

PARABLES: THE SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM | The Kingdom Changes Everything

Joe Coffey • 6/4/2017

We have a theme for this year, and our theme is *Thy Kingdom Come*. We've taken it from the Lord's prayer, where he taught his disciples to pray, taught us to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I've been telling you that Jesus is saying to you that you have a Father, and your Father has a will and your Father has a kingdom. Pray that his will be done, that his kingdom comes right here to this place at this moment.

I told you at the beginning of the year that we are going to be giving you Kingdom Assignments from time to time to try to kind of help you see the kingdom of God, to participate in the kingdom of God. Next week is going to be a Kingdom Assignment. Do not miss next week. If you're going to be on vacation, tune in. It will be a weekend that will not be soon forgotten. I can't tell you anything more, but I'm pumped.

We also gave you a Kingdom Assignment called the Local Outreach Ministry Spree. We took that from the Metro Parks Hiking Spree, where if you hike enough trails around here you get a walking stick. So we passed out these kind of cards that just have the Local Outreach Spree on it, and then inside it is a list of our local ministries that we support around town. We asked you just to go and visit, to encourage them. It's like outposts of the kingdom and they're doing stuff. So a lot of you have been going and I'm going to have them start scrolling some pictures of some community groups that have gone to these local ministries. But I want you to know my community group just this last week we went down to South Street Ministries, and we went to the Front Porch Café and met with Duane Crabbs and Joe Tucker and listened to them. I know all about South Street Ministries. I've been friends with Duane Crabbs for a while and all of that, but I just was not prepared to be so emotionally touched by the stories that he told and by our connection to them. You know, we started the Micah 6:8 kind of thing because I told you I'd been traveling around the world and I meet these amazing people just doing incredible things for Jesus, and I always thought if I could bring you with me, it would touch you. So instead of that, we started bringing them here and saying this is what you have a chance to participate in. But we have those people right around here. Duane Crabbs is a saint. Joe Tucker is a saint. They are full of wisdom, and we sat there with them. My eyes filled up with tears a couple of times, and I was so grateful to be able to be a part.

I want to thank you for doing Micah 6:8s, for giving all year long so that we can afford to give away whole weekends of offerings to encourage these ministries. But I also want to encourage you to go out and see some of these ministries. It will be an encouragement to them. But even more, it will be an encouragement to you. I'll give you an easy one coming up this Tuesday. We are hosting a dinner right here at the Hudson Campus in East Hall for True North, which is a ministry to incarcerated youth. If you bring this card it gets you in free. Free dinner. So for those of you who are cheap, go. And for those of you who are not cheap, still go. It will be a great, great thing. It'll be here Tuesday night. At every campus, too, there's a ministry spree table so you can just see what's going on and participate.

We are in a four-week series. We've been looking at four stories that Jesus tells about the kingdom of God in Matthew 13. Actually, three of the stories will be from Matthew 13. Next week because of the Kingdom Assignment, it's going to be taken from Matthew 25. But they're called parables because they're like analogies. Jesus will start a sentence off by saying, "The kingdom of God is like," and then he tells a story. I want to start out by telling

you that nowhere does Jesus say, “The kingdom of God” - or Christianity for that matter - “is like a set of beliefs that you can pick and choose from.” I think a lot of people treat Christianity like that. They like take a grocery bag and they pick up something from Christianity, and they’ll say, “Oh I like the way Jesus teaches about love, so I’ll take that.” Then they’ll pick up something else and go, “Oh yeah, I don’t like what he says about sexuality, so I’ll leave that. Oh, I love forgiveness, need me some of that. But I don’t like what he teaches about money, so I’ll just leave that.” And you walk away with the stuff that you like about Christianity and you think that you’re a Christian, but you’re not. That’s not the way Jesus describes it.

Whenever Jesus says something about the kingdom of God, he describes it as having power. In fact, First Corinthians says that the kingdom of God comes not in word but in power. It’s not a power that goes from the outside in, like a normal kingdom of this world. He always talks about it as a power that goes from the inside out, which is very strange if you think about it. Because the kingdom of God sounds like a place. It sounds like the kingdom of Great Britain or the United States of America.

If you were going to make an analogy about the United States of America and you were going to start a sentence by saying, “The United States of America is like...” what would you say? Well you’d probably end up describing a place. You’d say it’s like a melting pot, or it’s like a land of opportunity, or it’s like a big place of different freedoms in conflict, or however you describe it. But if you describe the United States of America, you’d never describe it as something that comes inside of you and changes everything about you. But that’s the way Jesus describes the kingdom of God, so you can never treat Christianity like it’s a bunch of beliefs that you can pick and choose from. It’s not like that.

This is what it’s like. This is Matthew 13:31-33.

³¹He (Jesus) put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³²It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

This is God’s Word.

Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is like a seed that’s tiny and then it grows. The kingdom of God is like leaven, like yeast that you put in a lump of dough and it expands into all the dough. Jesus says the kingdom of God grows because inside the kingdom of God is life, and in that life is power – almost incomprehensible power.

I’ve used this analogy before, because ever since I read it it’s stuck in my mind. But I read one time that inside of a single acorn is enough power to cover the entire earth with wood. The way that the author explained that and the way that that works is that inside of an acorn is an oak tree. An oak tree when it reaches maturity has hundreds of acorns, and inside every one of those acorns is another oak tree. And inside every one of those oak trees when they reach maturity are hundreds and hundreds of acorns. And inside of all those acorns are oak trees. And so it goes inside of a single acorn is the power to cover the entire globe with wood, because inside of an acorn is life, and life is the most powerful thing we know.

That’s why I want you to know that the kingdom of God is not like a place that you go to in order to get forgiveness, like the Land of Oz. Forgiveness is great. I love the fact that Jesus offers us forgiveness. I need forgiveness every day and to go to him and know that he went to the cross and he paid for all of my sin past, present and future – and I go to him and I confess my sin and the shame and the guilt is scraped off of me is awesome! But that’s not all that Jesus came to do. Jesus came to change us.

Forgiveness is to us what detox is to an addict. Detox is great. It's great to get clean. But an addict needs more than detox. An addict needs the power to change. These two analogies are about that power to change. So let me read it again because it's so short and then I'll get to my three points. It says,

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The three points that I want to make about power are: 1) the nature of the power, 2) the power for the one big change, and 3) the power for a million smaller changes.

First, the nature of the power. If you were going to make an analogy about power, what would you use? Would you use a cannon, an army, a collision on a football field, an MMA fighter? There are all kinds of analogies you could use. Jesus, to use an analogy for power, chooses a mustard seed. You know I love props. I love them. But a mustard seed is so small that if I had one you wouldn't be able to see it. So pretend I have one. You can't see it because it's so small. That's a mustard seed. Yeast is even worse. Yeast is like dust. You can just blow it off your hand. And Jesus says that inside of those is this power. It's because the seed grows and it grows into a tree, and the yeast moves and it moves into the whole lump of dough. But it's a particular kind of growth. It's not like Jack and the Beanstalk growth. He doesn't use magic beans. He uses something that they know that takes time to happen. It's almost imperceptible, but it is enormous.

It's like waiting for spring here in Northeast Ohio. You know, you wait for spring. If you're like me, I was driving to work in March and I was looking at the trees and I was going, *Are you kidding me?* They looked like sticks. You know, there was not a leaf to be seen anywhere. I'm driving March 20th and 21st and 22nd and 23rd and 24th, and it's always the same – no change, no leaves, no leaves, no leaves. Then there's tiny little buds that you can barely see, and then it seems like it happens overnight, leaves just explode into existence. Hundreds of leaves. Thousands of leaves. Literally millions of leaves here in Northeast Ohio.

That's what Jesus says. I want to get an image into your head, and I have this image of a plant growing up through asphalt. You could lay a firecracker on asphalt, blow it up, it wouldn't do a thing. But a little seed grows up and will split a slab of asphalt or concrete no matter how thick it is, because inside that little seed is life. A slab of concrete is no match for the power inside of that seed, and it grows and is imperceptible in its growth but is enormous in its power. That's the nature of the power.

Number two is the power for the one big change. In John 3 Jesus is talking to a man named Nicodemus, who is a religious leader. Nicodemus had gone with a grocery bag and picked up all the cans. He believed all the right stuff, and he carried them around with him with this huge carrier of all the beliefs. He believed all the right things, but he hadn't changed. So the life wasn't in him. So Jesus comes to him, and this is what Jesus says in John 3:3.

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

By the way, there aren't two types of Christians. There aren't like normal Christians and born-again Christians. Every once in a while somebody will come up to me and be talking to me and they'll go, "Oh, are you one of those born-again Christians?" And I want to go, "Well, there's only one kind, but yes, I am." The reason there's only one kind is because Jesus says unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.

This is why – let me try to explain it like this. There are different levels of life, like a plant is alive and has a certain kind of life. Then there's a dog. A dog is alive, but it has a different kind of life than a plant. A dog is involved in its environment in a different way than a plant. A dog can experience things that a plant can't. It's a different level of life. It's a higher level of life. A human being has a different kind of life than a dog or a plant. All three are alive, but a human being exists in a certain way. If you take a human being and you give a human being the life and the existence of a dog, it is tragic because you know that a human being was intended to experience life differently than a dog or a plant. Does that make sense?

Back to what Jesus says in John 3. He looks at Nicodemus and he says, "Nicodemus, you're alive, but there's part of you that's not really alive. You're not experiencing the world. You're not experiencing life the way you were made to experience life. There's a part of you that's dead. And until that comes alive, you'll never really experience life the way you were intended to experience it."

On June 17, 2015, a young man named Dylann Roof walked into a church in Charleston, South Carolina. Dylann was white. Emmanuel Christian Church was an historically black church. He sat in the back for over an hour during their prayer meeting. Then he pulled out a gun and he opened fire, and he killed nine people including the pastor of the church. As a nation, when the nation heard the story, we waited for Charleston to explode in flames like Ferguson, Missouri had ten months earlier. Instead, what the nation watched was in two days 20,000 people joining hands and singing together and saying that love is stronger than hate. When reporters tried to figure out what happened, they ended up finding out that the victims' families had come out one by one and said, "Jesus forgave us, so we forgive Dylann," and they marveled. Newspaper people couldn't even figure out exactly how to describe it. They described it as extraordinary. They couldn't even find the words to describe what had happened. And what had happened was the people of Charleston, those families of the victims, had a resource of power living at a level that human beings hardly ever live at. What they were saying is we have life that Jesus gave us. He brought a part of us alive that wasn't alive before. We call it being born again.

That's the one big change. It's all over the Bible, but let me describe it. Let's look at Ephesians 2 and how it's described in the first five verses.

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

By grace you have been saved.

I met with a young man a couple years ago. He was very bright. He was very likeable. He was pleasant, and he had given up his faith. As we talked, he was what I call a happy atheist. I mean that in a particular way. He wasn't an angry atheist. He wasn't a despondent atheist. He was at peace with the world that was just a physical world. I remember after spending about an hour with him, I was thinking, *Man, I'm sitting with somebody who's saying that he's okay with a world that's in black and white and he's*

missing all the color and all the beauty. Because what he was saying is if there was only a physical world, then my friend could never experience anything transcendent. He would never be able to stand at the shore of an ocean after a storm and watch the waves and be caught up in worship. He could never look out on a starry night when the stars seem so close you can reach out and touch them – and cry out, “The heavens declare your handiwork. Day after day, night after night they pour forth speech.”

I was in Canada one time, and I remember picking up a newspaper and reading an editorial by a self-proclaimed atheist. The title was “Thank Your Lucky Stars”. What he was encouraging people to do was to spend time thinking about the stars and thanking them, because he was saying there’s something in your heart that longs to thank. What he was saying was something inside of you longs for the transcendent. It was like a blind man longing to see. So he was encouraging people to thank their lucky stars.

I look on Facebook and I see some terrible tragedy, and I read comments and some of the comments are, “I have a good thought for you.” I’m going, *Is that the best we can do? Really, that’s it? You’re just going to say I have a good thought for you?*

What Jesus says is there’s more to life than that. That’s what he’s telling Nicodemus. There’s a whole new level of life in that Jesus can bring something to life inside of you that’s dead, and until that comes alive, you will be looking for life in all these places.

There’s a place in Jeremiah where God says, “You have committed two sins. You have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, to dig for yourselves cisterns” - cisterns are like pits to hold water – “to dig for yourself cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” I look around at our world and I see all the stuff that’s going on and all the different things that are happening with gender dysphoria and with sexuality and with everything, and I just think people keep digging cisterns – broken cisterns. They’re looking for transcendence. They’re looking for the God who loves them with a love they long to experience. They long to be alive, and Jesus is the one who offers the power for the one big change to bring you to life.

The last one is the power for a million smaller changes. Jesus uses two analogies here, and I like them both – the mustard seed and the leaven, or the yeast – because they’re similar but they’re different. They’re similar in the way that they grow. They have life in them and they grow and expand. But they’re different in that a mustard seed grows into a tree. The reason I wanted to get this image in your head of that seed breaking through the slab is that some of the changes that God needs to make in your life, or can make in your life, is that when something happens in your life that feels like a slab of concrete has fallen on you. I hear about those things all the time, whether it’s broken families or family members or suicide or death of a loved one or sickness or whatever it is. Some of you feel like you’re squished under that slab of concrete now. Why I want you to get that image in your head is because the life that is within you – or that no matter how thick that slab of concrete, no matter how thick the problem and the feeling of despair is – it is no match for the life that is within you. Don’t ever forget that. That’s just true. But the other image is that image of yeast, or leaven, working its way through the whole lump of dough.

My wife has fallen in love with Snapfish, so she is always making these books. She is making one for her dad, my father-in-law, now. My father-in-law didn’t come into a relationship with Jesus until he was almost forty years old. So in looking through the old photos we were reminded of what his life was like before Jesus and now what it’s like some forty years later. When he first came to know Jesus, there were some immediate changes – how he spent weekends, how much alcohol he drank, how many times he lost his temper and what that looked like. But now forty years later, you couldn’t list all the

changes that have happened in his life, because the life that Jesus began in him has worked its way through the entire lump of dough that is Dick Heasley, my father-in-law. Now if you took him and you introduced him to a friend of his who knew him only in his thirties and knew him really well but had lost touch with him, that person would scarcely recognize the man he has become, because everything's different. He's different in the way that he thinks. He's different in the way that he cares for his wife and his children and his grandchildren. He's different in the way that he spends money. He's different in the way that he deals with disappointment. He's different in the way that he deals with criticism. He's different in what he loves and what he hates. There isn't an aspect of his life that is not different. It's almost like spring in Northeast Ohio. It's a slow growth, imperceptible at times, but over time it is absolutely explosive. And I've watched it explode for the last thirty-five years as I've watched my father-in-law live his life.

This is what I want you to know, Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It has the power to grow up through concrete. The kingdom of God is like yeast that works its way through the whole dough. The kingdom of God has the power – Jesus has the power to make the one big change in you, to make something that is dead inside of you come alive - your very spirit - so you can begin to live the life that God intended you to have. And then it has the power for the million smaller changes to make you into the person that you've always longed to be. Thy kingdom come. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we come to you and we're grateful - grateful for the power that you put into our hearts, into our lives. I pray that every person here would know that power and the power to bring the first big change of actually coming alive in you and then the power for million smaller changes that need to take place to make us into what you created us to be. Thank you. Thanks for your grace. Thanks for your power at work in us. We pray this in your name. Amen.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments: ESV. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007. Print.