

Title: App or Operating System
Text: Luke 13.18-21
Theme: The priority of the kingdom
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: The Kingdom of God is the surprise story of our lives and world.

How much of this week do you think you lived intentionally for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom? How much of your planning and your priorities were driven by your conviction of your life's purpose to display the gospel to the nations so God's fame would be known and enjoyed? On Sunday's we rightly sing loudly and confidently that God is Sovereign and that he is the center and goal of all creation. But I'm guessing that for many of us, that's about as far as it goes and that we live the rest of the week as if we are at the center of our world. The truth is, we are not. God really is. If we do not align ourselves with that reality, we are going to be out of sorts. I think one of the contributing factors to the angst, depression, anger and despair in our world is that we try to insert ourselves as the center of the universe, when that is the place only for God.

But when we try to make ourselves the center of our world and existence, then we place upon ourselves the expectation to perform at the highest level of ourselves. In a selfie world, you better be the best selfie you can be. But be honest. You are not really your idealized version of you and you never will be in this life. You are not the hero in the story. You have limits. You are conflicted. You are inconsistent and double-minded. You are self-centered. You and me. You and all of us. And here is the good news. God drops bombs of grace on those who see that about themselves, admit it and lean on him. This means that his kingdom is not made up of those who have it all, nor advanced by those who have it all, but is made up by and advanced by those who know that they don't have anything if they don't have him.

Read Text:

Luke wrote this gospel account of the life of Jesus so that Theophilus would understand what the Christian faith is built on. Genuine Christianity has a value system that does not make sense to this world. If you want to be first, be last. Want to win? Lose. Want to live? Die. Want to have it all? Give it all away. So, in order to understand what all of this means, Luke writes this carefully researched account of the life of Christ. Here is what we are learning. God's plan from the beginning is to have a people that he will live with and enjoy forever. The name of that is the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the King of the Kingdom. It is a kingdom that operates differently than this world. Jesus came to the earth to fulfill the promises that God made about the establishment of this kingdom. The king and the kingdom is the heart of the entire creation story. This is what it is all about. But that is counter-intuitive to us. We are born with an internal operating system built around the idea that we are what life is to be centered on. But it does not work. So, we look at religion and of course, Jesus, like an app that we can add and use to find our way when we are lost, to get some wisdom when we are stuck, to get some health when we are sick, or to just get us out of the ditch so that we can go on our comfortable way living our own life as we want. That is how we think. But Jesus is not an app in life. He is the

entire operating system. Following him means to reboot our lives with him as the center of all things. That is what genuine Christianity is. We do not use Jesus to be successful, we trust in Christ to be a godly part of his forever kingdom. If you do not want that, you really don't want Jesus.

1. The connection (18a)

"He said therefore"

What just happened? Jesus went into a synagogue on a Sabbath and he took particular interest in a woman who had been crippled over for 18 years as a result of a disabling (demonic) spirit. He healed her physically by healing her spiritually. He rescued a child of Abraham from the bondage of Satan and the high and mighty synagogue ruler and his cronies were enraged. Even though these men claimed to speak for God, Jesus exposed the truth about them. They used God and his law as a means for their own power and influence. They did not care about this woman. They cared about protecting their turf.

Many of us are familiar with Kodak picture spots. These are places where Kodak puts up a sign to indicate that they are recommending that you get a picture here because the view is special from this place. God does that in our lives. He puts us into places that become Kingdom picture spots because the view from this spot is very revealing. Sometimes what is revealed is beautiful and sometimes it is awful. A Kingdom picture spot is more like an X-ray because it reveals what is going on in the heart of a person. That is what happened in the synagogue. When the synagogue ruler blew a fuse, "snap" went the kingdom camera revealing the fact that this man was really pursuing just another version of man's broken kingdoms and was using religion as the ruse for it. So, in response to that event *"He said therefore."* Jesus uses this Kodak moment as a Kingdom picture spot. He wants us to understand something.

The point should be clear. What the world values, and what we are tempted to value is generally not valuable, like titles, esteem, respect, power and money. And what the world overlooks and what we are tempted to overlook (like weak and broken people) can actually be the secret sauce in God's recipe for his kingdom. That is why the life and ministry of Jesus was/is so paradoxical. The king became a servant. The one with all power and authority submitted himself to earthly rulers. The greatest became the least. Therefore, his kingdom, his plan, his mission to rule is not going to look like kingdoms of this world and is not going to be built like them either. Once again, Jesus gives us important insight into what he is all about.

2. The questions (18b)

"What is the Kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?"

A kingdom has 3 related parts: 1) A king, 2) a people and 3) land. The kingdom of God is the visible and personal rule of God through Jesus the King who lives with enjoys his people, his followers who live under his authority in the recreated earth, which becomes heaven on earth.

That is the final phase of the Kingdom. That is end game and goal. Right now, Jesus is Lord. Right now, our God the Almighty reigns. Already Jesus is King in position, not yet is he King visible. The kingdom of God is already, but not yet. The Kingdom of God is a present reality and a future event. Local churches are embassies of, previews of and taste samples of the Kingdom of God. We represent the Jesus nation which is made up of believers from all the nations. It is the one and final and eternal kingdom. This is the story line of the Bible. This is the story line of history. This is the river that all tributaries flow into. If you miss this, you miss it all. The kingdom of God is the very plan for which God created the world. But the question that Jesus asked is, what is it like? His two answers: a grain of a mustard seed that becomes a large tree and leaven that is hidden in flour, tell us what the Kingdom of God is like. And get this! It is not what they thought and it is probably not what you and I think either.

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? Look at v.22. We are at the point in the travels of Jesus, where the signposts on the path are pointing to Jerusalem. The assumption was that Jesus was going to lead a march on Jerusalem, crush Rome, replace that toad, Herod who squatted on the throne, and restore Israel to her glory and power as in the days of David and Solomon. That's what kings do, right? But the kingdom of God does not start with palaces, White Houses, government buildings, military bases, voting booths or media centers. It's like a grain of mustard seed and leaven that is hid in three measures of flour. Jesus is not going to build an army and navy like the other kingdoms. He is not going to Jerusalem to take over, but to die. He will rise again and then ascend. He will leave, but the unseen Spirit will come and the seed will be planted, the leaven will be hidden in the flour and the kingdom will start growing.

So, what is the Kingdom of God like? It is small and easy to overlook. A mustard seed is small and leaven that is hidden in 3 measures (about 50 lbs) of flour is easy to ignore. But do not let that discourage you nor fool you. Even though a mustard seed and leaven are small and unnoticed, they are influential. A tiny mustard seed turns into a good-sized tree and even a little bit of leaven will eventually cause the entire 50lbs of flour to be leavened. The kingdom of God may not look like much, but it is influential and frankly, unstoppable. Not only that, but it is good. The tree that came from the mustard seed becomes a place of rest and shelter for the birds of the air. The kingdom of God is a place where people from all tribes, languages and nations can find shelter and rest and be safe from the kingdoms of this world.

Life in Gaza is bleak. Life in South Sudan is horrific. Life in North Korea is hopeless. Life in Afghanistan is terrible. Yemen, Venezuela are not much better. Power is seen in those countries as basically the opportunity to rape, plunder and destroy without consequence. For so many people there is no place to hide. No one in power to defend them. For all those who know Christ, the Kingdom of God is going to be a place where believers from even the hardest of settings will find a home of safety, love, rest, healing, acceptance and provision forever.

3. What does this mean for his followers?

A. Beware of advancing the Kingdom of God with man's kingdom methods.

Man's kingdom is all about the image, hype, posturing, power, staging and influence. Don't be fooled. The message, ministry and genuine influence of this church is not seen in our size, social media views or perceived significance. We do not look to accolades, approval and awards from our world for our significance and assurance of success. Yelp and Google reviews are not our concern. Our super power is humility. Our currency is the gospel. Our mission is the kingdom and our method is enduring faithfulness.

I was at a church in Oryol, Russia, in western Russia, near the sight of the largest tank battle ever fought in history. The church had received funding from churches in the U.S. to build a new building just outside of town. However, an official held up the permit process because he wanted a bribe. This church had a ministry at the local orphanage. There was a young man there, who was severely disabled in body, but very keen in mind. His condition was an embarrassment to his father who wanted to rise through the government ranks, and knew that a child like this would not fit the Russian image, so he left his son at the orphanage and refused to acknowledge him as his son. As you can imagine, when this child discovered who his father was and what had happened to him, he was extremely embittered. But the faithful ministry of the people from this local church did not make sense to him. They loved him. They cared for him. They brought him things and listened to him. They shared Christ with him and one day, he came to faith in Christ. Later on he realized that if he had not been disabled, his parents would not have abandoned him in the orphanage and if he had not been there, he probably would have never heard the gospel. He made up his mind that he needed to tell his father this. What his dad meant for evil, God overruled for good, so one day, he did. He was able to get someone to drive him to his parents' home. His dad was shocked, ashamed and angry to see his son at the door and was shutting the door when the boy pleaded with him to give him a few minutes. He then told him how Christ had changed his heart and that he harbored no ill will against his dad, but was grateful for the providences that brought him to Christ. He told him about the church people who cared for him and the dad was stunned. He didn't have a category for this. A few days later, Valery (the pastor) was back at the local government office inquiring about the approval, yet not willing to give a bribe. "It just so happened" that the official who had refused to sign the paper, was the father of the boy. He told the pastor about his meeting with his son and then signed the approval. The grain of seed had become a tree.

B. Be wary of earthly messages and methods. (They are empty and don't work)

What is true for a church is true for us. We live in a selfie world where you think you have to promote yourself like a brand. This really comes into play when writing a resume. That is a delicate matter because you want to be confident but you don't want to come across as arrogant. If the job you are interested in requires a certain skillset, then you will likely massage your resume a bit so that it sounds as much like a fit as possible. Give your world what it wants. But what if your world wants something that is wrong?

What do you think the Apostle Paul's resume might look like? He actually wrote one, but I doubt that based on what he says, that there would be too many churches willing to hire him. In 2 Corinthians 11.24-27 he focuses on his experiences. *"Five times I received at the hands of the*

Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” That was a summary of sorts of his ministry experience. In terms of his character, he says in 2 Corinthians 6.4-10 *“...by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and behold we love; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.”*

Clearly, he’s had some crazy experiences, but he sounds controversial, unstable, doesn’t stay put very long, confusing, and not particularly successful. But when you think about it, if Jesus had a resume at one point, it could have said that he experienced flashes of greatness, spoke to thousands and kept them spellbound, performed miracles, got a little out of control at the Temple, angered the establishment, and was sentenced to death. In the end, his trained followers all left him and only his mom and a few others witnessed his death. He died even without his own clothes and left it up to others to find a burial suitable for him. Not too impressive is it?

C. Reject the lie that “having it all” is what makes you happy.

What does that mean anyway? It is football season and unhinged fans are foaming at the mouth to make a new class of athletes their gods they will worship if the athlete is successful or make them demons they will destroy if he is not successful. Does a professional football player who makes it all the way, really have it all? Does the successful businessman or woman really have it all? Does the person with the house, cabin up north, boat on the lake, motorcycle in the garage, really have it all? Even if you had it all, no one can keep it all. The strong body breaks down. The smartest accountant may get dementia. Everyone dies. And most experience a significant loss of ability in the process. What good is it to have it all, if you can’t see, smell, hear, taste, or walk? *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.* (Jim Elliot)

If you are young and attractive and have the eyes of the world on you, know this, that in a few hours, there will be someone else younger, prettier and ready to replace you. Your value and security needs to be in something better, deeper than you. The kingdom of man is crumbling. The heaven will invade the entire batch. The servant king who dies is the Lord of Glory who returns on a white horse with a flaming sword in order to strike down the kings of this earth and reign forever. The only way to have it all is to have the One who is above all. Therefore, you can

D. Be part of something you don’t have defend.

In man's kingdom you are told to promote yourself, but you are not worth promoting and it is exhausting and terrifying when you have to promote and defend yourself knowing that you may let people down.

E. Be part of something that you can trust your soul to.

This week I looked up the preseason predictions for the MLB teams for the 2025 season. A few got a couple of things right, but many were way off and embarrassingly so. These are the experts who are supposed to know this stuff and some of them were so bad, you wonder how they could keep their job. Predicting the outcomes of sports teams is not a matter for your soul and really doesn't matter. But who do you trust your soul to? Jesus is a king who has never lied and has never been wrong. Every promise he makes, he keeps. Every single one.

Conclusion:

Paul – planted 20 churches, spoke to packed venues, wrote 11 books that are best sellers in the history of the world and have been the source of thousands upon thousands of books and Ph.D. dissertations. He