

The Surety of God's Work

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[0 : 00] I want you to turn to Luke chapter 13. Luke chapter 13. I am glad today to know that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Amen. And if I fall out here today and be assured, I'll be in glory. And that'll be fine with me. Y'all got to clean up afterwards, but I'll be fine.

And I am thankful for that today. But I'll tell you what else he is. He's also a wonderful teacher. And with a personal relationship with Christ, the Holy Spirit is committed daily to teach us through the word of God, as well as through the illustrations of life, what it means to be in the Lord, how to look for the movement of God.

And when you look for the movement of God, you will, you'll find it. But I'll tell you, it will not always be as it seems. A lot of times, God's doing a whole lot more than what we think he's doing.

God has a tendency to work contrary to our expectations. He works contrary to our experiences.

And we can easily miss what God's up to because it's not how we expect it.

[1 : 23] In our passage today, the setting is that there's a lady who needs to be touched by the Lord. And it's on the Sabbath. And when he heals and exercises a demon from this lady, the church becomes upset with him.

The church leaders, they didn't like it because it's the Sabbath. And to heal somebody or to cleanse somebody is work. And Jesus responds by, in a very kind way, by saying, you hypocrites.

If your donkey needs water on the Sabbath, don't you untie him from his manger and take him to get him water. And yet this lady needed a touch of the Lord.

And I gave it to her. Just not what they expected. And in response to that, Jesus begins a teaching.

It's a teaching time. And he gives illustrations that explain how God works. And he speaks of the kingdom of God. Now, when he speaks of the kingdom of God, there were a lot of misunderstandings about it.

[2 : 30] There are a lot of misunderstandings about it. The tendency in that day were for them to look back and look at King David and see what King David did. That was the mightiest king that Israel ever had.

That Israel grew like it never had under King David. And it kind of fell apart after King David. And so they always looked back to King David. And when they thought of the Messiah and when they read those prophetic passages, they often thought maybe God will raise up another King David.

Maybe we can conquer the land again. So their thought was often King David. And when they met Jesus, is Jesus the one that's going to bring back the kingdom the way we knew it under David?

Others looked ahead. They looked at the circumstances of their day. They knew what the Roman Empire was doing to them. And they felt the pressures of that. And they looked to the day when God would intervene in a powerful way, defeat the evil of the kingdom of Rome, the world power at the time, and take over the world.

And so when Christ spoke of the kingdom of God, that's what they thought of. But that's not what Jesus was talking about. Jesus said in all of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, very early on, it's recorded that he said the kingdom of God is at hand.

[3 : 51] That don't mean it's coming. It means it's here. Jesus was saying don't miss the moment.

Now, thank God under his revelation, it continues to reveal itself and will continue as the kingdom of God will throughout the ages. But I don't want you to misunderstand today because we live in a wicked world.

God is ruling and reigning right now. We're not waiting on God to take control. He's already in control. He is ruling and reigning now. That means we don't have to wait on him to win.

Nor are we waiting on him to win. They were to watch Christ and watch God win. And we are to acknowledge that Christ has won.

The battle of sin and death was won on Calvary. It was done. And the last buzzer hasn't sounded yet, make no mistake. But the battle's over. The war's won.

[4 : 53] It kind of reminds me of the Battle of New Orleans. And on January the 8th, 1815, after many skirmishes and smaller territorial battles, the Americans profoundly defeated the British in the Battle of New Orleans.

It was the last chapter in the War of 1812, or so it seemed. And what a chapter it was. The British suffered 2,000 casualties. The Americans suffered 71. It seemed to be the tell-all.

And what those soldiers did not know on that battlefield was the war was already over. The Treaty of Ghent had been signed on Christmas Eve two weeks before the ending of the war.

Ending the war. But yet, word had not got back. And they were still fighting. Due to a lack of communication in those days, cell phone batteries were dead.

The message didn't get out. And hundreds died fighting a battle. They didn't have to fight because the war was over.

[5 : 57] Make no mistake today, friend. God has won the war through Christ on Calvary. The rule and the reign of God will culminate in his return.

But we better not miss the opportunity or the power or the relevance of the kingdom of God right now. Jesus spends a lot of time talking about the kingdom when he uses his parables.

And he spoke to clarifying that the kingdom has come and to help us understand exactly what that means. I want to look at three of them today.

Two of them are right there together in Luke chapter 13. First one's in verse 18. Jesus said this. He said, therefore, what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?

It's like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden and it grew and become a tree. And the birds of the air made nests in its branches. And again he said, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God?

[7 : 02] It's like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened. His message is that the kingdom of God is not what it appears.

There's more going on around us than we think. Let me explain. The first lesson he teaches us in this first parable is that God's work may seem small.

The whole point of bringing up a mustard seed was the mustard seed was the smallest known seed of that time in that culture. However, it grew to be a large bush about 10 or 12 feet high, so large that birds could nest in it.

Some have made a lot out of these birds that are mentioned. There's a story of a tree in Daniel chapter 4 where the birds are a negative force. And because those birds represent demonic activity or evil, then some believe they reveal an evil presence that nest in the kingdom or in God's work. And so because of that, they carry that over to this parable. And the parable of the sower as well where the birds steal the seeds of the gospel that fall on hard hearts.

[8 : 22] They parallel that together. And I really believe Jesus mentions birds here to just tell you how big the tree is. To tell you that it's just a very small seed that grows into something very large considering the seed.

But we often misjudge the power of something by its size. We think a little is just a little. And we misjudge that little is much when God is in it.

When God gets into things, he changes them exponentially. Did you know that if you go home today and put a penny in a jar and you double that amount tomorrow and you double what you put in the next day and you double what you put in the next day and then the next day and the next day and you double that in 28 days, you'll be a millionaire.

And you'll be responsible to tithe on that to your local church. Go home and try it, but don't come begging in about a week, okay?

Did you know that if everyone in this room would commit to win one person to the Lord this year in Pickens and next year we'd commit to do the same and everybody that had been one would do the same as well, that within five years all the city of Pickens would be saved.

[10 : 08] And that's assuming that nobody is saved in Pickens except us. God has a tendency to work.

If we're just willing to do a little bit, you know, Peter preached a sermon in Acts chapter 2 and 3,000 got saved that day. And just 10 years later, the persecution grew so strong that the Christians had to scatter and where they scattered, they took the gospel message with them.

And from that, the world was reached. The gospel message got out of that small region. And just like Jesus told us to do to start in Jerusalem and then Judea and Samaria and the uttermost, that's exactly what they did when persecution came.

They took the gospel with them as they scattered. They shared it where it was. And you know who are the recipients of that? Us. We are. Because they took it out of that and just shared it.

Who would have thought 12 uneducated, untalented, grungy men could have spread the church from 12 to thousands and today billions?

[11 : 26] Jesus. That's what he said. That's what he's telling you. What starts as a mustard seed. Don't ever discount the small matters in God's kingdom because God blesses and grows the small.

The second thing that I learned from this, and it's in the second parable that I read, is that God's work may be hidden. It's that story of the leaven and the yeast and the bread.

And it's saying that, and again, sometimes leaven is used in a negative sense in Scripture. It's not meant that here. Instead, he's speaking of the kingdom of God and how leaven or yeast gets into that dough and does something that you can't see happening.

But in reality, it's working. It's moving. And even though you can't see it at work, it changes things. The same way, God's kingdom gets into your life and the Holy Spirit begins to work in your life and in others.

Things happen that you cannot see. You can't quite put your finger on. Jesus speaks of leaven and other stories as evil. That's not the intent here. Instead, he's speaking of the penetrating influence of the gospel and how the Spirit moves and works in unseen but very powerful fashions in ways that we can't describe.

[12 : 51] God's doing a work in people around you, and you can't even see it, folks. He's slowly progressing, and when it's real, when he really works in us, when the kingdom of God is in our lives and he's really ruling and reigning in us, he changes things.

It progresses. When you ask the Lord Jesus to come into your life and you seek his face with your life, he'll begin to change your conscience.

He'll begin to convict you about things that you thought were just fine the day before. But he'll begin to show you what's wrong with what you're doing.

It goes from that until he begins to change your mindset to where you begin to build parameters in your mind.

And you may think you're just getting better, but in reality, you're not. Just as sorry as you ever were. It's just that God's in you. He's changing the things and how you see them, and he's changing your mindset, and then he'll begin to change your will.

[14 : 21] He'll change the things from what you used to do to what you don't do anymore. And then he'll change your lifestyle.

And while he's changing you, somebody else will be watching. And it'll change in them.

Because God works like that. He progresses like that. He'll do things that you can't see. I think of Philip.

What a cool story. Philip couldn't see when God told him to go to the crossroads and meet a man.

And I got a feeling he was thinking as he went to the crossroads that God told him to go to.

How am I going to know? You know? What exactly am I looking for? And when he got to the crossroads, God had also led another man to be at the crossroads.

[15 : 26] And by the Spirit of God, that man was reading a prophetic passage about Jesus. And Philip heard him. And as Philip approached the chariot, it appears he had no knowledge of what he was walking into until he heard the man reading.

And he asked him if he understood what he was reading. He said, how can I? And when he explained that he was speaking of Christ, that Ethiopian was gloriously saved. And I love that passage where he says, water's right here.

Why not be baptized? Amen. And he was baptized right then on the spot. Or what about the man who heard sermon after sermon after sermon, and he finally got saved?

And when the preacher, all proud for himself, walked up to him and said, sir, can you tell me which sermon did I preach that touched you? And the man said, none of them.

He said, instead I was leaving church one day, and an elderly widow stumbled on the steps ahead of me, and I reached and caught her. And as I reached out for her, she thanked me, and she said, do you love my Savior Jesus Christ?

[16:41] He means all the world to me. The repeated gospel message and the personal testimony was used by the Spirit of God to convict and save that man.

So much of the work of God he's doing in lives is influential, is penetrating and permeating, but never seen outside.

Understand, the dough does not change itself. The dough has no power to change itself.

It takes the penetrating force of the leaven to make that difference, and much like us, as much as we may want to change, we can't do it on our own.

It takes an indwelling unseen, but surely felt force of the Holy Spirit of God. That's why the Greek word for Holy Spirit is breath or wind.

[17:49] Can't quite put your finger on it. I don't see the wind, but I see the evidence of it. And when the leaven of the power of the Holy Spirit of God takes over in lives or in a people, what a change it brings, in the midst of the explosive growth of Christianity in the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 17, verse 6, it tells what was said about the empowered Christians when a mob came to attack them.

This is what the mob said. They said, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. They came with a reputation because God had done a work in their life and they wanted God to work and move through them.

God's work is not always seen. It may be hidden and it sure is often underestimated. But if the parable of the seed speaks to the gospel progressing in the world, this one speaks to the gospel progressing in us.

Never underestimate what God is doing around you. Never underestimate what God is doing in you. And by the way, let me just say, I am thankful for volunteers in a church who are sensitive to hear what God would have them to do and are willing to do what God leads them to do.

those that prepare ministries, those that care for children, those that keep us secure, those that work behind the scenes.

[19:45] You don't even know who does it, but it just gets done. Those who invite guests, those who welcome guests, those who encourage others that feel unseen. We don't know who those people are.

I could name them today if I wanted to, but God's work is sometimes hidden, but it's very real. And God is well aware because we serve an audience of one.

Now I've been preaching for several weeks on the parables of Jesus in the gospel of Luke, but I'm going to break a rule here and I'm going to go to Mark 4 because there's another parable that's there where he talks about the kingdom of God.

It's in Mark chapter 4, verse 26 and 29. I love to hear the paper turning. It's a good thing to bring your Bible, folks.

It is. Make sure I'm on key. Make sure I didn't make it up. You know, it's good to have it in your hand. I'm not fussing. I'm just encouraging. It says this, and he said, the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

[21:07] Lord, help us get this today. He sleeps and rises night and day and seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. The earth produces by itself first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the earth, but when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.

I love it. He just puts the seed in the ground. It grows. He's not sure why. He's not sure how. He doesn't know all the details.

He doesn't know all the details. I recently pastored a church that had a lot of farmers in it. It's an agrarian county.

An adjacent city calls itself the sweet potato capital of the world. Self-appointed. Sweet potatoes and soybeans are all you see when you come into that county from any direction.

I was preparing a sermon something like this. I don't know which one it was. I texted one of my farmers and I said, let me tell you something. Let me ask you something. I said, fertilizer's high and there's not a lot of promise of pleasing weather.

[22 : 28] The prospects don't look good. Do you still put seed in the ground? He said, we still put seed in the ground. We just trust God to bring us through.

Whether it's a good season or a bad season, we just keep at it. Just expect a harvest to come. You just enjoy watching what was planted become full grown. Folks, I want you to trust trust the Lord for the harvest and to get busy planting seeds for the Lord.

You ain't got to figure out how. You ain't got to figure out why. You're not going to figure out how it's going to happen. But everybody needs to be planting something.

And you can make some choices in your life. You can plant different things. Some people plant seeds of discord. Did you hear what so-and-so's doing? You know?

[23 : 38] Just scattering a rumor. Or maybe a condescending word. Some folks plant seeds of discord. Some people plant seeds of judgmentalism.

Pointing a finger at other people. Putting down someone over here. I'm a whole lot better picking out your sins than I am mine. Some people make a sport of it.

Could be seeds of negativity. Just an effort to drag people down to your level. And I'll just tell you none of that is of God.

And all of it is unsure and unsteady and of the evil one. But God's work is sure.

It's a sure thing. God took a brother who had been sold into slavery and he made the best of those circumstances and progressed his way to where he was given responsibility over a leader in the enemy's house only to be falsely accused while he was there and put in prison.

[25 : 05] Only to be restored from prison and govern the strongest country in the world that in fact was so plentiful that it provided for his own land in the midst of a famine.

Did Joseph feel that when he was in Potiphar's house and Potiphar's wife was falsely accusing him? No. But God's work is sure. He'll take the slow tongue of Moses.

Did he feel like God's work was sure when he was wandering around the desert with a bunch of Baptists? A trip that could have took a few days took 40 years?

But God's work God's work is sure. He'll take the least significant and raise him to lead Israel to expand its borders and be as strong as it ever has been.

A man with frailties a man with mistakes a man who was overlooked in the very beginning. And yet he did that with David. Do you think he felt warm and cozy when he was getting a spear chucked at him by Saul when all he was trying to do was soothe the madman by playing a harp for him?

[26 : 33] No. No. No. But God's work is sure. God will take a babe born to a virgin to live a sinless life die on a Roman cross rise out of a barred tomb and return to receive his own to him and will save anyone who calls upon his name and surrenders his or her life to Christ?

I don't understand that. But God's work is sure. I am thankful that he'll take a foot-shaped mouth fisherman named Simon and save him and call him and empower him to unlock the truths of the kingdom and reach a previously unreached Gentile world and change the world for the gospel out of a man who said the wrong thing too often.

But God's work is sure. Did it look like it when he was arguing with Jesus and yet Jesus changed his name to Rock right in the middle of it because he knew he'd be such a strong foundation for the word of God?

No. But God's work is sure. God will take a student of religious law and a persecutor of Christians and he'll meet him on the road to Damascus, blind him, call him, and then open his eyes to a whole new world and he'll lead that man to write most of the New Testament.

Were those believers that first met the saved Paul sure that God had done such a work? No. They were scared to death. But God's work is sure. he'll send his Holy Spirit to a people gathered in Jerusalem and out of that group spread the Christian message one person to another throughout the world for generations so that you and I can hear that same message and have that same opportunity to respond.

[28 : 44] Do we deserve to be saved and changed? No. But God's work is sure. just like a seed. It's planted and then sprouts and grows a blade and then another.

And then that grain grows into the ear in the same way we just plant seeds. Church, if we'll plant seeds in God's time, it'll grow.

So I ask you, even if you ain't scattering, there's seeds falling out your pocket.

You're leaving a mark. What kind of seeds are you planting? Because when the Spirit gets in the works, the work of God will rise.

and it may seem small and it may seem hidden but little is much when God is in it.

[30 : 00] And my friend, God is in it. It's a sure thing. God is at work.

So let's get in on what God's doing. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I ask you this morning, have you ever committed your life to follow the Lord Jesus Christ?

Have you ever said, Lord, I understand that on my own I can't do it. I need your touch.

I need you to change me, Lord. Forgive me, wash me clean and change my life. Good news for you today is if you've never done that and you're willing to do that, you didn't come up with that on your own.

Holy Spirit of God is moving and working in your life and you need to choose to follow Him. Today as He speaks to you. Maybe you're here and you have done that but the reality is you've never told anybody about it, just a private deal for you.

[31 : 14] Jesus says, don't be ashamed of me and I won't be ashamed of you before my Father. Let others know, follow Him with baptism today. Proclaiming publicly and physically what God has done in you privately and spiritually.

Maybe God's leading you to be a part of this church. God's leading you in that way. We'd love for you to come, join us in our journey, seeking to scatter seed for the Lord and anticipating mightily what God's going to do as we do.

We'd love to talk to you about that. Maybe you're here and you don't need to make any of those decisions, you just need to decide to scatter some seed. You just need to decide to live your life for the Lord Jesus.

To trust Him when you can't see Him, when it seems slow, when it seems unsure, just trust Him. Take Him at His word because God's work is sure. Heavenly Father, I pray right now that you'll guide each and every one of us today to follow your will and your way exactly the way you'd have us to do it.

[32 : 33] Lord, I pray that we won't do more than you ask us to do and we sure won't do less than you ask us to do. We'll just be obedient as you speak to our hearts and lives. Bless our time right now, oh God, I pray in Jesus' precious name.

Amen.