps us to realize that all of humanity is left with only two options: they can either become his subject through repentance and submission, or they can be subjected to him unwillingly through judgment. But eventually, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord.
1. Those who hear his call, and become his subjects, will find that he is kind, gracious, patient and filled with steadfast love. He helps the weak, guides the lost, rescues the perishing, and forgives even the most sinful.
 2. Those forcefully subjected to him will find him fierce and terrifying, receiving no benefit from grace they spurned. Hebrews warns: **Hebrews 10:28 ESV** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **29** How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
- II. But the idea of Kingdom is about more than acknowledging Christ’s lordship and being saved, or ignoring it and being judged. The promise of the Kingdom is about the redemption of not just a remnant who will cling to his grace, but about the restoration of the entire creation that has been the victim of depravity and decay.
- A. Do you care about the environment? Be encouraged by the coming kingdom! **Revelation 21:1 ESV** Then I saw a **new heaven** and a **new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
 1. Romans tells us that the creation as we have it groans, waiting for the day when God’s plan is complete, and newness, cleanness, and re-creation will replace death, decay, pollution, corruption, extinction and brokenness.
 2. People spend lots of money and political energy to try and fix environmental problems that the fullness of the kingdom will completely eradicate forever.
 - B. How tired are you of injustice like we saw in Minneapolis this week? Are you sick of seeing the bodies of human beings piled up in wars waged by despots? **Psalms 46:9 ESV** He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. And **Isaiah 42:1**

ESV Behold my servant (Jesus), whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

1. Christ the King will balance every scale, punish every wrong, and call in every debt that is owed. No attorneys will find loopholes for crooks, no one will be able to beg their way out. Mercy and grace now are the only refuge.
 2. Sin is never overlooked. It is either atoned for by Christ's death on the cross, or judged by the King in the final day. No one gets away with anything.
- C. Tired of tears rolling down your cheeks? Wearied of one more heartbreak? Are you weighed down by discouragement, depression, or grief? The Kingdom changes everything! **Revelation 21:4 ESV He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**
- D. You might say "all these things are in the 'sweet by and by' but I live in the sour here and now". This shows the problem with limiting the scope of the gospel, imagining that Jesus' work on the cross was just about forgiveness of sin, and giving us hope of escaping to Heaven when we die.
1. The kingdom has already begun to transform the landscape of the present! And the idea of the Kingdom is unrealized until it includes all creation; including the earth, your work, your neighborhood, your family and yourself.
 2. Jesus told us to pray to the Father, "Let your kingdom come!" When did he intend it to come? The moment we pray! How will we know the Kingdom **has** come? Jesus said when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven!
 - a) The primary purpose of prayer is to plead for God's reign as King to become apparent **now** in our realms of ministry, service, and influence. This means our work, neighborhood, family and private, unseen lives. It's not about seeing our will accomplished, but God's reign being manifest.
 - b) Is God's will being done at work? Pray for his kingdom to come! Is God's will being done by your spouse? Pray for the Kingdom to come! Do you see God's will controlling affairs in Washington D.C., or in the lives of your friends, or even in our church? Pray for the Kingdom to come!
- E. The Kingdom always comes with a King, and you aren't it! And the King will come at the last day and his reign will be fully realized, but that is only the capstone of what Jesus proclaimed. He declared that the kingdom **has** come, is conquering, and taking over progressively through the occupation of believers.
- III. Matthew 13 is filled with short stories to make a point (parables) about the nature of the Kingdom. Jesus used these parables to explain the nature of the kingdom so that we wouldn't be surprised when his rule didn't look like we thought it should, and so we wouldn't miss it as it was realized in our midst. We read 2 of these at the beginning; one about a mustard seed, and another one about leaven.
- A. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."**
1. A mustard seed is tiny! You wouldn't even notice it if you weren't looking for it, and might never find it if you dropped it. But if you plant it, this tiny seed can produce a tree that will grow 8-12 feet in height!

2. Jesus point is that when the kingdom is first announced to people who have never heard about it, or seen it by faith, it might not make a huge impression. They see it as religious superstition, but a day is coming that it will fill the entire earth, impossible to ignore, providing shelter and rest for the weary.
 - a) We spoke earlier about the purpose of prayer being to call forth God's rule and reign as King in the earth. It's interesting that when Jesus taught about prayer and faith, he said **Matthew 17:20b ESV** "if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."
 - b) The smallest faith exercised by a subject of God's eternal Kingdom can accomplish monumental Kingdom triumphs in the authority of the King.
- B. In the 2nd parable we read, Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." 3 measures of dough is about 50 pounds; making bread for about 100 people.
 1. But just a tiny pinch of yeast will quickly infect that whole lump, and cause the bread to rise. Once the process begins, you can't stop it. Also, when yeast is causing bread is rise, there is no rapid effect that is immediately noticeable. A small loaf can take 45 minutes or more to rise.
 2. Jesus is saying once the lump of the world is infected with the leaven of the kingdom (as it was at his arrival), a transformation, at times barely noticeable, begins. That transformation is also entirely unstoppable. Dudley Hall says that the Kingdom is always advancing undetected and undeterred.
 - a) What confidence that should give us! God's kingdom cannot fail unless Jesus fails or has lied to us. But Bible assures us that he cannot fail or lie.
 - b) Christians in America spend a lot of time, energy and emotion fretting about political, financial, medical, and therapeutic solutions to problems that the Kingdom addresses for you and I in the "here and now".
- IV. Jesus is not just Savior; he is King and Lord. He is absolute ruler of all he has created. The fact that he is King means that there is nothing that can separate you from his love, and no weapon that is formed against you can prosper. Even death has been robbed of its prey by the Kingship of Jesus Christ. Prayer is the way that you advance his kingdom and see his will performed on earth till he comes. Remember that when you're tempted to think Christianity is a decision you made instead of a Kingdom with a benevolent King, who demands your full allegiance.
- V. **Communion: 1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- VI. **Benediction: Ephesians 3:20 ESV** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen