

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE?

Luke 13:18-35

Key Verse: 13:19

"It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."

Study Questions:

1. With what did Jesus first compare the kingdom of God? (18-19) What does this parable tell us about the way the kingdom of God grows? Read verses 20-21. How is the kingdom of God like yeast? In what ways is it revolutionary?
2. Why was Jesus going to Jerusalem?(9:51) What was he doing along the way? (22) What did someone ask him? (23) How did he answer? (24-30) What does "narrow door" imply? In what way is Jesus the narrow door?
3. What does it mean to "Make every effort..."? Why is timing important? What are the consequences of entering or not entering through the narrow door? What do these verses teach about the kingdom of God?
4. What warning did some Pharisees give Jesus? (31) What did Jesus teach about his mission? (32-33) What was his attitude toward Herod? Why did Jesus weep over the Holy City? (34-35) What was his longing hope?

Today Jesus tells us how the kingdom of God grows in our hearts while on earth. Let's listen very carefully how the kingdom of God grows. Jesus also tells us to enter the narrow door. It sounds ridiculous. There are many highways and tollways. This is the time of open opportunities. Why do we have to enter the narrow door? Finally, Jesus sorrows looking at Jerusalem, seeing that the holy city turned into a den of robbers.

First, the kingdom of God is like the mustard seed and the yeast (18-21).

Look at verses 18-19. "Then Jesus asked, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a

man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. In the ancient eastern countries, mustard was not a garden herb, but a field plant. It literally grew to be a tree. A height of seven or eight feet is common. But a mustard seed is known as the smallest seed among all seeds. It is common to see a cloud of birds around such trees. Some rest in the tree. Others love to eat little black mustard seeds. To Luke, the historian and evangelist, the mustard seed is well compared to the kingdom of God, and it's a blessing to birds as well as to travelers.

This part teaches us that the kingdom of God always starts like the smallest mustard seed, but it grows up to be a big tree and becomes a blessing. When Jesus came to this world to save men from their sins, he was just like a mustard seed. Jesus is God himself (Jn 1:3,4). But Jesus came to this world in a poor family. Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn (Lk 2:7). Jesus was born in the most fatalistic way and laid in a manger. But baby Jesus is the everlasting King of kings. He is the author of man's life and gives eternal life to all who come to him.

Luke, the historian and evangelist, wrote the story of the birth of Jesus in chapter 2, making use of the Roman Empire as a background for his birth. When we think about the Roman Empire, our immediate association is with the glory and power of the throne of the Roman Emperor. At that time, Judah was a part of Syria. Compared with the throne of the Roman Emperor, the baby Jesus in a manger seems too small to look at. Baby Jesus was so pitiful laid in a manger that he was the object of sympathy by the cow in the stable. But to Luke, Jesus has the life of God in him. The Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, was nothing but a political leader of the time. He lived for a while and disappeared like the dew. But the baby Jesus in a manger is the Most High God. He will reign forever and ever and his kingdom will never end. Luke says, "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The

Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (1:30-33).

Second, how the kingdom of God grew (18-21).

Once, Jesus wanted to have a retreat with his disciples so that he might teach them more about the kingdom of God (Lk 9:10-11). Jesus and his disciples made a secret attempt to get away from the people by boat. But the people watched Jesus' and his disciples' movement very carefully and they went around the lake shore and arrived before Jesus and his company. And some of them said, "Good morning, Jesus! How are you, Jesus?" They were shameless people. Jesus should have rebuked them, saying, "Would you please allow us to have a staff conference? Would you!" But Jesus did not rebuke them. Out of his deep compassion, Jesus began to plant the seed of the kingdom of God in the crowd of people, who were more than 5,000, not counting women and children. Then Jesus fed them with five loaves and two fish to their fill. The next day, Jesus again wanted to plant the seed of the kingdom of God in their hearts. Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life." Then many began to grumble. Some of them said, "Is he not a cannibal?" They all ran away except the twelve disciples. Jesus asked Peter, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (Jn 6:67) It meant, "Peter, you are ready to run away from me." But Peter confessed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68,69). In this despairing situation, Peter's impromptu speech flew from his soul. In this verse, "words of life" clearly refers to the kingdom of God.

Through common life with his disciples, Jesus taught them that he is God himself. Jesus also taught them God's purpose for him. It was Jesus' crucifixion, through which he shed holy blood for sinners. It was Jesus' resurrection, through which he promised to come again to judge the living and dead. Jesus again and again predicted his death and resurrection to plant the seed of the kingdom of God. Finally, Jesus showed them his original image as God on the Transfiguration mount (Lk 9:28-36). At this moment, Peter opened his spiritual eyes and began to see Jesus as the holy God. Once Jesus tested them, how they thought of

him. "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." Most of his disciples were vague about Jesus' messiahship. Jesus asked, "But what about you?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God" (Lk 9:18-20). This was the shortest and most spiritual answer in history.

Peter knew that Jesus is the Christ of God. But customarily, he was involved in a political contest, with the motto, "I am the greatest!" Of course, Peter thought that he was the greatest because he was the top disciple. But John and James did not think so. They thought that they were smarter than Peter, the hillbilly. Even Bartholomew thought that he might be the prime minister in the kingdom of God, which they thought that Jesus would establish on earth.

When he heard Jesus' calling, "Follow me," the kingdom of God was planted in Peter's heart. Peter himself was sure that the best thing in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Peter began to proclaim the kingdom of God. After Jesus' ascension, Peter became a senior shepherd. Most Christians believed that God's blessing would be overflowing. Instead, they confronted fiery persecution. Because of persecution, the early Christians had to split their families and scatter all over the place where they could avoid persecution (1Pe 1:1). Peter did not sympathize with early Christians. Rather, he urged the early Christians to proclaim the kingdom of God wherever they might be. Peter also urged the early Christians to participate in the remaining suffering of Jesus Christ (1Pe 4:13). The early Christians were like a flaming fire.

When we review the life of St. Matthew, it is unbelievable that Matthew was changed 180 degrees, so completely. He betrayed his suffering people. He betrayed his country. Finally, he betrayed himself to make money in that hard situation. When Jesus visited his tax collector's booth and knocked, Matthew was pushing a peanut butter sandwich into his mouth. Jesus knew that he was lonely because he was all by himself. To this lonely man, Jesus said, "Follow me." As soon as Matthew heard Jesus' words, "Follow me," he was convinced that it was God's voice from above. Suddenly, his spiritual eyes were opened to see Jesus as

God. Now to him, money was nothing but a piece of paper. He began to think that Jesus is the Son of God. He began to believe that the kingdom of God is as small as a mustard seed. But when it grows, it grows real big. Later, St. Matthew, the former tax collector, wrote the Sermon on the Mount, the constitution of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is also like yeast. In Jesus' time, the word "yeast" had a bad nuance of "corruption" or "fermentation." But here, Luke compares the kingdom of God to yeast. Yeast has a power to work from inside. Yeast has the power to explode the explosion, all of a sudden. When yeast gets right inside, then unavoidable change comes. Let me tell you a story. There was a very bright and ambitious young man. He had many-dimensional ability to write a poem and at the same time to be a politician. When he was very young, he was not sentimental about his pathetic national situation. He wanted to be a great man in his country situation. He was a Jew. At that time, Judaism wanted to extinguish the early Christians. Paul managed to get credentials to destroy all Christians.

But something happened. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied (Ac 9:3-5). At the moment Jesus said to him, "Why do you persecute me?" the beam of the kingdom of God shone in his soul. In spite of his wickedness, God forgave him in order to use him as an evangelist for the Gentile world. The Lord called Ananias and asked him to help Saul. But Ananias said, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go!" (Ac 9:13-15). So God sent Ananias as a shepherd for the future shepherd of the Gentiles. Acts 9:15-16 says, "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'" On the basis of seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul appointed himself as an apostle. Finally Paul was

shackled and sent to Rome to be judged by Caesar, because he had Roman citizenship (Ac 25:12). But they did not do anything. They just left him alone in the jail. He had nothing to do. But he had something most precious. He had the kingdom of God in his heart. He had also many sheep around him. They were jailers. When St. Paul proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God, they despised and rejected him outwardly. But inwardly they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Nobody thought that the gospel of Jesus would start in the hearts of prison guards through Paul. This story explains how the kingdom of God, as small as a mustard seed, grows and spreads.

Third, the narrow door (22-30).

One day Jesus went through the towns and villages teaching the word of God on the way to Jerusalem (22). Someone asked Jesus, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (23) This man knew that there are more wicked people than innocent people. So only a few people can have a joy of salvation. Jesus said to him, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door" (24). Here, the narrow door implies Christian lifestyle. Ungodly people are very hostile to Christians because they hate to live a holy life. Jesus told the man that he should be ready, because our Lord will come like a thief, anytime (Lk 12:39-40). Some will say to Jesus, "I know you. I know where you come from." But Jesus will say, "Away from me, all you evildoers!" (27) Because they did not have the seed of the kingdom of God, Jesus told them that their eternal condemnation will be great and everlasting, while the holy saints will rejoice together with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Let's read verses 28-30. This short story tells us the theology of the millennium in a few words. We must decide to go through the narrow door, Jesus.

Fourth, Jesus' sorrow for Jerusalem (31-35).

Then, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal'" (32). Jesus meant that he would do his mission and on the third day fulfill God's mission on the

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Jesus knew that God chose his people Israel as his own people of all nations. God chose them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6; 1Pe 2:9). But they abandoned God and were corrupt beyond recovery. Jesus knew how God bore with them for 42 generations. But there was no sign that they would repent. So Jesus began to weep, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (34)

May God help us to keep the seed of the kingdom of God in our hearts and enter through the narrow door.