

Luke 13: 18-20; Daniel 2:44-45; The Kingdom of God I. Where is this Kingdom II. The Kingdom's Small Beginning III. The Kingdom's Growth

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is the Kingdom of God and where is it evident? Answering this question helps us understand what we should expect in this present world. Knowing where the Kingdom is also helps us to properly view the nation of Israel today. Is Jesus the King of the Jews? Does that mean that He will one day set up an earthly throne in Israel to rule the nation? Or is Jesus already king and already ruling over all? Is the Kingdom of God present and at hand- or is it future and yet to come? Well- today we see that Jesus reveals the characteristics of the Kingdom for comfort of His people. Today Jesus focusses on the growth and spread- next week we see His focus on restrictions on this kingdom.

I. Where is this Kingdom

We start by considering the presence of this kingdom. The term- Kingdom of God- is a way to describe the presence of God's power and rule. Where His will is done and His authority acknowledged. This power and rule is now administered by Jesus Christ- the anointed King. The NT opens by revealing that the Kingdom of God is present- even in the midst of the people of Israel! As both John the Baptist and Jesus state- the Kingdom of God is at hand. What makes the Kingdom present? The fact that Jesus the King was present. In other words, wherever Jesus is, the Kingdom of God is. As the NT develops, the Kingdom of God advances as the dominion of darkness is pushed back into a retreat. So wherever the name of Jesus is confessed and believed- wherever His will is loved and obeyed- the Kingdom of God is present. This kingdom continues to advance even up to this day. When the apostles carried the message of Jesus, the kingdom of God went forth. That was the question that the disciples asked in Acts 1- will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? In answer to that question, Jesus called them to go out and be a witness to Jesus throughout the world. So instead of thinking about the Kingdom as something located and limited to a specific nation, Jesus is saying that the Kingdom is spread and advances as the apostles carry the good news to all the world. Throughout history, some people have associated the USA and the kingdom of God. Some trying to build their New Jerusalem with their own institutions and plans. Others look

forward to the return of Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom in the Land of Israel once again. But the Kingdom of God is much bigger than any nation or dominion of man. In fact, as we saw in Dan. 2, His kingdom will destroy all of man's kingdoms and this Kingdom will cover the earth- enduring forever- and never to be destroyed. So the Kingdom of God is not a physical, earthly kind of kingdom. As Jesus even said to Pilate, if my kingdom were of this world my disciples would be fighting for me. No, my kingdom is not of this world. The kingdom of God is of the world to come- and in this life we witness this kingdom in the Spiritual realm. As the bondage of Satan is broken, as the church brings the ministry of mercy to the afflicted, the affects of the curse are pushed back and the Kingdom of Light moves forward. In fact, we can see that the Kingdom of God is within God's people. As Luke 17 says, the Kingdom is within you. So a heart that embraces the gospel- a soul filled with the Spirit of Christ- is a representative of the Kingdom of God on this earth. The Kingdom of God is made of members of the church and the elect angels- all who love and obey Him. The Kingdom of God is then both a present and a future reality, it has both a spiritual and physical component, and it will one day cover this earth- never to be destroyed.

II. The Kingdom's Small Beginning

Now that we understand this concept of the Kingdom- which the line of David was rife with expectation for- Jesus continues by explaining this kingdom's small beginning. The rest, joy, healing and liberation in which the crowd was rejoicing will only be fully experienced as His Kingdom comes. But how does it come? Well, it starts small. In v. 19, it is compared to a mustard seed- a "sinapi" one of the smallest seeds in common use that day. This small seed would be sowed in a garden- hidden in the furrows- and almost imperceptible to the human eye. The beginning of the Kingdom is also like leaven- in v. 21. A small, little teaspoon hidden in a lump of floor. Once place in the dough, you cannot find it back. Both this mustard seed and this leaven or yeast have a small beginning. And the Kingdom of God shares this small beginning. After the fall, the good news was slowly developed over time. It would only be the full picture of who Jesus was and what He had to do after a few thousand years. The church started with a small line as well. The first believing seed- killed off. Only 8 saved though the flood. A few saved who had not bowed the knee to Baal in the day of Ahab. And even during the life

of Jesus, a few faithful in a remote corner of the Middle East. And still today- does the church hold such prestige that the world cowers before her? Or is it that even here in Illinois- we are considered insignificant. Or consider the tribulation that the church suffers in China or those in North Korea or Somalia. A small minority that is hated and pursued- often hidden and concealed from the outside world. But as the saints were warned in Zechariah 4- do not despise the day of small things! What starts small does not stay small! Do not be discouraged when you see little results from your work- He will establish your labors in His good time! One does the sowing- it may be years before the reaping is seen! Growth happens over time- through suffering and pain- as the Word and Spirit go forth- the Kingdom will grow! Christ grows His Kingdom by His Spirit! Even as the presence of the church will be evident when the visible church gathers- and the sanctification of the saints made known as they cease from sin and delight in righteousness- and the ministry of mercy goes forth to help- the Kingdom of God will/ must grow until it covers the entire earth!

III. The Kingdom's Growth

Now this little seed and small amount of yeast have a dramatic change. In v. 19 the seed becomes like a tree- a dendrom- a large plant in which birds can perch and rest. Literally- birds lodge in its branches. The mustard seed becomes a large shrub with yellow flowers. It is a hardy plant that grows quite large in one season. It is similar to the way our sunflowers grow. Once small seed producing a huge plant. Some mustard plants grow to be 12 feet tall. The transition is like our acorn to an oak tree- except this happens in one growing season! A dramatic- let's say supernatural growth! And the birds find rest and refuge in its branches. Next we have the yeast. This little pinch of yeast is hidden in 3 measures of flour- that is about 9 gallons of flour- over a bushel basket full. The yeast fills and leavens the whole lump- which would be enough bread to feed many people. Not only is there an abundance of growth -there is an abundance of food and provision as the end result! Together we find that the kingdom may have a small beginning, but it's end will be supernaturally large! Through the normal workings of nature, Jesus proves the gradual increase and expansion of the Kingdom until it touches every nation and fills every part of our being. Jesus is not just speaking about numbers- growing in numerical expansion- but also a

spiritual degree. There is a development in that many will be brought into that kingdom- but also those who are brought in will experience a gradual growth and increase in their own heart. So when it comes to the missional calling of the church, we can have great boldness and confidence! As Daniel saw- this kingdom will grow until it covers the whole earth! There is hope for today- the lost ones will be gathered- the influence of the King made evident as people are brought from darkness to light! The mercy of the King revealed in the loving actions and service of His people. It may be small beginnings- as the church grows in a few numbers. Maybe a church closes and another one opens. But the kingdom will increase! Sometimes up- or down- but the number of the elect will be gathered! And one day, when Jesus comes back, this whole world will be filled with His knowledge as Heb. 2:14 says- just as the waters cover the sea. We have a certain hope for the future- the end result of the Kingdom will be glorious and full- surrounded by an innumerable host- a number so great it cannot be counted as Rev. says- members of the great church as many as the grains of sand on the shore! And even in our hearts- individually- we each experience this growing kingdom. As the Spirit resides within us, we are progressively sanctified until His will becomes our own when we die or when the King comes back. God's Kingdom has a progressive or advancing nature to it. It is already present because Christ has come and is reigning, but it will only be fully seen when Jesus returns on the last day when all things are placed under His feet. So let us seek first the Kingdom of God- making it our priority to bring glory to the King! As Acts 28 concludes, the church is to proclaim the kingdom of God and the teaching of Jesus Christ!

To conclude, in the Lord's Prayer we pray- Your Kingdom come. In this phrase we pray for God to rule over us and our hearts- to keep the church strong and add to it- and to destroy the works and workers of darkness. It is our desire that Jesus' name would be glorified and His will obeyed- because He is king and His kingdom has come. God will bring His kingdom to this earth- and He is currently doing this very thing as the church goes forth and the Word proclaimed. Jesus reveals the characteristics of the Kingdom for comfort of His people. So let our hearts exalt the King and submit to His rule- for the King has come and His Kingdom is growing!