

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 28, 2009

The Expansive Growth of the Kingdom

by Dan Trygg

“And He said, ‘How shall we picture the Kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?’ ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, ³² yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.’ ³³ With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.”

Mark 4:30-34

“He spoke another parable to them, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.’”

Matthew 13:33

Jesus employed two more parables to describe the expansive growth of the Kingdom of God. Let's talk for a moment again concerning what the term, “Kingdom of God”, means. **The English word, “kingdom”, is a compound of two words, “king” and “dominion”.** Thus, the English word, “kingdom”, refers to the “king's dominion”. **It refers to the places, people and relationships where God is respected and obeyed.** The word, “dominion”, means to be in charge, and that your will is dominant, i.e., it is highly valued, honored and obeyed *above all others*. The “king's dominion” is wherever the king is respected and obeyed without question or resistance. **Those who honor the King in this way want to carry out His wishes.** They live to serve Him, and to do His will. Carrying out His wishes and counsel, and furthering His interests, come before everything else.

Jesus introduces this parable with a question. Now, He had been speaking to them for some time, using other parables. **This question is a rhetorical device to draw their attention** to once again give heed to what He was saying. **“How will we liken,” or, “In what way will we illustrate,” the Kingdom of God?** This manner of expression makes very clear that what Jesus is about to say is only a word picture meant to *draw a comparison* with some aspect or aspects of the Reign or Rule of God, ...the places, people and relationships where He is honored as King, and His will is carried out. **“By what parable might we present it?”** It is clear that Jesus is trying to draw their interest, and engage their minds, concerning what He is about to say. **He has something to teach them about the Kingdom of God which is different than what they already know, or expect.**

This might be a good time to ask, **“What did the average Jew of Jesus' day think that the Kingdom of God was?”** Most were thinking of their past history, the story of how God took them for His own people to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5,6). The OT is full of allusions to God as their King. When Israel wanted to have a human king, to be “like all the nations” (I Sam. 8:4,5), God saw their request as a *rejection of His rulership*. He went along with their wishes, however, appointing Saul as “prince over My people Israel” (I Sam. 9:15,16). The understanding was that He was still in charge, and the people and their king were accountable to Him. **The existence and continuity of the kingship through the line of David, down to the exile into Babylon, was seen as the continuation of God's kingdom in this world,** at least to some of the believing Jews. **In reality, however, it was a poor substitute for the real Reign and Rule of God.** Ultimately, because of idolatry, disobedience and injustice, God drove Israel out of the land, and the line of kings came to an end. Although a remnant of the people returned to the land of Canaan, there were never again any human kings established in power in the land. There were OT prophecies of a future Messiah, who would once again reign over the nation (e.g., Isa. 9:6,7; 11:1-5; Jer. 23:5-8). **The common hope and expectation of believing Jews of Jesus' time was that God would once again raise up a Davidic prince to become king over Israel, and, indeed, over the other nations, as well.** They were looking for an *earthly* king, and a *temporal* kingdom.

The Kingdom of God that Jesus came to preach and demonstrate was not primarily a political, earthly kingdom. As He later would tell Pilate, “My Kingdom is not *out from this world*. ...My Kingdom is not *from here*” (Jn. 18:36). It should be obvious to anyone who would examine Jesus' teachings, methodology and activities that He was not actively recruiting or training a military force, ...nor was He focusing His efforts on developing political alliances to gain political power. **Make no mistake, however. The Kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming would have profound and far-reaching effects on humanity at every level.** It is not recorded that Jesus owned even a plot of ground, and neither He nor His disciples indicate an interest in purchasing or wresting control of any real estate. Nevertheless, **it is clear that He expected to have followers from every nation** (Matt. 28:18-20), and He told those who were willing to give up all to follow Him that “there is *no one* who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake (i.e., the good news of the Kingdom of God), ³⁰ but that he will receive a hundred times as much *now* in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children

and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). From this, **it is clear that He expected the Kingdom of God to include houses, properties and people, ...in large numbers and at the present time!** How is this possible? How it is possible that *no one* who gave up anything for Jesus would fail to receive at least a hundred times as much of whatever it was he or she gave up, as well as receiving new family members, *in this life*, unless we understand that Jesus is looking at things very differently than His words might appear to be saying on the surface. (People take these verses out of context and misconstrue them to claim some get-rich scheme. Look at the context, people! Jesus just *turned away* the rich young ruler, because he wasn’t willing and able to give up all he had. Furthermore, it is quite clear that the apostles did not at all find their pursuit of Jesus to lead to wealth, honor or property [1 Cor. 4:9-13], ...and they were the ones who preserved this teaching of Jesus! They grasped Jesus’ understanding of the Kingdom of God, ...that it wasn’t *of* this world, though it is operational *in* this world. They even spoke out *against* those who taught that following Jesus was a means of gaining worldly riches – 1 Tim. 6:3-10.)

Let’s take a closer look at the parables of expansive Kingdom growth to see if there are further clues to be found there. **Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like mustard seed, which although it is smaller than other seeds grows to become larger than all the other garden herbs**, even becoming like a tree reaching a height of fourteen feet, or more. **It makes large branches, so that the birds of the sky can nest under its shade.** Matthew’s account says that the birds nest “in its branches”. **The obvious lesson is that though the Kingdom of God starts from a very small beginning, it will grow to become very large and expansive. It will come to be a place where refuge, safety and rest can be found.** There is more, however. The people listening to Jesus would have recognized a reference to a familiar word picture in the scriptures. The picture of a great tree that grew with expansive branches that birds and animals came to for shelter was used several times in the OT (Ezk. 17:22,23; 31:1-14; Dan. 4:10-27). It refers to a kingdom that grows, prospers, spreads out, and becomes a place of refuge, safety and provision. The birds of the air and the beasts of the field finding refuge under the branches of the tree are a picture of the fact that **the Kingdom of God will provide blessing and provision to many as a side-benefit of its growth.** That certainly has been the case throughout church history. Prison reform, slavery abolition, women’s suffrage, care for the poor, hospitals and healthcare, political and human rights, and other humanitarian and social services are just some of the blessings that have come about to offer care, nurture and protection to many as a result of the expanding Kingdom of God. **Avenues of service like these not only are by-products of faith, they are also strategic opportunities for evangelism.**

Another parable that Jesus told immediately after the mustard seed illustration is found in Matthew and Luke’s gospels (Matt. 13:31-33; Lk. 13:18-21). The illustration, or point of comparison, that Jesus wants to bring out has to do with the hidden, expansive growth of the Kingdom of God. **Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like yeast, or leaven, which a woman hid in three measures of wheat dough, until it spread through the entire amount, leavening it all.** The point of the parable is that the leaven works its way through the dough almost imperceptively. It makes no noise, and requires no special attention. It does not even need to be stirred, yet it will still eventually work through the entire lump of dough. **In a similar way, the Kingdom of God will start out as a very small influence in a very large, hostile world, yet it will eventually work its way into every nook and cranny, every people group and country, every language and culture, until the entire planet has been touched by its influence.** It will spread, not by a violent show of force, but by a steady, quiet, unobtrusive influence. While that may seem to be tame enough, **the word for “leaven” is from a verb meaning “to boil, or seethe”.** *For the leavening influence to continue, the yeast must be actively working, boiling, seething.* When the leaven loses its vibrancy, it goes flat and no longer is powerful to effect change in the surrounding dough. This same verb is used twice in the NT for *people* who were “fervent” or “boiling, seething” in the Spirit (Acts 18:25; Rom. 12:11). **When we are fervent and passionate for Christ, devoting ourselves to prayer, actively expressing His love through acts of compassion and serving others through good deeds, people will see who Jesus is through us, and they will be open to hear the message.** People can’t help but see the zeal and joy when we are excited about Jesus. That often will pique their curiosity, and open their hearts.

The previous parables dealt with the issue of fruitfulness. The parable of the soils, the seed in the field, and the tares were all about getting a good harvest from some seed. Regarding the Kingdom of God, they were about the receptiveness of peoples’ hearts, the power of the word in people’s lives, and the danger of counterfeits among the people of God. **These two parables are different from those previous ones. These are about the expansive, pervasive growth of the Kingdom of God in this world.** It would not come by force of arms, or by a political Messiah, as people expected. Yet, from the smallest beginnings, the Kingdom of God would grow in number, expanse, influence and power, until it covers the earth. **The influence of God’s Rule and Reign will bring healing, freedom, kindness, hope, care, justice and blessing in every conceivable human environment. We are part of that process.** Truly, hades’ gates have *not* been able to stop the expanse of the Ekklesia of God. Let’s be diligent to equip ourselves for the tasks ahead, and realize that our role in this grand enterprise will touch the lives of many we do not even know.