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Riverside Covenant Church
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Luke 13:18-21 – The Power of the Kingdom

1. Setup in Luke 13

(a) Relationship of disaster to sinfulness

- i. Begins with **Herod killing some Galileans** and their blood being mixed with that of the sacrifices
 - A. Jesus tells them that they were **no worse sinners** than all the other Galileans
- ii. Jesus adds a story about **18 people** that were killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed
 - A. Again Jesus says they were **no worse sinners**
 - B. Each time Jesus says, **“unless you repent, you will perish as they did.”**

(b) Fig tree parable

- i. fig tree in vineyard that **does not produce fruit for 3 years** and owner comes back
 - A. he wants to cut it down, but caretaker advocates waiting one more year
- ii. judgment will come, but **God is patient and merciful**
 - A. gives a chance to repent

iii. **we must produce fruit though**

(c) Jesus healing of crippled woman

- i. Jesus is in synagogue **on Sabbath** and heals a crippled woman of 18 years
- ii. **synagogue leader not happy** about healing on the Sabbath
 - A. Jesus calls them **hypocrites** for they untie their ox or donkeys and lead them to water on the Sabbath
 - B. **What is more important**, animals or the healing of a woman crippled for 18 years?
 - C. Crowd rejoices at wonderful things Jesus is doing

2. **“He said therefore, 'What is the Kingdom of God like?’ (Read Luke 13:18-21)**

- (a) John the Baptist, **“the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.”** (Matthew 3:2)
- (b) Jesus, “to what should I compare it?”
 - i. **tiny little mustard seed** – giant tree that birds can rest upon
 - ii. **leaven (yeast)** – all was leavened or raised

3. **What is the Kingdom of God** to begin with?

- (a) The conversation about the Kingdom of God happens **after the miracle to emphasize that the kingdom is present**

- i. the woman's healing and the **implied defeat of Satan is evidence**
 - (b) The phrase **“Kingdom of God” shows up 32 times in Luke.**
 - i. The Kingdom is the restoration of Israel in this world. By Kingdom, what is meant is “reign” or “rule,” rather than “realm.”
 - A. **God’s sovereignty is eternal fact. His rule exists universally “de jure” (in law), but “de facto” (in fact) in this age only when people submit to the divine will.**
 - (c) Jesus proclaimed the immediate sovereignty of God who will take control of all the destinies of people, **restore people to what they were intended to be, and overthrow the powers by whom the lives of people have been destroyed, maimed, and turned aside from their proper destiny.**
 - i. **In Jesus, God has become present and active to establish his rule.**
 - (d) **The kingdom is God’s dynamic reign (or activity) to defeat evil and establish righteousness in fulfillment of the OT prophecies** – to Israel – in order to restore Israel. In the end, what we are talking about is God coming to fulfill his promises to Israel.
 - i. Kingdom: **the beginning power of the other realm**, an energy which can become active in ordinary reality and which flows through Jesus in his exorcisms and miracles.
 - ii. Many believe the Kingdom of God **arrived in Jesus' baptism** when the Spirit of God descended down upon Him.
 - (e) **More is meant than the place where God’s will is performed.** If that is all that is meant, the kingdom was present in the OT. Something decisive has taken place in the ministry of Jesus, but an even more important future event is anticipated.
4. **What is the Kingdom of God like?** (starting small, but very significant)
- (a) Mustard seeds were proverbially known for their **small size**
 - i. Matthew 17:20, **“if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you say to this mountain, 'move from here to there.'”**
 - ii. emphasize is on **how high it grows** from such a small size
 - iii. contrast between the **apparent insignificance of Jesus' ministry** to the resulting great kingdom it will bring
 - (b) the kingdom is like the process of the small seed become the large plant
 - i. unexpectedly for the Jews, like a mustard seed God's kingdom starts as something insignificant but becomes something quite large

- ii. **could what was happening with Jesus and his disciples really be the establishment of God's kingdom?**
 - A. **Was not the kingdom supposed to be a mighty display of God's defeat of evil and the removal of nations afflicting Israel?**
 - (c) The mustard seed urges and possibly warns that **no one should be put off by what appears unimpressive.**
 - i. The focus is on the organic unity between Jesus' present ministry in Israel and the coming kingdom of God.
 - ii. The end that everyone knows and longs for, is already in the beginning inaugurated by Jesus and now at work
 - (d) **Jews, disciples of Jesus, or otherwise, did not need to be told the kingdom was coming. What they needed to know was that the future kingdom was already present in Jesus' teaching and work.** God's longed for kingdom has begun; it has started and will come to fulfillment.
 - (e) The mustard seed parable is a challenge to human perception and judgment about smallness and significance.
5. What is the Kingdom of God like? **(insignificant, but pervasive)**
- (a) more literal translation say that the **leaven was hid** in the dough
 - i. "hidden" is intentionally used to draw attention to the hiddenness of the Kingdom
 - (b) **the text actually says leaven instead of yeast**, which are not precisely the same thing, but very similar
 - i. yeast is one type of leaven or leavening agent that makes bread rise
 - ii. the original text also says 3 measures of flour (instead of a large amount)
 - A. that is a lot of flour, probably as much as a woman could knead and enough to feed 100-150 people
 - (c) both parables portray the **surprisingly large effect of something small or unobservable**
 - (d) leaven which pervades a large amount of dough corresponds to the relation of Jesus' ministry and the full manifestation of the kingdom
 - i. what people thought should be happening was not happening
 - ii. **what you see with Jesus is the beginning of what you hope for in the kingdom and will surely lead to it**
 - iii. the focus is not the contrast of small and large but the hidden beginning which will result in the completion of God's work in the kingdom, the leavening of the whole

iv. a hidden power, hardly discernible to some, is already and irresistibly working

6. History is changed by the word and work of Jesus

(a) many people know significant beginnings in their lives that God has brought to completion

(b) The presence of the kingdom heightens the ethical challenge. **Jesus does not merely ask people to obey – as important as obedience is – but he calls them to be disciples.**

References consulted:

Kistemaker, Simon J. The Parables. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980.

Snodgrass, Klyne R. Stories of Intent. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.