

## The Question on the Kingdom (Luke 13:18-35)



Some people claim that the Christian faith is a fossilised religion about to go extinct. Others think Christianity will be replaced in the future by a universal religion for the mankind. But the Bible is still the bestseller of all times by far, and the followers of Jesus is growing in number all over the planet.

'What is the kingdom of God like?' Jesus asked, i.e. How can I help you to get a feel of what God's kingdom is like?

1. Jesus' first example is from the outdoors. The kingdom of God starts like a tiny little mustard seed, sown in the field. But locked within the seed is the tree which will grow very tall and large, that the birds would come and find resting place in it. The birds are the picture of the people from the nations. (C.f. Ezek 17:23; 31:6) When Jesus was sown into the ground as just one seed, there were eleven disciples He'd left behind carrying out His mission. Two thousand years later countless multitudes from the nations of the world are following Jesus.
2. Jesus' second example is from the indoors. In those days, each family baked fresh bread at home. Each day a little piece was taken from the dough fermented with the yeast before it was baked into bread. The little piece was mixed into the new dough and left overnight, and this would make the next day's batch of fresh bread. The kingdom of God like this yeast works its way through the whole dough overnight.

### A. The Growing Kingdom

1. Its origin is from outside of our world: Men throughout history have tried to create utopia, a perfect human society on earth where everybody loves and respects each another. But they all failed. Why? The kingdom of God is out of reach from this fallen world and the fallen mind of man. It cannot be simply created by man's good intentions. Then how did the kingdom of God enter this world? When Jesus the King came into our world, His kingdom with Him. Jesus at His first coming became the seed sown into the field, and the yeast mixed into the dough. Then all the power and the potency of the kingdom has been encapsulated in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that message was entrusted to the Church.
2. Its beginning is humble: When you sow a seed into the ground, nothing spectacular happens. Its growth is slow, imperceptible to the naked eye. No one stands over the buried seed to watch it grow. Not even over the bean sprouts - the fastest growing seeds of all. It is the same with the yeast. We put it in the dough, and we go to sleep. Nobody stays up to watch the yeast work its way through the dough. That's why the kingdom of God is hardly noticed when it is first planted.
3. Its growth is unstoppable: Have you seen the root of a tree splitting a huge boulder? It starts from a tiny seed, but its growth will split rocks and concrete cement. A living seed is more powerful than dead bricks, so it is with the kingdom of God. Nothing in this world can quench the force of life that is in the kingdom of God. As surely as the sun rises in the morning and the waves of the ocean crash into the shores, so the kingdom of God will break through all obstacles and all resistance to grow and advance.
4. Its advance is not sensational: The world is addicted to the spectacular and the melodramatic, so they worship the movie stars, rock stars, sport stars, gourmet stars, etc. The Church too tends to be star-struck with its men and women of the hour. So, a very few will notice of the growth of God's kingdom because it takes place by another Sunday service, visiting the sick, small prayer meetings, etc. We won't hear of the few people getting saved in a village church somewhere. Most people don't know that many hospitals, schools, universities, children's homes and countless charity organisations were started by God's people. The kingdom of God has been growing steadily for the last 2000 years, and it will continue to do so until Jesus returns.
5. Its destiny is glorious: What started out so small, will become a vast multitude which no one could number from all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne of God and worshipping Him. (c.f. Rev 7:9) *'Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom.'* (Is 9:7) This kingdom includes those who have finished their race on earth, and entered their home in heaven. They are more alive than ourselves in the immediate presence of God, awaiting their resurrection. They are forever part of this kingdom.

This kingdom's beginning is humble, its growth not sensational, but its final destiny is stunning in its glory and power. And His Kingdom will be forever.

## B. The Closing Gate

1. As Jesus moved through the cities and villages, teaching the kingdom of God, one of the disciples asked, *“Lord, are there few who are saved?”* (v22) I.e. how many will be saved and enter the kingdom? Just a few or many?  
  
Some people are overly interested the statistics - how many, how much, how big, etc. Sometimes these are curious minds without personal commitment. The people of Jesus’ days were no different. The rabbis held differing views on this widely discussed subject. But the consensus among them was that most Jews would be saved except for a few blatant sinners, while most gentiles will be condemned except a few godly ones (Sanhedrin 10:1). Jesus’ disciples were about to get the shock of their life!
2. *Jesus answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”* (v24) He was saying in effect, *‘Don’t ask how many, but you do everything you can to make sure that you are solidly in the kingdom of God, because many will not be able to enter.’*
  - a) *‘Strive’* (ἀγωνίζομαι) here conveys a ‘whole-hearted action to prepare for the Olympic Games.’ From this we get the word ‘agonise’. We need to be prepared to ‘agonise to get into the kingdom of God’. We must make it the top priority of our life, like an athlete trains for the Olympics. There will be many who will find themselves shut outside on that day, unable to get in. Why?
  - b) Because the gate into God’s kingdom is narrow, just wide enough for one person to pass through if he will strive to enter in. (1) Nobody can hold your hand to walk you through the gate, not even your mother or father, husband or wife. You must enter for yourself. (2) It is a narrow way. You need to leave all your sin and pride outside. It is not wide enough to bring in all kinds of baggage.
3. Jesus describes the two categories of people who will find themselves shut out, for two different reasons:
  - a) Time Limit: The master arose, and the door was shut from the inside. Some people assume there will always be time to get in, so they put it off till the next day until it is too late. And they don’t make it in time! When the door finally shuts, there will be no more opportunity to get in. God has marked this day in His calendar, and the time will come when there will be no more new people to coming into His kingdom. His house will be full. We need to be reminded that time is running out and the door will close once and for all.
  - b) Presumption: *‘Lord, Lord open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your Presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity. (v25-27)* The people who claim to ‘know’ Jesus, based on superficial knowledge, will be rejected by Him. They had no real relationship with Jesus. Does Jesus know you? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus?
5. One of the worst things about hell is that those in hell can see heaven from there, but they can never cross over. *‘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. They will come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.’* (v28-29).
  - a) Jesus referred to ‘Gehenna’ to illustrate hell, the valley in Jerusalem into which all the garbage from the city was thrown out. It was characterised by the smouldering fire, the smell of sulphur, and the maggots crawling around, breaking down the rotting waste material. The sunlight didn’t reach the bottom of this valley. But from the valley, one could look up and see the towering Jerusalem temple glistening in the sunlight. This is where Judas died.
  - b) Hell is a place where the truth is known too late. People in hell will weep and gnash their teeth because of the unspeakable regret that they can *never ever* turn back the clock or undo the choices they’ve made. While the door is yet open, there is your opportunity to enter. And it is your decision and yours alone.
  - c) Be aware of ‘universalism’ or the ‘inclusive gospel’ that says God will ultimately save all souls in hell or give them chance to repent. Jesus made it clear that one day the door to the kingdom of God will shut and forever! Often the proponents of universalism approve as *‘good and acceptable’* what God in His word condemns as *‘works of iniquity.’* It is because they don’t have the revelation of the horror of sin or the enormity of what it cost God to forgive us.

4. There will be two great surprises on that day:

- a) Surprise 1: Multitudes of gentiles from the east and west, north and south, from all over the world will sit down in the kingdom of God with the Jewish patriarchs while these Jews themselves will be 'cast out' (ἐκβάλλω).
- b) Surprise 2: A lot of important people won't be there - the rich, the famous, those adulated by the world, while some people whom nobody paid attention to in this world will be there. When the door finally closes, the true state of each soul will be revealed for all eternity. Many who are first now will become last, and many who are now last will become first. You and I must make sure that we are not the first that becomes last, but the last that becomes first by God's grace.

### C. The Unrepentant City

1. *Some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." (v31)*

- a) Jesus may have been near *Perea*, the region under Herod's jurisdiction where John the Baptist was executed. John agitated Herod with his message of repentance when he was alive, and there was a rumour that Jesus is 'John the Baptist back from the dead' with even greater power! These Pharisees may have been Herod's underlings, sent to scare Jesus off course because Jesus was steadily moving towards Jerusalem, the capital city where Herod had his palace headquarters.
- b) *Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected...It cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.'* (v32-33)

In another words, *I am coming to town near you, Herod, to finish my Father's work. And it is Jerusalem that will have the honour of shedding my blood, not you, Herod. God knows the day I will die. I will live long enough to do what God wants me to do. After that I'm heading home back to the Father.*

Jesus lived with the conviction that His times are in God's hand. That was Jesus' attitude to life and death. We too need to have this attitude. Herod is the only person Jesus calls 'that fox'. Later when Jesus stands before him in a trial, Jesus had nothing to say to Herod. It is a fearful thing to be so assessed by the Son of God.

2. Now Jesus looks down at Jerusalem, full of beautiful limestone buildings, and He weeps over the city. *'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!'* (v34)

- a) Herod, the Edomite and the illegitimate head of Israel, was in fact a 'fox' devouring the little chicks, the Jewish people. Jesus was the 'mother hen', willing to put Himself between them and the fox and protect them with His life, but they were not willing. Literally, *'but you willed not.'* There was a clash of will between Jesus and the people. The greatest power I have is that I can say "Yes" or "No" to the Lord Jesus. And Jesus will not violate my will. That's why there has to be a place like hell. How often Jesus is willing to gather the people into His arms of mercy, but they say, 'No. I don't need you. I'm good on my own.'
- b) Therefore Jerusalem, the city that God has chosen, 'the city of peace', will become a 'city of desolation'. When later Jesus was crucified, the thick 40ft long veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. In forty year the temple would be destroyed, and Jerusalem was laid waste for almost two thousand years. Ruin comes to those who reject the Lord. One day Jesus will return to the city on a white horse with the army of heaven as its rightful king, and Jerusalem will welcome Him, shouting '*Baruch Haba B'shem Adonai*' – 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'

3. No one cannot stop the kingdom of God. The only thing anyone can stop is only himself from entering the kingdom. Jesus still is weeping. He willingly gave His life on the cross so that He can gather us into His arms of mercy. The gate into the kingdom of God is still open. But one day this gate will shut, and time is short.

Jesus made it very clear, as did His apostles after Jesus. We must repent, turn away from our sins, and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, to enter the kingdom of God. Anyone who says otherwise is an imposter. Don't follow them. It will not lead to everlasting life. Your soul is too precious to be played with. Follow Jesus and His word. Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.