

Luke 13:18-21 – What is Heaven like?

- 1) Today's lesson teaches us much about how the "kingdom of God" affects the world - It also describes how faith affects the soul of the person who has it (17:6)
- 2) "The Kingdom of God" is an important theme in Jesus' teachings, appearing 49 times, and an additional 31 times as "the Kingdom of Heaven"
 - a) God chose Israel to establish His kingdom on earth through Law and Justice (Deuteronomy 4:6, 1 Kings 8:22-23, Zechariah 8:23), but they failed to do so (see Isaiah 5, especially verse 7)
 - b) Jesus build a Church establish the kingdom through Mercy, Grace, and Faith (Matthew 5:13-16), but the Church will fail as well (see Matthew 5:13, Luke 18:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)
 - c) In the end, God Himself will establish His Kingdom, and welcome into it only those who already have the Kingdom within them (Revelation 21:22-27), in whom faith proves itself through obedience, and praise of God is matched by submission to His will in all things
 - d) The Kingdom of God operates on and requires faith, since it is an unseen kingdom (Romans 1:20, 2 Corinthians 4:18)
- 3) Jesus uses two images from everyday life – one that speaks the language of the farmer, the other in the language of the baker
- 4) The first image is the mustard seed
 - a) It begins small – "the smallest of your seeds" (Mark 4:31)
 - b) It has life within it but that life only grows when it is planted in a heart that proves "fertile soil" (Luke 8:5-8)
 - c) The lesson shows the effect a life of faith has on others
 - i) The seed is the Gospel
 - ii) The man who sows it is Jesus, through His personal ministry and through the testimony of His apostles and those who faithfully proclaim it (Matthew 16:18, John 17:20, Romans 10:14-15, Ephesians 2:20)
 - iii) The garden is the Church, the area of the world cultivated to receive the word and nourished to sustain it
 - iv) The seed becomes a bush
 - v) The bush provides shelter for "the birds of the air"
 - (1) This "shelter" refers to the grace the Church is meant to show to the world
 - (2) The implication is that the Kingdom of God will bless even those not of the kingdom
- 5) The second image is that of yeast and the effect it has on dough
 - a) The point of this image is the effect a life of faith has on the person who "has" it
 - b) The message is similar to another parable in which Jesus says that it only takes a little faith to do 'miracles' (Matthew 17:20)
 - c) The woman can be seen as the Church, which "works the lump of dough" in order to activate the faith of the believer so that he or she is more fully affected and changed by the faith it contains
 - d) The Church does this by way of its teaching, and also as it prepares its members for service (see Ephesians 2:20-22 and 4:11-16)
- 6) Both collectively as the Church, and individually as believers, we are the recipients of the "seed" of the Kingdom
 - a) First, God works on our hearts, breaking the soil (that is, breaking the hardness of our hearts to make us receptive to the Word
 - b) Then Jesus, Who is the Word of God, is received by faith and finds a home in us
 - c) Once the Word is received, the "gardener" tends the soil - the Church identifies the weeds that threaten to choke out the life of faith (see Matthew 13:22) and removes false ideas (see 2 Corinthians 10:5 and Titus 1:10-16)
 - d) By being called into community as the Church (the word "church" in Greek means the ones "called away from the world's way of thinking and living", while the sister word "synagogue" means "those gathered together in fellowship"), the "yeast" of faith within each of us is "worked into" our souls by our mutual love and concern for each other (see the insert with the many "one another" passages in the New Testament)
 - e) In this way, the Kingdom of Heaven that we represent has a positive impact on the society among whom it exists
- 7) The brevity of today's lesson fits well with its message – it's not size of our faith but its quality that matters – is what you believe the "truth once for all delivered to the saints"? (Jude 1:3)