

**Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)**

**Luke 13: 18-21**

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Luke Chapter 13 and today we will read verses 18 to 21.

Today we will take some time to truly understand Jesus' parables concerning the kingdom of God. Of course, the most complete set of parables is found in Matthew chapter 13, where Jesus spoke seven parables about the kingdom of heaven. Many Bible teachers do not distinguish between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, but most dispensational teachers make a distinction between the two.

Matthew speaks of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, particularly referring to Jesus returning to reign on earth, related to the millennial kingdom; therefore, it emphasizes the overcomers. Thus, in Matthew chapter 13, the seven parables concerning the kingdom of heaven begin with the parable of the sower and conclude with the seventh, the parable of the dragnet, gathering fish of every kind. These seven different manifestations of the kingdom of heaven correspond to what is recorded in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where John the elder wrote to the seven churches, beginning with Ephesus and ending with Laodicea. These seven churches are all called churches by God, and within each of them, God calls for overcomers.

This call to the overcomers corresponds to the seven manifestations of the kingdom of heaven spoken of in Matthew chapter 13. We will examine that passage in detail when we have the opportunity to study Matthew in the future. However, here in Luke chapter 13, Jesus gives two parables. It seems that Luke intentionally selected only two from the seven, choosing those that fit well with the surrounding context of chapter 13.

Luke emphasizes the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the realm where God exercises His authority. When Jesus came to the earth, He began to bring the

kingdom of God to the earth. When He entered the synagogue, the kingdom of God came into the synagogue. In verse 17, Luke specifically points out two groups of people: one group opposed Jesus—His adversaries; the other group, the multitude, rejoiced at all the glorious things done by Him.

Earlier, in the account of the synagogue on the Sabbath, the one opposing Jesus was the ruler of the synagogue, representing the religious leaders of that time—the scribes and Pharisees. They brought into the synagogue things that were not according to God’s will, and even used these to bind those who truly had needs. The woman who had been bent over for eighteen years had, for a long time, come into the synagogue every Sabbath, yet was unable to receive real help.

**Verse 18-19: “Then He said, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? 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.’”**

Therefore, Jesus exclaimed, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed.” A mustard seed is often used as a metaphor for faith. The kingdom of God begins with faith, and through the watering of God’s word, this faith can gradually grow into a mustard plant—becoming a vegetable that supplies people’s needs and serves as food for life.

However, this mustard seed was taken by someone and planted in a garden, yet it grew into a great tree. When the mustard seed develops abnormally—when it does not follow the way of life nor the proper order of life—it was originally a vegetable meant to meet human needs and serve as food, yet it instead becomes a great tree, and the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus had already made it very clear that the seed sown by the wayside was devoured by the birds; and these birds represent Satan. In other words, when the mustard seed grows into a great tree, it begins to accommodate all kinds of different things—even allowing Satan to dwell in it. This speaks of the

outward appearance of the kingdom of God developing in an abnormal way, expanding to such an extent that all kinds of worldly things enter into the kingdom of God.

If we sincerely take a look, is the church life around us truly pure—containing only the word of life, with only Christ being exalted? Or have business entered in? Has politics entered in? Has power entered in? Have art and culture entered in? After so much mixture, it grows into a great tree, and eventually the birds lodge in its branches. This is the outward, abnormal development of the kingdom of God.

**Verse 20-21: “And again He said, ‘To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’”**

In contrast to the mustard seed growing into a great tree—speaking of the outward, abnormal development of the kingdom of God—the leaven speaks of inward corruption. A woman took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened. The grain offering was made of fine flour without leaven, which typifies Jesus’ fine, tender, and pure humanity. In the Old Testament, all grain offerings that were presented had to be unleavened. Leaven generally represents sin. Therefore, after the Passover, there are seven days called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which grain offerings must be made with fine flour mixed with oil. The fine flour signifies the pure humanity of Christ, and the oil signifies the Holy Spirit.

Among all the offerings in the Old Testament, only the grain offering at Pentecost was required to contain leaven, and it had to be made into two loaves. As we know, in history, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out, and the church was brought into being. Therefore, the leavened grain offering at Pentecost typifies that after the church was formed, there are two groups within the church—Jews and Gentiles. This is the only grain offering that includes leaven.

In the New Testament Gospels, Jesus also repeatedly spoke about the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees. They added various traditions, rules, human ideas, and thoughts, causing what was originally fine and pure flour to become leavened.

We know that leavened dough becomes softer, lighter, and easier to eat. Many times, when we come simply and purely to God's word, we find it great and difficult, because we are unable to fulfill it. But when some rules, human ideas, and "leaven" are added, it makes the "dough" easier to accept. Yet, because of this, the inner nature of the kingdom of God begins to be corrupted.

In Luke chapter 13, Luke deliberately places these two parables spoken by Jesus between two events. Earlier, it mentioned that Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and the entire leadership structure of the synagogue had already become corrupted: the mustard seed had grown into a great tree, even allowing Satan to lodge in its branches. In the Jewish synagogue, there could actually be a place for Satan—even to the extent that a woman had been bound by Satan for eighteen years. When Jesus came to carry out a work of life and healing, they were instead indignant and said that no work should be done on the Sabbath. This completely violated the principle of life.

The kingdom of God has developed in a distorted way, allowing many things that do not belong to God to enter in—even to the point of becoming those that rule within the synagogue.

The reason the outward appearance of the kingdom has become distorted—changing from a mustard seed into a great tree—is because of inward mixture. The leaven of the scribes and Pharisees has already been added into the fine flour, and the whole lump has become leavened. It appears large, attractive, and easy to take in, yet it is not according to God's will.

In the following passage, Jesus tells the people to strive to enter through the narrow gate. Many who had eaten and drunk with Him, He says He does not know. According to Luke's arrangement, these two parables are placed between the events before and after them. Personally, I feel that the mustard seed growing into a great tree, and the leaven being mixed into the flour causing the whole lump to

rise, both speak of negative conditions—negative developments of the kingdom of God. Of course, I know that many interpreters explain them in a positive way, as representing the flourishing growth of the church. I respect their interpretation and their approach to leading the church—seeking to influence society through engagement with the world, politics, and various human methods.

However, I prefer a pure church, where only the Lord Jesus Christ reigns, without any mixture that comes from man. Such churches are likely very small, a little flock. But personally, I believe this is according to God's heart.

Let us pray together: Lord, we ask that You grant us grace and light, that we may truly know You and understand Your will. Give us also an obedient heart, willing to follow Your leading in each of our lives. And grant us a spirit of forbearance, to respect every person and every church, that each may continue forward under the commission they have received. Lord, bestow Your grace. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!