



## The Fourth Sunday in Advent

### *'The Growth of God's Kingdom'*

#### **Sermon Text: Luke 13:18-27**

*"Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."*

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

If you will recall, in our sermon lesson last Sunday we focused our attention on *'Two Aspects of the Kingdom of God'*. Firstly, as to its nature here on earth and secondly, as to its final fulfillment at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when He shall come in all glory and majesty to judge the world and gather unto Himself all believers to the inheritance that awaits us in heaven because of what God in Christ has done for us.

We learned that, contrary to what many believe and teach, the Kingdom of God is *not* a physical earthly kingdom of pomp and riches, but it is indeed a *Spiritual* kingdom.

It is the spiritual kingdom that comes whenever and wherever the Gospel is preached in all its truth and purity – where the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart of man through that Gospel or “good news” message – and has as its throne room the very heart of the believer in Christ.

And so too, we learned that the coming of the Kingdom of God is not some ‘event’ that will happen in some distant place and time, but that it is *here* and it is *now*.

We also touched briefly upon the fact that the Kingdom of God is a *growing* kingdom.

On the basis of our sermon text for today then, let us turn our attention to a more in-depth study of *'The Growth of God's Kingdom'*.

Let us observe:

- *Firstly: That the Kingdom of God spreads far and wide,*
- *Secondly, It spreads quietly, and*
- *Thirdly, That while many are called, relatively few will attain the final goal of the Kingdom of God, namely everlasting life in heaven.*

In verse 19 of our text, our Lord Jesus, says the kingdom of God *"...is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in it's branches."*

Now in the orient the mustard tree grows from the tiniest of seeds, a seed so small that were you to hold it in your hand, you could hardly see it. From this smallest of seeds, it grows into a very large tree, whose branches spread so much that whole flocks of birds can find refuge from the heat of the day and shelter from the fierce winds that blow through the region.

So also it is with the Kingdom of God.

The 'seed' of the Kingdom of God is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, although much of the world in which we live looks upon this seed as a foolish, insignificant and unimportant thing, it is in fact, just the opposite. For when this seed of God's Word is heard and by the gift of faith worked by the Holy Spirit takes root in the individual heart, by God's Grace it grows.

Yes, dear Christians, it grows – fed, watered and nurtured by God the Holy Spirit with the Word of God until it's branches reach out into every aspect of that individual's life – in the home with one's family, in interactions with friends and with one's employer and employees, within and without the local congregation, among believers and unbelievers.

The seed of the Gospel then is quite alive – *active and growing* – producing good fruit, *fruits of faith*. For it alone makes such amazing changes within the human heart. The Gospel alone gives the believer all that he needs to daily conquer sin. It gives him the ability to put down and overcome the earthly appetite for self-indulgence, the selfish pursuit of material things, and the unholy desire to fulfill earthly lusts. The Gospel creates within the human heart a sincere thirst for *spiritual* things rather than material things and produces the desire and ability to live a God-pleasing life in word and deed. The Gospel alone indeed makes of the believer a *'new creation'* in Christ.

Why? Why does the seed of the Gospel effect such changes?

It does so because the powerful promises offered to the whole world in the Gospel of Jesus Christ bring freedom from the enslavement of sin. It breaks asunder forever the bonds of a guilty conscience. It brings sure knowledge and sweet comfort of forgiveness and eternal salvation to the hurting heart.

It says to the sin-troubled heart: “Though you in your sin deserve nothing but the righteous wrath and punishment of God, yet alone through the merits of Jesus – His sinless life and His innocent suffering and death on the cross – your sins are washed away. You stand righteous before God, as a His dear child and you may confidently approach God your Father just as a small child goes to his loving father to ask what he will.”

With such knowledge of Christ’s love and God’s grace, there is granted to the believer true comfort. It is the comfort of true peace of heart, soul and mind – of real peace with God. It is, as Jesus said, the peace which the world cannot give.

And so the Kingdom of God grows within the heart of every believer. And from each believer – through witness by a godly life, the sincere desire to spread the good news, and a godly zeal to carry out the Great Commission of Christ given to His disciples of all ages – the Kingdom of God, just as the branches of the mustard tree, spreads far and wide.

From its earliest roots in Judea, the Christian Church spread out in all directions. Across the farthest, widest deserts, the highest mountains and the deepest seas, from east to west and north to south it has grown until there is hardly a place in the world that has not heard its gentle call or experienced its influence upon the suffering human heart.

Our text also tells us that like the swelling of bread dough after it is leavened, so also is the Kingdom of God. What does this mean?

It means that the Kingdom of God grows in much the same way. Just as a small amount of yeast works through a relatively large measure of flour meal, causing it to change, so is the gospel message.

Now, have you ever heard the terrible loud racket that is made when yeast is making bread dough rise? No?

Neither have I.

Dear Ones, the Kingdom of God grows in much the same way.

It is a simple, gentle and *quiet* message, offered to and meant for the sin-troubled heart – *ALL* sin-troubled hearts. For it is God’s will that *all* men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth – finally to be brought into the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, the Kingdom's quiet call is not heard in the mega-churches of our day where the simple Gospel message is so often replaced – drowned out as it were – with the rather loud incessant drumbeat of a 'feel-good' social gospel.

Nor is it heard in the unscriptural ranting of popular charismatics who openly despise the right application and proper preaching of the Law and Gospel, setting it aside as though it were somehow outdated and no longer applicable to people in this day and age.

These instead teach a worldly philosophy that God desires that everyone lives the life of the rich and influential – *and that they indeed can* – if they will but follow a few simple church rules, such as tithing.

The Kingdom's quiet call is not heard in the work-righteousness teachings of the Catholic Church. Nor is it promoted anywhere else it is stifled by those, who instead of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, would inject human reasoning into the interpretation of God's Word, thereby causing offense and actually working *against* the growth of faith within the hearts of simple Christians.

In the Day of the Lord all that – *even though adamantly* – claim they are Christians but have, in fact, done only the bidding of their father, the Devil – working *against* the believer and *against* the Kingdom of God – these our Lord shall deny ever knowing and they will be condemned to spend eternity suffering complete separation from God in just punishment.

Rather, the Gospel message is heard and the Kingdom of God grows quietly wherever and whenever it is preached in all its truth and purity, where sinners despairing of their own ability to gain heaven come by faith alone to rely upon the grace of God alone.

And the Kingdom grows even more as the Holy Spirit working through God's Word every day turns more and more hearts and minds of those who were once enemies of God (as once we all were) to God in love and humble appreciation of the Gospel, to serve God and neighbor.

Yes, dear Friends, the Gospel is a very simple, quiet message.

Yet, as the Scriptures tell us in Romans 1:16,

*“... it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.”*

Unfortunately, there are relatively few that hearing the Gospel believe it and way too many who, having once received it, have turned away from it.

In verse 24 through 27, we hear Jesus' responding to the question put to Him by a man concerning the number of those who would be saved. In essence, this man wanted to know how many people would be members of God's Kingdom. He believed that his own good works actually 'entitled' him to be saved.

But Jesus, knowing the condition of this man's heart, as well as the others with him, tells them, "*Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*"

Dear Ones, Jesus here is telling His hearers – *including us* – that the only way to enter into the Kingdom of God is through the narrow gate of faith. That is, the complete trust and reliance upon the innocent blood sacrifice of the Lamb of God alone for the full atonement of all our sins.

Sadly, there are many who when told of this One and Only way to heaven reject this narrow gate, imagining their own work righteousness as a way to gain heaven.

Dear Friends, we cannot squeeze through that narrow gate carrying a wide and cumbersome load of imagined self-righteousness and good works, expecting these will somehow gain us entry. These in fact are but stumbling blocks and delusion. We must leave these things behind us on the trash heap of worldly philosophy, human reasoning and idolatry where they belong.

Nor does merely an outward show of a 'connection' with Christ and His Word – such as 'membership' in a church body or even the act of weekly going to church and appearing to listen to the Word while one's heart and mind are actually on other things – these do not make anyone a member of God's Kingdom.

No, membership in God's kingdom is nothing more and nothing less than a gracious free gift of God offered to the whole world in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Being a member of God's Kingdom – being a 'Christian' – means leaving behind *as sin* all thoughts of self merit and work righteousness and instead *by faith alone* believing in and clinging to Jesus Christ as the world's only Savior from sin, death and the power of the devil. It means arming yourself with the Word of God for **daily** combat with the Devil, the world and your own sinful flesh.

It means daily drowning your Old Adam in contrition and repentance of sin, denying one's self and every day taking up your cross once more and following Jesus wherever He may lead, all the while knowing that by the Grace of God in Christ alone your destination is everlasting life with Him in heaven.

So, let us with the hymn writer declare:

*"Therefore I murmur not, Heav'n is my home;  
What-e'er my earthly lot, Heav'n is my home;  
And I shall surely stand There at my Lord's right hand.  
Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home."*

#660 v: 4 (TLH)

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen