

The Kingdom of God Described Following Rejection

Luke 13:18-35

Let's begin by reading the last five verses, verses 31-35: On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." 32 And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' 33 Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. 34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! 35 See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' "

Background Notes

In the first half of Luke 13 the Lord predicted that the nation of Israel would, like the fig tree in the parable, be cut down because of unbelief. The nation's spiritual condition was crippled because of hypocrisy, and this teaching was visibly portrayed in the crippled woman who needed to be healed. The Lord could have - and would have - healed His people Israel, if they, like the crippled woman, would have turned in faith to Him as Messiah and Savior.

The Lord Jesus wanted to gather the people together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing (v34). The self-righteous leaders of Israel continued to reject the true King and the Kingdom of God, and therefore their nation and their Temple would be left desolate. This happened in 70AD, when the Roman armies conquered Jerusalem and burned the Temple. This desolate spiritual condition and unbelief will continue all the way to the End Times, when many in the nation will finally turn to the Lord Jesus in faith and say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

The rejection of the King and His offer of the Kingdom would culminate in the execution of the King. The Lord knew this, and these verses tell us that as He went on to Jerusalem He knew that His crucifixion would shortly come to pass. *"Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem."* And no threat from cunning King Herod, or agenda by the Jews to keep Him from Jerusalem, would change our Lord's plans to continue His wonderful preaching, teaching and healing ministry, all the way to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 says, *"He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."*

As a result of Israel's rejection of their King and the Kingdom of God, the Lord used parables to reveal the form the Kingdom would take between His rejection and His return, and also how it would be when He did return and set up His earthly Kingdom.

Doctrinal Points

1. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed and like leaven in flour.

*Verses 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."*

In these short parables, the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, the main point is obvious – it's **growth**. But is the growth "good growth" or "bad growth"? It's both! To appreciate this point, we need to understand that the Kingdom of God is **not the same thing** as the Church! The true Church is composed of all true believers, who are called out of this world to be the Body and Bride of Christ. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, at the present time, is "Christendom." Christendom encompasses the entire world, wherever Christianity has spread. Christendom includes true believers and false profess-ers (people only profess to be believers). Christendom is the "wheat and tares" of Matthew 13, and the "wise and the foolish virgins" of Matthew 25. These conditions will continue until the return of the Lord.

In these two parables, the good growth is the mustard seed itself - the pristine purity of Christianity at the beginning. But as Christianity grew and spread, it did not remain pure. The "birds" of false cults and unorthodox religious sects have found nesting places in the many branches of the tree of Christendom. Remember the birds in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13)? They were agents of Satan that snatched away the good seed of the Word. They may have the same evil connotation in this parable as well.

In a similar way, the meal, or flour, was good before leaven was mixed into it. Leaven always seems to represent evil in the Bible. In the parable, the leaven probably represents false teaching that was mixed in with the good flour of truth in the early stages of Christianity. Just as leaven spreads throughout a batch of dough, false teaching continues to spread throughout Christendom to this day. So, at the present time, the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed and like leaven in flour.

2. The kingdom of God has an open door, but will have a closed door.

*Verses 22-30: And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. **23** Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, **24** "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. **25** When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut*

the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

As the Lord continued His journey to Jerusalem, He preached the truth about the Kingdom of God from village to village: *"And He went through the cities and villages teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem."* In verse 23 someone asked Him the question, *"Lord, are there few who are saved?"* The Lord did not directly answer the question, but He gave an answer that was better and more complete than the questioner expected, or could have hoped for. The Lord's answer in His description of the Kingdom of God is our second doctrinal point: *The Kingdom of God has an open door, but it will have a closed door.*

The open door is in the first part of verse 24: *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate."* The closed door is in the last part of the same verse: *"For many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able."* The Lord then described the door in terms of a banquet, in which the door is open until the head of the house gets up and shuts the door. *"For many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able"* when the master of the house has risen and closed that door.

When will that door be closed? It will be closed when the Lord returns and sets up His Kingdom on this earth. Then the long-awaited and long-postponed Kingdom of God, with Jesus literally reigning as King over this world, will have arrived. Then the entrance will be closed. Jewish believers, from Abraham on, will be part of this Messianic banquet, and Gentile believers from north, south, east, and west - all over the world - will be there. But all unbelievers will be excluded, including the self-righteous folk that the Lord was addressing, because they still refused to accept Him as their Messiah.

Once the door is shut, no amount of reasoning or change of heart or begging will help. Once the door is shut, it will be too late to enter. The destiny of the unbelievers will be a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is certainly a description of hell. In hell, some people will weep in sorrow forever, but some people will "gnash their teeth" in anger forever. When the door is shut, there will be a great reversal. Some people who are considered to be "last" now will then be first, and some who are considered to be "first" now will be last!

The good news is that the door is now still open. The Kingdom of God has an open door now, but it will have a closed door later.

Practical Application

Don't confuse "striving" with "doing good works"!

Verse 24: *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate."* Strive, or make every effort, to enter through the narrow gate. It almost sounds like the Lord was saying that you have to make every effort to do good works in order to be saved. But we know that's not what the Lord meant, because the rest of Scripture clearly states that salvation is by faith - not by doing good works. For example, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

What the Lord meant was that becoming a true disciple in the Kingdom of God is not automatic. No one drifts into the Kingdom of God. We must enter by a definite decision of the will. We must turn away from all other doors that the world has to offer, and enter through the "narrow door" of **Christ alone!**

Temptation, worldly attractions and satanic forces will keep many people from entering the narrow door, so entering really does become a matter of *striving*. In order to enter we must get past all the barriers and obstacles and snares that would keep us away from the narrow door of Christ. It's not a matter of good works, but it is a matter of striving. Don't confuse striving with doing good works.