

“HOW THE KINGDOM COMES”

I. Introduction

- A. In the glorious opening section of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the apostle describes the purpose that God has set forth in Christ as “a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph. 1:10)
1. This verse tells us that the scope of redemption is as broad as the universe, and that all things will be brought into conformity with God’s grand plan.
 2. God is going to unite all things in his Son, not in the sense that everyone will be brought together in the one way of salvation in Christ, but in the sense that everyone and everything will be brought together in submission to Christ.
 3. Now, as great as this truth is, it does not match up with what we see in present reality.
 4. We do not see unity when we look at the world.
 5. We do not see unity when we look at our nation.
 6. We do not even see unity when we look at the church.
 7. So how are we to reconcile the teaching of God’s Word with the way things appear in our world?
- B. Different groups have differing ways of answering this question.
1. Roman Catholics claim that the instrument that God is using to unite all things in Christ is the office of the Pope, together with Rome’s purportedly infallible magisterium.

2. Others argue that we should be striving for some sort of revived Christendom that would in one way or another remove the distinction between the religious and civil spheres.
3. Others contend that if we just communicate the Christian message in a manner that resonates with what people are looking for, then more and more people will enter into the kingdom.
4. And others say that we should define the Christian religion so broadly that it becomes inclusive of just about everybody.
5. The problem with all of these perspectives is that they fail to reckon with what Jesus has to say in this text about how his kingdom comes.
6. As we study this passage today, we will see that it teaches us three things about the coming of God's kingdom.
7. First, the kingdom has small beginnings.
8. Second, the kingdom's growth is slow and steady and mysterious.
9. And third, the kingdom is moving towards a comprehensive culmination.

II. Small Beginnings

- A. Luke's use of the term "therefore" at the very beginning of this passage should not be overlooked.
 1. As it is often said in biblical studies, whenever you come across a "therefore", you should ask what it is 'there for.'
 2. In this case, the "therefore" tells us that there is a connection between the two parables contained in our text and the healing that was described in the previous paragraph.
 3. That paragraph related how Jesus healed a woman who had been afflicted for eighteen years by a spirit that prevented her from being

able to straighten out her body.

4. Jesus performed that healing at his own initiative on a Sabbath day.
 5. He did this in order to demonstrate that his coming into the world marked the inauguration of the glorious end-time kingdom that the Sabbath symbolized.
 6. Having done that, Jesus now employs these parables to further instruct the people on what the kingdom of God is like.
- B. These two parables convey the same basic points.
1. The first of these points is that, while God's kingdom is cosmic in scope, it has very small beginnings.
 2. This is illustrated by the mustard seed.
 3. In Palestine, the plant that grows out of the mustard seed can reach upwards of ten feet tall, with branches large enough for birds to build nests in them, but the seed itself is extremely small.
 4. Likewise, yeast works throughout a batch of dough and causes it to expand considerably, but the grains of yeast themselves are tiny.
 5. If we didn't know any better, we would be surprised that such little things can develop into something so substantial.
 6. This is a picture of how the kingdom of God advances in this world.
 7. Its beginnings are humble, outwardly unimpressive, and seemingly insignificant.
- C. We can see this in a variety of ways.
1. We might consider the first promise of redemption, which was itself a tiny seed out of which everything else grew.

2. We find that promise in Genesis 3:15, where God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
 3. There are a lot of things that God left unsaid at that point, but the salvation that he was going to secure for his people was encapsulated in that small seed-promise.
- D. We can also see the principle of small beginnings when we look at the outworking of redemption throughout the Old Testament period.
1. Israel had its beginnings in the barren wombs of Sarah and Rebekah.
 2. Before Israel was brought into the Promised Land, they were slaves in Egypt.
 3. Even at the height of its power, Israel was just one little nation on a tiny strip of land on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.
 4. And over time, Israel's unfaithfulness resulted in the nation being whittled down in size, having its temple destroyed, and being carried off into exile.
- E. We see the principle of small beginnings in the manner in which Christ came into the world.
1. He was born to an unmarried virgin, with an animal feeding trough for his crib.
 2. He was raised in an ordinary family and trained in his father's trade as a carpenter.
 3. And when he ascended back to heaven, he left his church in the hands of ordinary men, many of whom were mere fishermen.
- F. We see the principle of small beginnings when we study church history.

1. The first few centuries of church history witnessed the rise of various heresies that distorted central aspects of Christian doctrine and divided the church.
 2. Those early centuries were also were marked by waves of severe persecution.
 3. And when the persecution finally ended, all sorts of other problems began to arise, and the church continues to face many problems to this day.
- G. Lastly, the principle of small beginnings is true of our lives as individual Christians.
1. Even the most sanctified Christian is nothing compared to what he or she will be in the age to come.
 2. In the words of the apostle John, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2 ESV)
 3. All of these things should remind us that we must never despise the day of small things.
 4. Our God loves to use small and insignificant things to accomplish his plan.
 5. This is how he reminds us that the surpassing power belongs to him, and not to us.

III. Slow, Steady, and Mysterious Growth

- A. The second point that we can learn from these parables is that the kingdom of God comes through slow, steady, and mysterious growth.
1. Have you ever decided to spend a day watching a tree grow?

2. Have you ever stood over a bowl of dough for an afternoon to see it rising?
 3. If you have, I'm sure you had a really exciting time.
 4. While we know that trees grow and that yeast causes dough to rise, these things happen so slowly and so gradually that we cannot actually see them transpiring.
 5. This is how it is with the kingdom of God.
 6. The kingdom is always moving forward and always expanding, but it does so in a manner that is largely inconspicuous.
- B. This is not at all what first-century Jews had in mind when they thought about the arrival of God's kingdom.
1. They expected the kingdom to arrive quickly and with great outward glory.
 2. They thought that the grand prophecies of new creation in the Old Testament were going to be fulfilled through an immediate ushering in of a new era.
 3. That is not what happened.
 4. Instead, the Messiah was betrayed into the hands of the Romans and was crucified by them.
 5. And while Christ's resurrection certainly was glorious, it was followed by his ascension back into heaven, which left his church in a not-so-glorious condition, at least in the eyes of the world.
 6. Of course, the kingdom has been advancing to the ends of the earth ever since the Spirit was poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost.
 7. However, this advancement has taken place in a fairly ordinary manner over the course of a considerable amount of time, not in a

manner that is spectacular or instantaneous.

- C. There are still many people today who think along the same lines as those first-century Jews.
1. They think that the kingdom of God advances through big things.
 2. They put their hopes in large-scale revivals, in culturally relevant methods, in broad movements that unite various groups of Christians together.
 3. And while those things may produce some fruit for a time, they inevitably deteriorate into something else, or they just fade away entirely.
 4. We see a similar focus on immediacy in the way many believers approach the Christian life.
 5. They expect their growth and sanctification to be radical and instantaneous and effortless.
 6. That way of thinking finds no support in the parables that Jesus sets forth in this passage.
 7. Instead, these parables teach us that kingdom growth takes place gradually and organically.
 8. While its growth is produced supernaturally, the Spirit of God typically works through the faithful and patient use of the outward and ordinary means that God has appointed.
 9. The kingdom will come.
 10. Its coming is as certain as the seed growing up into a tree, as certain as the yeast causing the dough to rise.
 11. But the kingdom comes in a mysterious and generally hidden manner, not in an obvious or outwardly impressive manner.

IV. A Comprehensive Culmination

- A. The last point that these parables teach us about the coming of God's kingdom is that it is moving towards a comprehensive culmination.
1. In the first parable, the tiny mustard seed grows into a large plant that provides a place of shelter and habitation for the birds of the air.
 2. This is a picture of how the kingdom of God is the permanent homeland of all the redeemed, and of how it is a kingdom that can never be shaken.
 3. In the second parable, the minuscule grains of yeast spread throughout all the flour until the whole batch is leavened.
 4. This is a picture of how God's kingdom will one day encompass all of creation.
 5. As the angel in the book of Revelation announces at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rev. 11:15)
 6. Notice that this announcement is decisive and final.
 7. It is not at all gradual.
 8. This tells us that the day of kingdom culmination will be different than the era of kingdom expansion.
 9. While the kingdom grows gradually throughout this age, its culmination will arrive decisively on the day of our Lord's return.
- B. Another aspect of the comprehensiveness of God's kingdom can be seen in the yeast metaphor.

1. Once the yeast has done its work, the dough has been completely transformed and fit for a new purpose.
2. This is a picture of what God is doing in the lives of those whom he brings into his kingdom.
3. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a transforming power at work in the life of a believer.
4. All throughout your Christian life, the gospel leaven is working its way through you and is gradually conforming you to the likeness of your Savior.
5. And while this leavening process will never be completed in this life, it will one day be accomplished.
6. When you leave this world and enter into glory, you will be made like your glorious Lord.

V. Conclusion

- A. The kingdom of God is already present in this world.
- B. The mustard seed has been planted; the yeast is working its way through the dough.
- C. But the advance of the kingdom is not often manifested in striking or conspicuous ways.
- D. Instead, it is typically manifested in enigmatic and everyday ways.
- E. So instead of looking for the kingdom in big things, have patient faith that our Lord is able to carry out his great and glorious kingdom-building project through small and unlikely things.
- F. As we sing,

*Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,*

*By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.*