

## A Kingdom Concealed

June 9th, 2013

Luke 13:10-21

*"<sup>18</sup>He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? <sup>19</sup>It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." <sup>20</sup>And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? <sup>21</sup>It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.'"*

One thing I've learned over the years is that if you have a few hours with a complete stranger, and if you listen well and ask good questions, it's not hard for you to figure out what that person loves and values and treasures. If you spend a few hours with anyone and are humble enough to keep your mouth quiet, you'll learn what's dear to a person's heart, because as Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Now if we were to do this with Jesus, what would we find? If you were there two thousand years ago, and you had a chance to get a few hours with Jesus, what would you hear Him talking about? What would you walk away saying, "This is the thing that Jesus seems to really be passionate about"? One key answer is, the Kingdom of God.

*"<sup>15</sup>The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"*

*"<sup>4</sup>I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.'"*

*"<sup>2</sup>Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*

*"<sup>1</sup>Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God."*

*"<sup>2</sup>and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."*

*"<sup>2</sup>When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come."*

*"<sup>20</sup>But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."*

*"<sup>31</sup>Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. <sup>32</sup>"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

The Kingdom of God is a huge theme in the ministry of Jesus, and we'll see that subject come up again in today's text, **Luke 13:10-21**.

There's a connection in these verses between the miraculous healing of this woman, and the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God ("Therefore," v.18). We'll try to probe what that connection is later, but for now, let's explore this text by considering the character of the Kingdom (illustrated by the healing), and the concealment of the Kingdom (illustrated by the two parables after the healing).

## **The Character of the Kingdom**

There's nothing explicit in Luke's report of this healing about the Kingdom of God, but we know that the miracles of Jesus were a demonstration of the future power of the Kingdom breaking into the present. We know that from the exchange He had back in chapter 7 with some servants of John the Baptist. Remember, John asked if Jesus was the One who was to come, or if they should be expecting another. And Jesus told them, "<sup>22</sup>Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them." Yes, the miracles show that the King has come!

So with that context, and the "therefore" in verse 18, I think it's evident that we have here a demonstration of the Kingdom's power, a taste of its future glory. So what do we learn from this miracle about the character of the Kingdom? Let's note three characteristics:

### **1. Healing and Renewal**

That's pretty obvious in the text, but glorious! "<sup>11</sup>And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself." You have to try to put

yourself into this woman's shoes to feel her plight. Eighteen years of chronic, debilitating, visibly unattractive, pain. What's that like? It's horrible, that's what it's like. People stare. People think you've committed some terrible sin. Kids laugh and make jokes. You can't look anyone in the eye. People don't know how to make conversation. You can't have normal sexual relations with your husband. You feel like you're an embarrassment to everyone you're with.

But Jesus has His eye on her: "<sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability."<sup>13</sup> And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight..." She asked for nothing. She promised nothing. She had not cornered Jesus. She had not forced His hand. He could have finished his lesson and gone home and no one would have even thought about this woman. But He stopped. He called her. He took the initiative and displayed in this woman the healing power of the Kingdom.

This is a picture of what Jesus will do for all of us at His second coming, when the Kingdom is brought to completion: "<sup>21</sup>[He] will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

Jesus' miracles were not a suspension of the natural order of things, but the restoration of the natural order. God did not originally create the world to have disease, hunger and death in it. With this act of healing, Jesus is declaring that He has come to redeem the world where it's gone wrong, and to heal the world where it is broken. It's a gracious promise that the world we all want is coming.

## **2. Justice/The Great Reversal**

It would be great if the account of the miracle ended right there, but there's another figure in the story, which reveals another characteristic of God's coming Kingdom. One of the big themes in Luke is that in the arrival and ministry of Jesus, a great reversal is taking place in the

world: the poor, destitute, broken, outcast are being lifted up, while the proud, haughty, self-sufficient are being brought low:

*"<sup>52</sup>he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty."*

*"Blessed are you who are poor, the hungry, you who weep...Woe to you who are rich, full, you who laugh..."*

*"<sup>11</sup>For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Jesus has healed a broken, poor, miserable, disabled woman. Now He will humble the proud, self-righteous, ruler of the synagogue: "<sup>14</sup>But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.'" What hard-heartedness! What callous indifference to the well-being of others! Luke is showing that despite all the warnings in chapters 11-12 about hypocrisy and outward religion, the Jewish leaders are still not repenting. Their hearts are only growing harder and more hateful of Jesus. And when Jesus is done exposing His hypocrisy, he and all who side with him are put to shame (v.17).

It doesn't often seem like righteousness prevails in our day. The "good guys" seem to finish last, and the evil and the unrighteous prosper. But here we see "a good guy" (a daughter of Abraham, ie, a woman of faith) healed, and a bad guy (note, this "bad guy" is law-abiding, not law-rejecting) humbled. It's a little preview of the great reversal coming, when the Kingdom is consummated and all is set right.

### **3. The glory of God seen and celebrated**

*"<sup>13</sup>And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God."*

*"<sup>17</sup>As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him."*

This is the deepest treasure and joy of the Kingdom of God. It's not about you! Oh, there is amazing blessing coming your way, but it's all to the praise of the glory of God, and His grace. When Jesus delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after subjecting all things to Himself, then God will be all in all. When Isaiah speaks of the glorious, cosmic renewal that will take place under the Kingship of Jesus, he wraps it up with, "<sup>9</sup>The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

That's an amazing statement, because the sea is water, so how can the waters cover the sea?! But I think that's the point: just as water and sea are the same thing, so the day is coming that the earth will be so saturated with God's glory that there would be no way to distinguish what's happening on the earth from God's glory; they would be one. That is God's plan for the ages, to unite all things -- in heaven and on earth -- in Jesus (Eph.1:10). And this is good news for us, because you were created to admire greatness.

## **The Concealment of the Kingdom**

So we have in this synagogue a little snapshot, a little foretaste, of this Kingdom that Jesus has come to bring.

*"<sup>18</sup>He said **therefore**, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? <sup>19</sup>It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." <sup>20</sup>And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? <sup>21</sup>It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.""*

Now what is the "therefore" doing there? There are a few possibilities, but I think it's that Jesus knew that the Jews of His day were looking for more of this type of stuff. They were expecting that when the King

brought the Kingdom, it was going to mean the final vindication of Israel, the overthrow of all their enemies, peace, justice, healing and prosperity. But Jesus knew there was a great mystery of the Kingdom, and He wanted to spare His people from misguided expectations about when and how the Kingdom was coming (cf. 9:18-22).

He knew what His disciples didn't: that there would be a dual manifestation of God's Kingdom. His first appearing was in obscurity and humility and weakness, to suffer and die on the cross for the vindication of God's righteousness and the redemption of His people. Only through the King's "defeat" on the cross could rebels to the Kingdom like you and me be brought into the glory and joy of what was coming. Then, after rising and ascending and giving His people the Spirit to herald the good news of the Kingdom and salvation through faith in Jesus, He would return in power and great glory, to establish His sovereign rule forever in the consummated splendor of the New Heavens and New Earth. The Kingdom was *already* present in Jesus' ministry, but it was *not yet* completed.

So with the people in the synagogue celebrating the woman's healing, praising God and likely anticipating a more complete, global display of the Kingdom, Jesus *therefore* warned them that the Kingdom was not coming as they were anticipating. The two parables teach the same basic lesson: from a small and seemingly insignificant beginning, the Kingdom of God grows -- at times invisibly and almost imperceptibly - - until it reaches the ends of the earth with its transforming power. The parables are contrasting the Kingdom's modest beginning and its glorious final state (ESV Study Bible note).

### **Comfort in the Concealment**

2,000 years later, we still need this same gracious reminder. God is not building His Kingdom right now in a grandiose, powerful, unmistakable way. It's hidden, small, seemingly insignificant. No one

is falling before you at the grocery store exclaiming, "Wow, a co-heir, co-ruler of the universe!" There's groaning, and weakness, and pain, and exhaustion. But don't let the small beginnings cause you to doubt the massively great and wonderful ending that is coming one day, when Jesus breaks through the heavens, and finally and forever destroys all His enemies, delivers His people and all of creation from evil, joins heaven and earth together and establishes His eternal rule.

As painful as the wait is, the groaning now is really a gift, because it presses us to resist the temptation to hope in the shallow, hollow, fleeting comforts of this world. It teaches us to rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead, and makes all things new. In the words of Russell Moore, the groaning of this age shows:

*My life's meaning isn't found in the brief interval from birth to grave—in a happy marriage, a satisfying job, or the kind of "success" my in-laws would recognize at the Thanksgiving table. Instead, I can give thanks to God for a life, a universe, and a flow of history that are, in the long run, Christ-shaped. I long for the arrival of the kingdom that has long bubbled around us, invisible as yeast. And I yearn for the moment when, an heir to the throne of the cosmos, I join with my brothers and sisters—and our Galilean pioneer—to sing out, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for yesterday we were dead."*

You can have confidence that day is coming, because that Galilean Pioneer, Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, has paid the penalty for your sins, dying in shame and weakness on the cross, yet was raised in glory and power as the firstfruits of a coming resurrection that will not heal not only you, but the whole world.

If you have not submitted to Jesus as King, do so today! And if your heart is heavy with groaning as you wait, we'd love to especially pray for you today.