

Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Faith Like a Mustard Seed

—by Bronson Duke

Whenever you engage with a passage of Scripture, it is always good to check the surrounding text for clues as to what the writer is trying to say. Here in Luke 13:18-19 we find a very familiar passage to many:

Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.”

Now, if you look at the rest of Luke 13, you’ll notice something in verse 10: Jesus is back teaching in the Jewish synagogue for the first time since He began His journey to Jerusalem in Luke 9:51. In fact, this is actually the last time we will see Him in the synagogue. So, why did He come back?

I think Luke is trying to bring to mind Christ’s ministry in Galilee, specifically in Nazareth in Luke 4:16-20, which Marc Turnage taught on a few weeks ago. We all know that any mission needs a mission statement, and that is precisely what we find in Luke 4. Jesus is letting His followers know what His ministry and mission will look like. Here is what He says:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the Poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.”

This is what Jesus tells the people to expect to see Him doing: bringing Good News to the poor, proclaiming freedom to the captives, bringing sight to the blind, and setting the oppressed free.

You may remember from the Old Testament that the people of Israel insisted on having a human king like the other kingdoms around them. The sad part about that is the fact that they had God Himself as their King. They had Yahweh, Creator of the heavens and the earth, the One who breathed life into dirt and it became man. Yet they insisted on having a king that came from that same dirt to represent them. Here is what Jesus is saying, “God Himself will be King again, and in fact it is already happening, and when God is King, this is what it will look like: People will be made whole.” And this is precisely what we see Him doing in Luke 13:10-13.

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then He put His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

How amazing! God is doing what He said He would do! However, the religious leaders were not excited; they were angry. There were six other days to do work! According to their interpretation of the Law, Jesus should not have been healing on the Sabbath. They knew the letter of the Law, but not the spirit of the law (2 Cor. 3:6). God is for people. “The Sabbath exists for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) This brings us to our primary text for today, Luke 13:18-19:

He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

Any time there is a “therefore,” we’ve got to know what it is there for. He is connecting this back to His mission statement in Luke 4—the promise that God Himself has come to be King. In this passage Jesus is reaching back even further, all the way to Genesis and the Garden of Eden where God alone is King over the Garden. Jesus is painting a picture: God’s Kingdom of peace is coming. It is breaking in now, but it is gradual. It will start as a seed and grow steadily.

As Pastor Matt pointed out in today’s video, mustard bushes grow like crazy and are nearly impossible to contain. It is the same way with God’s Kingdom of Peace. In Jesus, He planted this seed in the ground and it is growing. It will grow to the point where even the birds of the air will

rest in its branches, like they did in the Garden. God is finally restoring His creation just as He promised. His full peace, His shalom, is breaking into our world. His great redemption plan that He set in motion from the moment of the Fall of Man has come in the form of the ministry of Jesus Christ. When God reigns, everything in all creation is restored and brought into peace and into its full purpose. This is the Gospel and the mission of Christ, and the best part is: It is now our mission as the people of God, His Church.

Discussion Questions

1. Just like the Israelites desired a human king rather than desiring God as their King, in what areas are you tempted to look to your leaders for confidence or affirmation, rather than trusting God?
2. Much like the Sabbath, boundaries are something we put in place to serve us and help us rest. Jesus healed on the Sabbath to create a “rest” (to use the image from Luke 13:19) of healing, peace and rest for the sick woman. What cues can we take from Him about loving people when it comes to our personal boundaries?
3. Read Luke 13:18-19 again and put it into your own words. What does it mean for the Kingdom of God to break into your everyday life?