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Sermon: November 17, 2013
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“SEED AND YEAST”

Luke 13:18-21

Jesus of Nazareth is in his third year of ministry, and we are starting to wonder: is this it? Is this all there is?

○ {Mt 4:17; 6:10; 10:17; 6:33} He grabbed our attention with the message, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.**” Early on he taught his disciples to pray, “**Thy kingdom come.**” Later he sent them out in teams to proclaim, “**The kingdom of heaven has come near.**” He is constantly talking about the kingdom.

? *But where is the kingdom of God?*

Jesus has wonder-working power. He has healed thousands and cast out dozens of demons. The scuttlebutt is that he raised a girl and a young man from the dead.

I have seen the lame walk and the lepers cleansed. I ate my fill when he fed a vast crowd with nothing more than five loaves and two fish. It was like being there when Moses gave our ancestors the bread of heaven!

Except, Moses fed them every day for forty years – and Jesus has only fed me that one time. More to the point, Moses wielded God’s power to *liberate* us; but Jesus has not inflicted a single boil on one solitary Roman soldier, much less sent the Angel of Death for their firstborn – he has *not* begun to use God’s power to liberate us.

Yes, Jesus has enormous influence.

○ {Mk 10:29} He has an uncanny ability to bring people together and inspire sacrifice. Apart from him some of his disciples wouldn’t be caught dead together; now they are a tightly-knit brotherhood – and they “**have left everything to follow him.... home... [siblings]... [parents]...children**” and businesses.

The public flocks to him in droves. It is not unusual to see hundreds trailing behind him on the road. When he stops to teach thousands press in, hanging on his every word.

Jesus is capable of uniting all true Israelites into an irresistible force to sweep away sin and injustice and our enemies from the land.

Instead he squanders his charisma on sinners, alienates the Pharisees, and throws away strategic opportunities. When he fed the five thousand we were this close to making Jesus our king; but he got in a boat and sailed away! If he keeps wasting his influence, it won’t be long before he has none left.

☑ {Snodgrass, 225} Jesus of Nazareth has power and influence. But he is in his third year of ministry, and we are starting to wonder: Isn’t “**the kingdom supposed to be a mighty display of God’s defeat of evil and the removal of nations afflicting Israel?**”

? *How can we reconcile Messiah’s thrilling declaration that “**the kingdom of [God is] near**” with the terrible headlines and our tiresome run-ins with the kingdom of this world?*

☐ Please turn to Luke 13:18-21. The Lord Jesus tells two parables for the benefit of those who are

struggling with doubt or disappointment regarding his kingdom.

■ Verses 18-19 record the Parable of the Mustard Seed: **“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 perched in its branches.”**

¶ {Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32} In their parallel accounts Matthew and Mark emphasize the contrast between the miniscule mustard seed and the towering mustard plant: **“Though it is the smallest of all seeds,” “the smallest of all seeds on earth, yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches” “that the birds come and perch in it.”**

☑ {Snodgrass, 220} **“Those who measure such things report that the mustard seed is one millimeter in diameter”** and weighs so little **“that it takes [between] 725 [and] 760 seeds to [add up to] one gram,”** and one gram is only 1/28th of an ounce.

☑ {Snodgrass, 220} From that tiny seed the most common variety in Israel grows up to ten or twelve feet tall, with sizeable leaves. **“Birds... [are] attracted to it... both [for] its shade and its seed.”**

☑ {Snodgrass, 225} The point of the analogy is **“that no one should be put off by”** the kingdom’s unimpressive appearance, for **“Like the tiny mustard seed which grows to a large plant, so the kingdom is present, even if hidden, unnoticed, or ignored, and its full revelation ...will come.”**

Someone will say, ‘That was two thousand years ago. One would think the kingdom would be visible by now. Hasn’t that seed grown yet?’

Yes, it has. While we still wait for the kingdom’s **“full revelation”** at Christ’s Second Coming, its roots are growing deeper and its branches wider by the day.

○ {Lk 6:44} Yet it is still **“hidden, unnoticed, or ignored”** – in large part because it is not manifested in the pageantry, fireworks, and obliteration of enemies which so many desire.

But Messiah says, **“Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.”** In general, one’s words and actions reflect the fiber of his or her being. Likewise, the character and appearance of God’s growing kingdom are consistent with its “seed.”

And what was that seed? The ministry of Jesus!

○ {Php 2:6-7} He is **“in very nature God,”** yet he **“did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.”** Self-denial, self-emptying, and servanthood for God’s purposes, are the seed, substance, and sign of God’s kingdom on earth.

○ {Php 2:8} Having become **“a human being, he humbled himself”** further **“by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!”** Humility, courage, and self-sacrifice for others (including one’s enemies), are the seed, substance, and sign of God’s kingdom on earth.

○ {Php 2:9-10} **“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.”** Worship, verbal witness, Christ-like speech, Christ-like deeds, and Christ-like relationships that glorify Jesus are the seed, substance, and sign of God’s kingdom on earth.

We are still immersed in the kingdom of this world. It is rife with self-indulgence, self-service, self-promotion, pride, cowardice, self-protection, idolatry, and speech, deeds, and relationships that are ungodly.

○ {Php 1:6; Rev 11:15} But take heart! God’s kingdom is growing in, among, and through his people. **“He who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ,”** when it will be proclaimed that **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever”!**

■ Now, the Parable of the Leaven in verses 20-21: **“What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”**

Of course the woman mixes in the yeast; but Jesus does not use a verb for “mix”. He says *ενγκρυπτω* [engkruptō]. Listen closely: *ενγκρυπτω* – *encryption* – *cryptic*. Each word is derived from the Greek *κρυπτος* [kruptos] which means “*hidden*.”

The bread-maker blends in the yeast so thoroughly that it is hidden. The yeast never becomes flour or water

but by the time the woman is finished we cannot say, ‘Here’s the flour, here’s the water, and there is the yeast.’

○ {Lk 17:20-21} In the same way God’s kingdom is present, but it hides in plain sight. A little later in Luke the Lord will reveal to his disciples that **“The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”** Where Christ’s Followers are, there is the kingdom.

☑ Notice, too, how potent the yeast is. Jesus does not report how much the woman uses. He does tell us that she hides it in three *σατα* [sata] of flour, which makes enough bread to feed 100 to 150 people. It does not take very much yeast to leaven even that huge quantity.

○ {Mt 5:14; A. Frank} Likewise, the citizens of God’s kingdom are always in the minority – yet our impact far exceeds our numbers. We are **“the light of the world”** – and **“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”** Margaret Mead hit the nail on the head when she observed, **“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”**

Many people are disappointed with the work of Jesus. From beginning to end his ministry appears insignificant and even futile, as does ours.

○ {1 Co 1:27-28} But take heart! **“God [has chosen] the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... the weak things of the world to shame the strong... the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are.”**

☑ {Snodgrass, 235} **“A hidden power, hardly discernible to some, is already and irresistibly working. The kingdom” “has its beginning” “in Jesus’ ministry” “and it is” continually “at work” even now, even among us, “even if in a hidden or unanticipated way.” “It will not be stopped.”**

Only the blind or willfully ignorant can deny the reality of yeast in bread dough. Equally, only those whose spiritual eyes are shut can deny the presence and effect of God’s kingdom.

“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 perched in its branches.... What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

This is the word of the Lord.