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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *What Christ's Kingdom Looks Like Now*

*February 24, 2019*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 13:31-33

**Scripture Reading:** Revelation 21

In Jesus' earthly days, the temple at Jerusalem was assumed to be a sure sign of the Lord's favor and presence with the Jews. Do you recall how the disciples marveled about its magnificence?

Luk 21:5-6 And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, (6) "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

It was the same type of thing even way back in Jeremiah's day-

Jer 7:4 Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'

We see then that the Jews, with a very few exceptions, had a very wrong-headed idea of what the kingdom of God looked like. They wanted big – big buildings, big territory, big *earthly* glory. In reality, that temple was soon to come down and the true Temple of the Lord was right there present among them in the person of Christ.

Nothing has changed today. Fleshly people who think they belong to the Lord, but do not, are building big, flashy, impressive kingdoms. Buildings. Big crowds. Big money. Big names. But none of this is the Kingdom of God as I will show you from our Lord's parables here.

The news of late has been filled with news of the “megas.” Corruption and evil in the Southern Baptist Convention. Scandal and corruption in one of the largest “churches” in the Chicago area (google Harvest Bible Chapel and James MacDonald for that one). The same mentality like an evil leaven has spread throughout evangelicalism it would appear. Is this the kingdom of God? Are these entities the body of Christ? No, they are not.

Follow as I read:

Mat 13:31-33 He 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. (32) It 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." (33) He 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."

As we must always remember, if we are going to interpret Jesus' words properly, *we need to see them in light of any quotation of or reference to the Old Testament.* This language of a large tree growing and the birds of the air nesting in its branches drives us back to Ezekiel (you will probably find

the reference in your Bible's cross reference notes) –

Eze 17:22-24 Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. (23) On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. (24) And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."

Huge trees are often used in Scripture as symbols of kingdoms. Here is another example:

Dan 4:19-22 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies! (20) The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end

of the whole earth, (21) whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived-- (22) it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.

Of course Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian kingdom came to an end. The Kingdom of God however is without end.

Now, let's consider the elements of these two parables:

1. Grain of mustard seed (smallest seed of the day)
2. A man sows the seed
3. Grows into a large tree
4. Birds come and build their nests in its branches

And then:

1. Leaven
2. Woman takes the leaven and "hides" it in flour
3. Eventually all the flour has leaven mixed in with it

Alright, let's think through this carefully. In both cases *the end result* is that the Kingdom of heaven becomes worldwide, vast, and

ultimately visible. In its mature form it includes the nations of the world and is a blessing to all.

But do not miss this fact:

*In both parables, Jesus emphasizes the smallness and the invisibility of the kingdom. The seed is sown and germinates. The leaven is unseen, hidden in the flour initially.*

The secret nature of God's kingdom is a consistent theme in Scripture:

Mat 13:44 "**The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field**, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Luk 8:10 he said, "To you it has been given to know **the secrets of the kingdom of God**, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

Luk 17:20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "**The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,**

Luk 23:50-51 Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man,

(51) who had not consented to their decision and action; and **he was looking for the kingdom of God.**

Rom 14:17 For **the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking** but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

What we see in these verses and in many others is this: *the present secret, hidden nature of the kingdom of God.* In this present world, in this age, the kingdom of God is not open, visible, physical, in a specific locale. Here it is again:

Joh 4:19-24 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." (21) Jesus said to her, "**Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.** (22) You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. (23) But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. (24) **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.**"

We are warned frequently by God's Word *not to believe claims of a visible, earthly entity to be the kingdom of God.* Listen to it again:

Luk 17:20-21 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, (21) nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Mat 24:23-27 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. (24) For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (25) See, I have told you beforehand. (26) So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. (27) For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Where is the kingdom of God? It is "among us" Jesus said. It is this:

Act 2:32-36 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. (33) Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy

Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (34) For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, (35) until I make your enemies your footstool." (36) Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

One day, the Kingdom of God will be visible. It will have a heavens and earth and a visible people and we will be able to see it and touch it. That is the day when the mustard seed comes to full growth and the nations of the world become the nations of the Lord. That is the day when the hidden leaven will not be hidden anymore.

Rev 21:1-3 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

But in the mean while....the kingdom is hidden. You see its effects. You see the hearts of sinners changed. You see

the fruit of the Spirit in the true people of the kingdom. But you cannot see the King, you cannot see the kingdom land, you cannot get in your car or on an airplane and travel to this kingdom.

*The kingdom of God is present wherever the Spirit of God resides and reigns in power. We cannot see the kingdom itself in this age, we can only see its effects. What are those effects? They are the power of Christ's Spirit giving sinners new hearts, putting the old man to death and raising up new creations in Christ. They are the fruit of the Spirit evidenced in the lives of these new creation people. They are the qualities created in us that Jesus describes in the Matthew 5 "beatitudes" –*

- **Poor in spirit**
- **Those who mourn**
- **Meekness**
- **Hunger and thirst for righteousness**

It is just as Jesus told Nicodemus:

Joh 3:7-8 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (8) The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Consider, can you see the Temple that

is right now in this present age, the Temple of God? Here is its description. Listen and ask – *is this something that we can see right now?*

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Now, let's think very carefully and compare these truths of Scripture with the typical mindset of the average professing Christian and local church. Here is an observation that I believe is correct and which it is vital for us to get a firm grasp on:

***Most Christians think of their local church as the kingdom of God. That is to say, they believe that through evangelism and missions and the planting of local churches, the words of Christ in these parables are being fulfilled. And therefore they believe and operate upon the premise that as these visible, local churches grow in numerical quantity and build bigger and more buildings, the mustard seed becomes the tree and the nations nest***

*in it.*

***This is entirely wrong and creates disastrous results – the kind of which we are seeing in our day.***

The kingdom of God in this age is not visible. It is secret and it is hidden, only visible to those to whom Christ gives eyes to “see” it. But what we see is not a building like the temple in Jerusalem. What we see, we see by faith:

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Remember? That is why Christ said He spoke in parables. It is why He said this to Nicodemus:

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Many, many local churches today talk all the time about being “kingdom” churches. Their ministries they claim are “kingdom oriented.” But pause here and think. When you look at them in action, what are their efforts focused upon?

- Raising more money
- Building bigger buildings

- Evangelizing in such a way that the results will be visible and measurable
- Designing programs with “excellence” of method and materials so that the world will be impressed

What then is the result? A Tower of Babel. A work of the flesh devoid of the Spirit of Christ. And *sin. Lots and lots of sin.* A place where God’s righteousness is not hungered and thirsted for.

*The kingdom of God is invisible. It is secret. It is hidden.* And yet fleshly thinking leads us to believe that we can measure it. Number it. Touch it. But....

Heb 12:18-24 **For you have not come to what may be touched,** a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest (19) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. (20) For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." (21) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." (22) **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,** and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the

firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

*This is incredibly important for every Christian to understand, but it is perhaps especially so for us.* Here we are. Decades of ministry. What do we see? The same building – we haven’t put up any new ones. About 30 people when we gather. Provision from the Lord, but no big savings account. No litany of activities and committees so that the place is busy as a beehive. That is to say:

*By the measures used by most Christians and denominations and seminaries, we are a failure. We need to do things differently they would tell us. Your statistics don’t spell success. Why, you haven’t even baptized anyone in how long?*

See it? Such people see the kingdom of God *as an earthly kingdom.* They are fleshly. Their leaders teach them falsely. So that they think *they* are capable of growing the kingdom, in spite of all the talk they do about how “the Lord has done this.”

Listen to Louis Berkhof:

“The spiritual nature of the kingdom is brought out in several ways. Negatively, it is clearly indicated that the kingdom is not an external and natural kingdom of the Jews....Positively, we are taught that it can only be entered by regeneration...that it is like seed cast into the earth...like a mustards see...and like a leaven. It is in the hearts of people...It is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...and is not of this world but a kingdom of the truth.” [Systematic Theology]

Understand? We do not build the kingdom of God by:

- Adding people to the church membership rolls
- Performing baptisms
- Pouring increasing amounts of money into various endeavors
- Raising up leaders who are famous celebrities and thus have large followings

The only thing *in and of themselves* that these things do is build counterfeit kingdoms that the devil just loves to use for furtherance of his kingdom. And if you want prime examples, just keep following the exposure of the evils in the Southern Baptist Convention of which, by the way, James MacDonald and his huge

Harvest church is a member. Or for that matter you can go to the web pages of most local churches and if you read with discernment you will see that what is described is an earthly kingdom.

***It is vital that we have a biblical understanding of the nature of the kingdom of God, because it is that understanding that is inevitably going to dictate our methods, our view of the church, our understanding of who a real Christian is, and just about every other doctrine of the Christian religion. Right thinking about the kingdom of God will strengthen our faith.***

If we look down the road someplace and see a local church with a huge building, busy as a beehive, hundreds of people coming, and we equate that with the kingdom of God – that is, the object which we are trying to build – then we are going to go horribly, horribly wrong as so many today have.

Finally, *you are here in this church, in this building. You are in a place that can be touched and heard and seen. But this is not the kingdom of God. The real question we must always put to ourselves is, am I in the real Kingdom of Christ? Have I been placed as a living stone into the real Temple of the Lord? Does His Spirit dwell in me?*