

# §171. Kingdom Parables: Growth and Transformation

*Luke 13:18–21*

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**Luke 13:18–21.** Then He said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” 20 And again He said, “To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

## Introduction

1. Context: Crippled woman was healed; the Jewish leadership rejected Jesus; but the multitudes rejoiced. Lord, wants to assure them that the kingdom will come, albeit its characteristics contrary to their expectations.
2. Purpose: His kingdom, though looks very small and faces severe challenges, will grow into a universal movement.

## Exposition

### **18. Then He said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?”**

1. **Kingdom of God:** God is establishing his kingdom. It has a physical dimension like that of any other kingdom. The shadow of that we see when David and Solomon ruled Israel. The full physical manifestation of is going to come only in the millennium. It also has a spiritual dimension. Kingdom of God a group of people who accept Jesus as God and king of their life. Jews were looking for the physical fulfillment of God’s kingdom. But they refused to believe that Jesus is the king of the kingdom they were longing for.

2. **To what shall I compare it?** The question implies the difficulty in explaining the spiritual reality through any physical means. Hence, the Lord spoke several parables; each teaching some aspects of the spiritual nature of this kingdom. Nevertheless, we should not forget the promise Jesus gave concerning this matter. **John 14:26.** **But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.** Lord is able to teach even an uneducated with the truths of his kingdom.

**19. It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”**

1. **Note:** Some give a negative interpretation that the birds of the air refers to the false teaches coming to the church. The context of this parable, here as well as in Mathew 13, gives a strong positive flavor to this parable.
2. **Mustard seed:** Smallest of all the garden plants of those days. It shows the smallness of the seed contrasting the largeness of the tree later.
3. **Man:** Typically work in the field and responsible for outdoor activity.
4. **Grew:** There is life in the seed. It has the potential to grow. This is characteristics of the kingdom of God on the earth.
5. **Large tree:** Some species of the mustard plant grow up to about 10 meters. Though this may not be as big as cedar or pine or other trees in the forest, comparison should be made to the smallness of the seed.
6. **birds of the air nested in its branches:** Two old testament portions are helpful in understanding this. **Dan 4:12.** **Its leaves were lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it.** This refers to gentiles taking refuge in the Babylonian kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. **Ezek 17:23.** **On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be**

a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it". All these indicate that the kingdom the Lord is establishing will be a universal one and gentiles will be a part of it.

## **20. And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God?"**

1. **Again:** Above parable is not sufficient to portray the characteristics of his kingdom and hence Jesus spoke another parable.

## **21. It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.'**

1. **Note:** Just like the previous parable, some give a wrong interpretation that the leaven refers to the false teaching that will permeate the church. The context of this parable here as well as in Mathew 13 shows that this parable also has positive message.
2. **Leaven:** Though leaven us used negatively in some places, here is it positive. Such a usage is not unusual. For example, the word lion is used for both Satan as well as Jesus (**1 Pet 5:8. devil walks about like a roaring lion; Rev 5:5. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . .**).
3. **Woman:** Typically work inside home. As side point: the Lord observes and approves what a woman does inside home; though not seen by others. In fact he likened her work to that of his kingdom.
4. **hid:** The work of the gospel is hidden; not very obvious to the external world.
5. **three measures** is a very large quantity compared to the virtually insignificant quantity of yeast.
6. **All leavened:** Though the work of the yeast is hidden and slow, its effect is significant and evident. Similarly, the transforming work of the gospel is slow and hidden, but it has the power to transform a large quantity.

## Application

1. **Seed and Leaven:** They show the contrast between the Israel and the Church. Old testament principles and promises concerning Israel as a theocratic nation should not be applied to the New testament Church which is the body of Christ. E.g. Priest, Political power, etc.
2. **Mustard Seed:** The extensive growth of the church. Humble beginning but proud culmination. Church has the potential to grow and to be blessing the people. Is my church growing? If not, what can I do for it?
3. **Leaven:** The intensive transformation, though hidden, it will be evident and significant. Church has the power to transform the lives of the people and even to that of nations. Is the gospel transforming my and people around me?
4. **Man and Woman:** both has a role, though different. Lord, approves our secular work. In fact, that gives some insights to the working of his kingdom. How can I glorify the Lord through my profession?