

What is the kingdom of God like? Luke 13:18-21

Good morning.

Our passage today is from Luke 13:18-21 which I'll read from the screen.

Today we are continuing the current Sermon series where we are looking at some of the questions recorded in the Bible that Jesus asked. Today's question is 'What is the Kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?'

The 'Kingdom of God' is a theme that runs through the whole Bible and the Jewish people would know the Old Testament Scriptures which refer to the land that God promises to his people through Abraham, Moses and Jacob. But how does that work in New Testament times and our modern day? What actually is the Kingdom of God for us?

If you travel up the road going north from here you will come to the Kingdom of Fife and you may spot a sign post saying, 'Welcome to the Kingdom of Fife' That's because the Kingdom of Fife is an area of land that has boundaries and there are people who live in the Kingdom of Fife, they are citizens of the Kingdom of Fife.

When the Jewish people thought of the Kingdom of God, they thought of this Land that was going to be provided for them by God. They were expecting the promised Messiah to come and rescue them from the power of oppressors such as the Romans and allow them to live happily in 'The Promised Land'. But Jesus came (and remember He is the Messiah) to show that the Kingdom of God is much more than that, as it's a spiritual Kingdom rather than a political one. I have found it helpful to think of the Kingdom of God as being all the 'places' when Jesus is King. Our worship this morning has focused on the Kingship of Jesus in our lives and hearts when we believe in Him and proclaim Him as King. So the Kingdom of God is the realm where Jesus reigns which includes our hearts if we believe in Jesus.

When we read of John the Baptist in Matthew's gospel John is quoted as saying 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'. Don't be confused with the terms 'Kingdom of Heaven' and 'Kingdom of God' which are describing the same thing. When Matthew was writing his Gospel his main aim was to write for Jewish readers so we find in Matthew's Gospel that he uses the term 'Kingdom of Heaven' which scholars say would be a more understandable term to the Jewish people. While the other Gospel writers; Mark, Luke and John use the term 'Kingdom of God'. So when John the Baptist is quoted as saying, 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand' he is stating that the Kingdom of God has come close. The coming of Jesus to earth as a human being brings the Kingdom of God near to humankind and makes it accessible to us all. This is a revolutionary idea compared to the traditional Jewish thought of the Promised Land; Jesus brought the Kingdom of God to human beings.

As we think of the Kingdom of God as being the reign of Jesus in our hearts as Christians and in our Church communities that doesn't cover the whole picture because God's Kingdom is also where we go after we die. Usually we refer to that as 'Heaven'. It's the place where God is and where there is no evil, no pain, no suffering, and everyone worships Jesus as King. So the Bible, and in particular the words of Jesus, tell us that the Kingdom of God is both 'now' and also 'still to come in the future'.

This tension of 'now and not yet' is because, although Jesus is King in our hearts and lives now, and He is King over all the world now, there are lots of people in the world who do not accept Him as King and it's only in the future that everyone will see clearly that Jesus is King. The Bible tells us that; 'one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord'. Some people may bow to Jesus unwillingly but they will still have to bow.

I certainly know people who don't wish to have anything to do with Jesus or God in their lifetimes, but deep inside would love to have the certainty that after they die they will go to Heaven, have a happy existence and be reunited with their loved ones that have died previously. This idea used to be referred to as 'pie in the sky when you die'. Well the Bible tells us that there will be feasting in Heaven so there may well be pies but ignoring God in our lives doesn't give us the assurance that we will get to Heaven after we die.

The Bible teaches that not everyone will get to Heaven. Does that seem harsh and unfair? Well God wants everyone to be His friend and ultimately be with Him in Heaven and so He has provided a way for everyone to be able to come. He did that by sending Jesus to die on the cross and therefore dealing with the problem that humans are not good enough for Heaven. All people, therefore, have a choice to accept Jesus or reject Him. The only way for us to be certain of being in God's Kingdom is to accept Jesus and make Him King of our lives on earth rather than living lives our own way.

I guess that leads to more questions doesn't it; 'Is it possible to be sure that you will go to Heaven after you die? Is it possible to be sure that you are a citizen of God's Kingdom now on earth?

As we surrender our lives to our King Jesus the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and the Bible says that He, for the Holy Spirit is a person and not an impersonal force, He will come and be like a seal of that fact that you are in the Kingdom of God. I'll just read the words from Ephesians 1 :13+14

'Having believed you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.'

We all like guarantees don't we, assuming that they are trustworthy, they give us security. The Holy Spirit gives us security, confidence in the knowledge that we are members of God's Kingdom both now and in the future.

Now we're actually coming to the question that Jesus asked in the passage that we read earlier. Today's question is 'What is the Kingdom of God like? And Jesus adds a second saying; 'What shall I compare it to?

And as we've heard in previous weeks Jesus rarely answers questions directly, choosing instead to answer either with another question or a parable. In this case we have a parable – a little story with a big meaning. In fact we have two linked parables as Jesus seeks to help his listeners at the time, and also us reading later, to understand more of what the Kingdom of God is like.

What do these two parables have in common? They both teach that the Kingdom of God begins small. A mustard seed, almost like a speck of dust, and a grain of yeast, not much bigger. They are both 'planted' if you like, the mustard seed in the ground and the yeast in a batch of dough. And they both give big results, much bigger than something so small might be expected to give.

So what do these parables teach us about the Kingdom of God? I think they show us that God's Kingdom, that includes us His citizens, is being used by God to have a big influence on the world around us. If we go back again to Abraham we read that God made a solemn promise with Abraham, the Bible calls it a Covenant, to bless Abraham and give him prosperity and lots of descendants with the purpose of... blessing the whole world. Genesis 12:3 'All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

God wants to use His people, Abraham and the Jews and also you and me to bless the whole world. Hmm that's a big task, overwhelmingly big, but remember what we've just read? The kingdom of God starts small but spreads to give big results. The mustard seed becoming a tree where birds can find shelter, the dough making a batch of bread for many to enjoy.

Also, the mustard seed and the yeast take time to bring their full influence. The work of growing and proving takes time and is mostly unseen but progresses forward, upward and outward influencing the surroundings.

And that brings us to another question as we think about how these parables can be applied to our lives. 'How can God use you, a citizen of His Kingdom, to influence the world for Him?' And I don't have the answer to that question... nope, nothing in my notes... because how you allow God to use you is up to you. It's your mission – should you choose to accept it!! It's up to each one of us to pray and ask God regularly, how He wants to use us to influence the world for Him. Remember, you begin small – so if you feel that your influence is very small then that's the right place to start. Ask God and follow what He shows you, which may just be to carry on what you are already doing or maybe something completely different.

The other question for us to ask ourselves, following on from what we considered earlier is; 'Are you sure that you are a citizen of God's Kingdom?

Are you sure that you are going to be with Him in heaven when you die? Have you decided to make Jesus King of your life? Oops, that's 3 questions but they're all the same really! If you're not sure then today, now, is a good time to do something about it. If you are not sure and you want to be sure then now is a good time to say that to God.

We can say that to Him by praying. Prayer is very simply talking to God – out loud if you want or inside your head, it doesn't matter as He hears you either way -and you don't need fancy words just express your feelings to Him like you would when speaking with a friend. Tell Him that you want to make Jesus King of your life, your whole life. Then you will be sure that you are in the Kingdom of God, absolutely sure that you are a citizen of God's Kingdom today and for evermore

Let us pray

Almighty God thank you for your never-ending love for each one of us.

Thank you that you dearly want to have a close loving relationship with us and that you have enabled that to be possible.

Thank you that you want us to be citizens of your Kingdom and that You send the Holy Spirit to guarantee our future

And thank you that you choose to use us to bless the world.

Continue to work in us and through us by Your Holy Spirit.

We ask this in Jesus name, Amen

Let's sing 'Crown Him with many crowns. King Jesus, the Lamb upon the throne!