

A Redeemed Culture #4 – Go and Take Dominion, or, “How the Kingdom Grows”

Introduction – The gospel of the kingdom of heaven is something more than simply a message of persons delivered from hell. The story of redemption is not only about individuals being saved, it is the story of the supplanting of the old humanity with a new humanity (2 Cor 5:17-19). Although we have been given the ministry of reconciliation, although we have been called to go and disciple the nations, although we have been commanded to take dominion over the earth, we need to understand the world has not been dumped on our shoulders. We plant, we water, but it is God alone who brings forth the increase, the expansion, and the sanctification.

The Text – “Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed....The kingdom of heaven is like leaven...” (Matt 13:31-33).

Understanding the End – God’s purpose in sending His Son into the world was to save the world (John 3:16-17). We are told that something revolutionary occurred to the world when the Father sent the Son (John 1:5, 1 John 2:8); darkness is passing and light is appearing. The light of the new heavens and the new earth becomes so bright in the presence of the Son that there is no need for a sun anymore (Rev 21:23). And this Light to the Gentiles brings in the whole world. (Isaiah 49:6, Psalm 2:8-9, Rev 7:9). Christ’s coming was not to be a rescue operation, pulling out a few victims from the rubble. Christ’s coming is described in terms of a new covenant, a new humanity, a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, a new world: a new culture.

Parable Language – Think of the language that Jesus employs to describe the kingdom of God. He says it is like a wedding, not a funeral. It is a feast, not a fast; it is a pearl, not a lump of coal. And then there are the seed parables of growth, of separation and of harvest.

Mustard Seed and Leaven (Matt 13:31-33) – In both of these parables, the kingdom is far too small to really be significant in the mind of any reasonable person. In both parables, however, the end shows the unreasonableness of such thinking – the unfaithfulness of such thinking. What you see at a particular moment in history is not what you should believe to be the case forever. But more importantly is the teaching in these two parables of the nature of kingdom growth. It is organic, slow, and inevitable.

The Growth of the Kingdom – Notice that these parables are describing organic growth, not a building project of our own devising. This is important because while all of the other parts of the parable are important, I want to stress one important point: Culture building is much more like watching God do His thing than us trying to do our thing for Him.

Co-Workers With Christ (Col 4:11) – Christians are fellow workers with Christ in His kingdom. But we must understand that while we are called upon to make our feeble efforts, the kingdom’s growth is not dependent on our feeble efforts left to themselves.

Dominion in Wine-Making: Jesus’ Example (John 2:1-11) – What a terrible way to encourage dominion-taking. If God can simply speak the word and create wonderful wine, why does He leave the work of cultivation, harvest, production, aging, and distribution to us? Or maybe there is something to learn here.

Lego Building: My Example – As parents sit with their children teaching them a new task, we do so knowing full well that the job will now get done much slower and with many mistakes. But what happens? Not only is wisdom imparted to the children, it is done so in the context of love. And so it is in the relationship of our heavenly Father with His children, or the Groomsman with His bride. The Father is not thwarted in His work by our feeble attempts. Like a father with his son, instead, He delights over the process of sanctifying us and working through us in order to accomplish the work of growing His kingdom.

The Easy Yoke of Kingdom Building (Matt 11:25-30) – Everything we are to do in Christ Jesus we cannot do. None of it – we cannot save ourselves, we cannot purify ourselves, we cannot make ourselves holy. We cannot cause others to be saved, we cannot sanctify others, we cannot bring others to heaven. We cannot take dominion over anything in any kind of way that the holiness and perfection of God requires. We fall short in every way. But Jesus doesn’t call the strong, He calls the weak. He doesn’t call the rich, He calls the poor and needy. He doesn’t call the self-made man, He calls the losers. He calls us to be yoked to Him and in that yoke find all His works to be an ease and not a burden, because He is doing them.

A Yoke That Brings Rest – Being yoked with Christ is like the little child learning to build the Lego set. He doesn’t need you. But He wants you. He knows you will fall short. He knows that it will go slower than if He just spoke the Word and it was done. He knows that there will be great disappointments along the way – but He wants to instruct us in that as well. And He knows that in the end, it will be obvious to all that we were co-laborers with Him and yet all the glory will go rightfully to Him.

I sat by the fire helping my son with his new Lego truck. He was thrilled to be with me and I was thrilled to be with him. He was so thrilled to work on the truck. And it didn’t matter to him at all how long it took, or how many times he had to try again. This yoke before him was easy and there was rest in his soul. I had no concerns at all that it would be finished – I was there.