

The Experience of Every Christian Life - Part 5

Cultivating Biblical Optimism

Luke 13:18-21

Well over the years my wife Carlynn and I have put in our time as parents of little leaguers, as many of you have I'm sure, hauling our kids to practice, buying uniforms, incessantly washing the uniforms, volunteering for the snack bar all that stuff, we've done that. Our kids, our two boys, played on some decent baseball teams through the years and some bad baseball teams and some really bad baseball teams. And I can't help but notice how differently they play when they're on the winning team verses the losing team. No matter how much you as a parent say, "Go out there, give it your all, do your best!" When they know they're on a team that has like no chance of making the playoffs, I mean they go out there and they dutifully play but that's about it. But when they know they're on a winning team, when they have that sense that this team could go all the way, it's amazing to watch their level of play really go in a different direction. I mean they start to play some pretty impressive baseball on those teams. (01:34)

You know it's no different in the Christian life you need to understand. I mean if we wear the uniform and yet we secretly assume that we are on, you know, a team of cultural losers, you know, on the wrong side of history as we're accused. You may dutifully go through the routine of Christianity, may be put in your time, go to church, read your Bible but that's going to be about it. But if you start to understand some things that Jesus taught about who we are and about what we're a part of and where this is all headed, then I think you'll start to engage in some extraordinary Christianity. You'll start to live in a way that is really qualitatively different. I mean that's important for us to catch. (02:14)

In Luke 13 for the past couple of sessions we've been looking at a healing in the synagogue and you found a lot of the people responding well to that healing and really glorifying God for what the Messiah was doing and they were excited to join the team. But it was tempered unfortunately with a very bad response from the powers that be, the ruler of the synagogue wasn't into it and as we saw in Christ's response, responding in the plural it wasn't just one ruler of the synagogue, he was apparently convincing a lot of people that Jesus was the bad guy and a law breaker and he wasn't all that great after all. These people that were buying into Christianity following the Messiah, I mean, that's the losing team to be a part of. Jesus responds with two stories that I think will get all of this in perspective so that you and I don't go through the motions of Christianity and routinely and dutifully put in our time but really secretly wonder, you know, I don't know, we're kind of outcast, marginalized, we'll play on the team, we're part of the family, we got the uniform but I don't know, we'll just try to stay out of trouble. (03:19)

Take a look at this passage a fresh if you would, you can glance through where we've been, here the healing in the synagogue the response of the people, the unjust criticism we examined last time we were together. Now you need to tie these two short parables in four following verses and you need to catch this connection because of a word that's used there in verse number 18, the word therefore. Take a look at this. Jesus tells two quick parables in comparing the kingdom, which of course he's collecting citizens for, and he begins with the words, "he said therefore". That's the words of Luke as he says he's giving these two examples in response to what happened. (03:58)

He said therefore, – verse 18 – "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?" First example, verse 19, "It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches. And again to what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened." Okay, you can look at that and say I get the basic idea. You've got normal people, the common folk, buying the ministry of Christ, they wanted to be associated with it and you've got the leaders and the powers that be, the important people, they're rejecting it, they're mocking it, they're despising it. And he says, "Well, listen it may not be all that vogue, it may not be all that popular, it may be that a lot of people will despise you for being a part of this movement but you got to know it may start small, but it's going to infect the whole thing. It may be like a seed in a garden but it's going to grow into this big tree and all kinds of birds are going to flock to it. You're going to have, you know, fruit and you're going to



have all this great thing that's going to grow up from this small beginnings." Leaven, yeast same way. (05:07)

You can get that and say "Okay, there's the idea." Be encouraged this is the winning team this is not the Bad News Bears you're not on the losing team, this is the right team to be on. But before we look at these two illustrations as you can see on your worksheet, did you find the worksheet there? And see that I've tried to append to that first point two verses, verses 18 and 20 and if you looking at it, I don't know what are you going to make of that, because all Jesus does is say, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? Verse 20, and again what shall I compare to the kingdom of God? What's the analogy I'm going to make here. Well, Jesus' asks the question, of course he's going to answer. But what I'd like to pose to you is that he's answering it partially. I mean in a sense you've got some analogous features of a seed and a tree and yeast or leaven and the dough that rises and all of that. Yes, there's connection there between small beginnings and humble beginnings and big impact down the line but really that's not an apt comparison, (06:07)

Oh, now you're splitting hairs Pastor Mike. I understand all illustrations break down at some point; no you're right they do. But in a sense you've got to realize when Jesus says my plan for this as he said elsewhere is to build my church, to build this community, to culminate and consummate all of human history in the coming of the kingdom you need to realize when he says those things, it's really not like, at least not in all of his features, like planting a seed in the ground and hoping and praying and watering and doing all you can to see it become a tree. Or putting that leaven in the dough and hoping that like usual it rises, I mean there's lots of contingencies in both of those, although they're good analogies. In a sense asking it twice and giving two different responses it allows me to step back and and say, "Well in some sense his planning about the kingdom is incomparable to any thing. And here's why, because when God makes a plan to do something, when Jesus is telling us here is what God has decreed to happen regarding the kingdom. It's unlike any other plan that someone could make. As a matter of fact think if you would to James chapter 5, when it says when we make plans we should make plans and then we should append this little caveat. We should add this as a contingency, if the Lord wills. You know that passage? Don't say you're going to do this or that and then end the sentence with a period. Say I'll do this or that comma if the Lord wills. What are we saying there? Let's change the words around a little bit, wills is not just want that's plan, decision, that's purpose. In other words, you can say it this way. When I make a plan I should say, here's my plan comma if it's the Lord's plan. And that's starting to sound like some other passages you know. Right, here's what I purpose and this is what I purpose to do but comma if the Lord purposes it. Remember that old song that says unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor, labor in vain. I mean I want to build a house unless God wants the house built, it's not going to happen. I'm going to purpose to build a business but unless God purposes it, it's not going to happen. I plan on doing this thing with set of parameters and variable but ultimately the ultimate variable is God and what he plans. All of our planning is contingent. Even someone who plants at seed in a garden or even someone who goes about to bake bread and puts yeast in it their house could burn down. I don't know, you may think he's really splitting hairs here but recognize I just want to stop and I want to build some confidence as the subtitle of this message says we need to cultivate biblical optimism. And when God says I'm going to build a kingdom, you need to stand back and say, "Wow, that's a kind of plan that's unlike any human planning anyone could ever do." And we need to have some confidence in that. Number 1; jot it down if you would, be confident in God's incomparable plan. (08:53)

1. Be Confident in God's Incomparable Plans

That may sound like a contradiction because what am I going to compare it to? And he gives us some comparisons and all I'm saying they're very imperfect comparisons because everything God chooses to do is without contingency. Think about that. When I make a plan it's contingent on a lot of things, ultimately on God's planning. When God makes a plan, who's that contingent upon? No one, God chooses and he accomplishes. Matters of fact in theology we call that a decree. We call that something that he brings a verdict, here's what will be, here's a settled matter for you, here is what I choose and decide to do. When God decides it's a done deal. Now that brings me some confidence when I'm a part of a thing called the kingdom and he says this team is going to win. (09:38)

Oh, okay, that's not like me yesterday looking at the Twins playing the Blue Jays and saying I really think the Twins are going to win. As a matter of fact it's much like me saying about yesterday's game, the Twins are going to win. Well you're saying as though its future, but you know the past is past you can't change the past. No, that's my point, if you know baseball, right; the Twins are a terrible team apparently unless you are from Minnesota. But it's a bad team, it's a really bad team and you didn't expect them to win because they're in a slump right now. But they go and they play the Blue Jays who aren't a whole lot better, so off they go and they actually go through the first inning, the



fifth inning, the seventh inning and there looks like another skunk. There's not a single run on the board for the Twins. They get to the bottom of the eighth, they're hosting this game, five runs in the bottom of the eighth. And the Blue Jays come back and try to score, they score one run in the ninth I believe it was, and they're done, it's over, and they win. So if I say to you, "I tell you that the Twins will win yesterday's baseball game." You're going to say your grammar is really wrong. You're tenses of your verb don't work. I tell you that Twins will win yesterday's baseball game. You're going to go, stop this is silly. Well if I say that what's going to happen about something that's already happened you say well you can put a lot of money on that. You can't really with any good faith put a lot of money on the Twins winning yesterday if I'm talking about this from Friday's perspective. (11:14)

We say, Christ's kingdom is coming, Jesus will build his church one day the king will be on his throne and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess and you may say well I'm banking on it and he's a really good baseball player so I hope he accomplishes all of his plans. And I'm putting all my money on Christ. Now that's how a lot of Christians think. But God plans outside of time you understand. God has no contingencies in his plan. When he decides he's going to build his church and that all the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and that he will reign forever and ever, there's no contingencies on that. It's as good as done. (11:53)

So when we sit here and are told incessantly, hey you guys are the Bad News Bears, you're lousy, you're never going to win, let's keep marginalizing you and let's make you feel like the idiots that you really are in this culture. You need to stand back and say now wait a minute, God has decided that the manifesto of the kingdom, this thing we call our Bibles, will be the ruling constitution of the kingdom and that all the virtues and all the righteousness that is spelled out for us in the scripture that is God's will and his law and it will be established and Christ will reign on a throne. And every knee will bow to him and you want to be on the right side of history you better bow the knee to Christ and be a part of our team. And we don't say, "Oh now, come on now step up to the plate Christ and hit a homerun." It's a done deal, it's a done deal. (12:40)

Be confident in God's incomparable plan. There was a man in the Old Testament that had a lot of plans and he was, I mean, his batting average was really high. His name was Nebuchadnezzar, remember Nebuchadnezzar? King of Israel? No. Judah? No. King of Babylon, those are the bad guys. Might as well be from Assyria or Egypt that's not a good guy in the Old Testament, no you're right he's not a good guy. But God allowed him to be raised to power so that he might discipline his idolatrist wayward people of the South in Judah. And so God gives him great success and he expands his kingdom. And he expands his kingdom and he disciplines the Israelites from Judah and the temple mount gets sacked and he burns everything and he steals all of their precious metals and he brings some slaves back, some Hebrew slaves back to Babylon and you know the most popular one, Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah aka they renamed them Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You know the story. (13:40)

Well when he's there, God puts a dream in his night time experience and he dreams something that gives him insomnia and it gives him you know a lot of ulcers and he's feeling really bad and he's doesn't know what to make of it and his dream is haunting him. It's a dream if you know your Bible of a statue. Remember that dream? Daniel 2. He dreams of this statue and that would be one thing but this great statue that's made of precious metals and some other things. He all of a sudden sees it be destroyed by a gigantic rock that comes out of the sky and smashes it to pieces. He says I've got to know what this is about. This dream is haunting me, it's a nightmare. So he calls together all his magicians and his fortune tellers and soothsayers and they all come in. And he says, "Okay, now you've got some supernatural ability to interpret what my dreams mean, well if you're so supernatural well you prove it to me by telling me first what my dream is and then you can interpret it." Huh and like most fortune tellers they're a bunch of con-men they're like, well we can't do that. No, you can't do that. Well, they remember Daniel who had already distinguished himself as a leader among the people as a foreigner who had a God who claimed to be the God of heaven and earth and secrets and revelation and all the rest. So they call in Daniel. Daniel of course gives glory to God and he says, "Yeah, I can tell you what your dream is. Your dream is of a statue, its head is made of gold, you've got its torso made of silver, you've got its midsection made of bronze, you got its legs made of iron, you've got the feet made of iron and clay. And it stands there all of its glory. And then here comes a rock that's cut out from a mountain not made of human hands and it gets slammed into the statue and it bursts into a million pieces. That's your dream. [gasp] you're right, that's my dream. (15:20)

Here's the interpretation, hey Nebuchadnezzar you've been very successful here. You are like that head of gold, you

have amazing dominion and sovereignty over the people of the earth. Your leadership everything you've set out to do you've almost accomplished all that you could possibly want to accomplish. But you know what? Your kingdom is going to come to an end and it's going to give way to a silver kingdom. The Persian kingdom in connection with the Meds, we call it the Medo-Persian kingdom. And that's going to overtake Babylon and then it's going to, it's going to be overthrown in this midsection to Greece. And Greece here during in the intertestamental period is going to dominate. That's going to be kingdom that gives way to an iron kingdom, a strong iron kingdom and that will dominate, that's Rome. And then it will spilt and it will decentralize and you will have all kinds of kingdoms, you'll have kingdoms that are mixed with iron and some clay and it will go on and on and on until finally this big rock, I'll read it for you verse 44 Daniel chapter 2. At that point the God of heaven will setup a kingdom and it will never be destroyed. That kingdom it shall be a kingdom that will never be left to another people and it will bring all these other kingdoms to an end and it will stand forever. And that stone that you saw that was cut from a mountain not from human hands and it broke to pieces the iron and the bronze and the clay and the silver that's God's kingdom and a great God has made this known to the king and he's going to tell you what he's going to do after this. This dream is certain and its interpretation is sure, God will accomplish this. All the earthly kingdoms will give way to God's kingdom like a big rock that smashes all other kingdoms. And do I quote it enough for you from Revelation chapter 11 verse 15? I've already quoted, the kingdom of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. (17:06)

And you notice sometimes if you're really astute and observant sometimes you say the kingdoms of the world and sometimes you say the kingdom of the world. You know the early church use to take that kingdom of the world and they would quote this verse as the kingdoms of the world because in one sense there are a lot of kingdoms of the world that become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. But ultimately they're all related and categorically the earliest manuscripts tell us that it is the kingdom of this world because categorically all the kingdoms of the world are a rebel kingdom all related to the God of this world as 2 Corinthians 4:4 says. So we have a rebel kingdom and its manifestation some are better than the others, some are stronger than the others but ultimately every kingdom will be destroyed and all the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. That's how the early church began to begin to quote that verse as the plural. The idea of the kingdom of the world giving way to the ultimate kingdom is something as Daniel says that is certain and sure and the interpretation there's no errors in this all the kingdoms of the world will give way. (18:08)

That is something Jesus taught us to pray about everyday. How are you doing by the way on that prayer? Well, we worship God our Father who art in heaven. Hallow be thy name. You're a great God, thanks for being holy. Thanks for being provider. Thanks for being sustainer. First thing on my prayer list your kingdom come. Establish your kingdom. As the early church use to say, Maranatha, in Aramaic, Maranatha come quickly Lord Jesus. Come quickly. We're ready for the kingdom. We're on a team that's much maligned and despised but the kingdom is coming. And for us it's not a hope not a cross your fingers hope it's a settled reality. (18:41)

Let me show you a passage you should look at afresh. Ephesians chapter 1, you want to talk about God's planning being sure that you're participation is not in a organization that's on the wrong side of history because you hold up an ancient book that's in their minds puritanical and its wrong and its Victorian its backwards its backwoods. No, this is God's revealed word, it will be the constitution of the land when the kingdom of God supplants all other rebel kingdoms and he sets up his authority on this earth. Now, this is so much in this I wish we have time for the whole thing but let me jump into the middle of this run-on sentence in verse number 9. I say that because in Greek it's a long long sentence and even in English very long. Ephesians 1:9, making known to us the mystery of his will, certainly God has done that. His will, don't think that's just his wishes and his wants and cross your fingers hope, that's not it at all. He's made known to us the mystery which would otherwise not be known of his purpose, of his plan, of his decreed and determined forecast, which is not something he is worrying about, is contingent on anything. He sits outside of time when he makes these plans, it's a done deal. And it's all according to his purpose – there's a strong word – which he sets forth in Christ. Christ will be the king of this kingdom. As a plan – he's going to unfold for us in a timeline – in the fullness of time, now we're waiting for that. We started with a king who's been validated, I like to say he's been coronated and proven to us not only by his miraculous signs but physically by his resurrection from the dead. So we have a coronated king who has yet to inaugurate his kingdom as it says in Revelation, he's one day going to take his great power and he will begin to reign. That hasn't happened so we're waiting for the fullness of time. God's got a plan and he's working it. (20:31)

Now what will he do in the fullness of time? He will unite all things in Christ, all things under his jurisdiction and

his authority. Things in heaven, all the spiritual realm, every demonic spirit assigned to his place. Satan himself he's sequestered in a place never to bother mankind again. And on earth every person, every people, every group, every leader, every king, everyone subject to Christ. In him, in Christ we have obtained an inheritance having been – another strong word, we looked at will, purpose, plan, here's another one – predestined, this is decreed, it is settled, it's a done deal, it's a verdict and a mandate, its already done in God's mind according to – here's the word again – purpose, the purpose of him who. Now if we look at time he's working everything out, he works all things according to the counsel of his plan. It's all worked out. Now there's so much here we can continue to observe but for sake of time drop down to verse 18 (21:25)

This is the prayer for us to catch that to be instilled and bolstered with confidence in this. Having the eyes – he prays for the Ephesians and for us – of your hearts enlightened. May the inner person be emboldened and enlightened and understand this better that you may know what is the hope - how often have I said it, not the crossing your fingers, I hope it'll happen, but the assurance and the confidence in this – to which you've been called. You've been called to a hope, you've been called to a certain and settled confidence about God's plan. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance? What are we talking about? The fullness of the kingdom, the arrival of the kingdom, the reward for the saints. The glorious inheritance in the saints. And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe? He's the coach, he's the captain. Do you think this team is going to win? Man, think about his power and we're not forecasting it, it's done, it's settled. A timeless eternal God, he's got it done, but we look at his power and we recognize this is the winning team toward those who believe according to the working of his great might. Which he worked by the way in Christ when he raised him from the dead. You want to look at the future with confidence you better look at the past and the verification and the authenticity of God's faithfulness to keep his promises in what he's done, like raising Christ from the dead. Ala Isaiah 53, saying that he would do it and then he did it. And he's seated him now at the right hand of the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. Do you think there's any president any supreme court any judicial group? Do you think there's any kind of world governing body that is going to stay his hand? Impossible, all rule and authority, he trumps them all. And above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come if you're concerned about something on the horizon. There's no problems, no one is going to arrest his hand. (23:21)

Verse 22, he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to, oh the Bad News Bears, to us the church which is his body. When we walk around with the uniform of Christianity on, going yeah we're Christians we bear the name of Christ but you know, I believe our press we're kind of cultural outcasts and weirdoes. Stop it, we are citizens of a kingdom that will be established and everyone who reviled us will one day be ashamed, you will be vindicated and I will be vindicated for holding to the revealed will of God, you understand that? The kingdom is coming. He will be enthroned and every rival kingdom will be supplanted by his leadership. To put it in words of Job 42, remember Job finally gets rocked into sobriety at the end of the book? He says this to God, "I know that you God can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." I don't know what it's going to take in your life to have that kind of affirmation. There's nothing that God plans that will not take place. There's no intension of God that isn't going to be carried out. There's no opposition to God that will ever be successful in doing anything against God's decreed plan. (24:37)

Proverbs 19:21, many are the plans in the mind of a man. Proverbs 19:21, many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. If you're too busy as a temporal person, a creature on the timeline saying I don't believe there could be a God like that, you need to rethink everything about what the definition of the word God is. Of course he is the one who supersedes every human plan. In the words of Job no purpose of his could be thwarted. In the words of Solomon, it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. Now you got to take that at face value. It's as certain as me predicting that the US Hockey Team is going to beat the Soviets in 1990. Do you see what I'm saying with this silly illustration about predicting the past? I mean the odds are not on the US Team to beat you know the Russians in the you know Lake Placid in New York in the Winter Olympics but it's a done deal. And I can predict it now. I can predict it now with absolute certainty. And Christ has predicted that one day this thing called the church, this thing called the kingdom that will develop into Christ ruling over this entire planet, it's a done deal. It's more certain than any farmer putting a seed in the ground or any baker putting yeast inside some measures of flour. (25:53)

Be confident in God's incomparable plans, consider it. Think about it. Number 2, verse 19, the first illustration. Luke chapter 13 verse 19, well it is like a grain of mustard. I mean there is some analogy here that's worth noting. It's like a grain of a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, it grew and became a tree, and the birds



of the air made nests in its branches. Hmm, now follow me on this. In Daniel chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar has another dream. He dreams this time not of a statue but of a tree, a huge tree. A tree that he sees birds in the branches, he sees beasts under the shade of it and everything is copacetic because here's this wonderful tree with all kinds of fruit. People are eating its fruit, birds are living in their nests in its branches and there's animals lounging under the shade, what a beautiful tree so far decent dream not even worth sharing. Then an angel comes down tells another angel, chop it down. And chops it down to a stump. And here comes this beautiful majestic tree, crashes to the ground, and all that's left is a stump with this band of bronze around it. Weird. So he knows this trustworthy dream interpreter, and he calls Daniel and Daniel what is going on with this dream? (27:10)

And Daniel says this, Daniel 4:20, the tree that you saw which grew and became strong so that its top reached to the heavens. It was visible to the ends of the earth, whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit was abundant. In which food was given for all, under which the beasts of the field found shade, in whose branches the birds of the heavens live, oh that's you oh king. Because you've grown strong, your greatness has grown and its reached to the heavens, your dominion to the ends of the earth. And because the king saw the watcher, the holy one, the angel come down from heaven saying, "Chop down the tree and destroy it." Oh, but leave its stump and its roots in the earth and bind it with a band of bronze and iron. And the tender grass of the field and let it be wet with dew of heaven. Let its portion be with the beasts of the field for seven periods of time. Well, I hate to tell you and I wish the interpretation were for your enemies and not for you, but it's not about your kingdom, that's about you. You're a powerful sovereign majestic successful person but you're going to be chopped down for seven periods of time. (28:16)

Modern psychologists I guess, psychiatrists would call it lycanthropy, an insanity a form of madness that makes you think you're an animal. Do you know the story of Daniel 4? The great king and all his regalia with his jewels on and his scepter starts you know snorting around the fields like he's an animal. He becomes a crazy nut case. And all of that so that at the end of that period of time God can restore his reason and here's what he says. At the end of those days, bottom of Daniel 4, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to heaven, my reason returned to me and I blessed the most high and praise and honor him who lives forever for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing before him. And he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay his hand or say it him, what have you done now? Me, I used to think that was me, but that ain't me because God can withdraw from the synapse of my brain and I can go nuts. Now people came to me because I had a lot to offer in my kingdom. Sometimes I conscripted them and I enslaved them like I did with Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah and Daniel. I mean sometimes people come here because I make them come here, some people lounge in the shade because they like my kingdom. But you know what? I can't keep them because you're going to chop me down for a season and then you're going to take my kingdom of gold and turn it into a kingdom of silver and you're going to have a bunch of foreigners ruling the world and people will flee from my tree and go to another tree. So I know my authority is transient. (29:50)

Now follow me on this. Jesus says you know the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed and it grows up and it becomes a tree and you know there's not a Sabbath School Graduate that doesn't make this connection I got to think when they heard Jesus give this parable. And all the birds make their nests in it. And they go, oh yeah, yeah Nebuchadnezzar had a dream like that. And he learned how transient his authority was and how the only one with sovereign power is the one who just a few chapters later in Daniel 7 says there will come one like the Son of Man who sets up the kingdom and no one will take away his sovereignty. And he will be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, that one he's coming. That's a different kind of tree. Well what's the thing about his tree that makes the birds of the nest find their sustenance in the fruit in the shade all that comes from that tree? How is that tree different than the trees of Nebuchadnezzar or whoever else might set up a tree and a kingdom? Well because what draws people to that, not only is the permanence of that kingdom something that will be established but there's something about the connection to that kingdom that's different than any other kingdom connection. People come to Babylon or they come to Assyria or they come to Egypt or they come to Greece or Rome or they come to America or any other jurisdiction and they do it for a lot of reasons. And they may come and say I don't like it anymore and they go but it's not that way with the kingdom of God. The citizens are drawn by something invincible and indomitable. And if you want to update this from a New Testament perspective the thing that brings the birds if you will to the kingdom of heaven that continues to grow and provide sustenance for an increasing numbers of people it's something we call in the New Testament the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that makes converts that don't fly away to other branches. Number 2 on your outline; let's just think of it that way. In terms of the expansion of the kingdom via the gospel we have to be certain about our invincible gospel. (31:39)



2. Be Certain About Our Invincible Gospel

What is it that draws inhabitants or in our case citizens, kingdom citizens, to this thing called the Kingdom of God? Well it's the thing called The Gospel. And that gospel is unlike any other draw from any other thing. It is as Jesus said to Nicodemus something that you can't explain in human terms, it's something about the Spirit that comes and goes and blows where it wishes and its like people being born again. It is so profound it is like they're not there and then they're there and as Jesus put it it's like a Shepard calling his sheep, they hear his voice they come to him, they follow him. And then nothing separates them from him as he says in that passage you're in my hand and no one is able to snatch you out of my hand. You are permanent residents of the kingdom. Now when you think about that, not as one who considering becoming a resident of the kingdom, but one who is a resident of the kingdom and here are people applauding in the synagogue, look at what you did Jesus you are the prophet that is to come as our morning Bible reading said. You are the one; you're showing your majesty and your glory. I'm with you. See now they've been commissioned as every disciple was to take the invincible gospel the indomitable power of the gospel that changes people's lives and bring more people into this shade and fruit of this kingdom. And that is something he said from the beginning. Hey follow me and I'll make you creators of followers. Hey follow me poetically and I'll make you fishers of men. Be reconciled to me and I will give you the message of reconciliation. And that message powerful for expanding this organization called the kingdom. That thing is the power of God. I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God to everyone who believes no matter where they come from. You see creatures from all over the planet coming to this thing. (33:23)

Turn to this passage real quickly with me. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, I know we live in a day where if you're not tempted to be embarrassed that you're a Bible believing Christian then you must have your head deep in the sand. Because the mocking in our culture is being ramped up in a way that I think our grandparents would never have conceived or imagined. I mean you want to talk about the marginalization of us just adhering to the basic ethics of Christian sanctification it's getting worse and worse and worse. We are mocked, not only because of what we stand for but the core of our theology which is a crucified Christ, human sacrifice on a Roman execution rack so that my sins can be forgiven so that I can be qualified to enter the kingdom. That's a crazy message. Drop down to verse 18. (34:18)

It's a crazy message. If I say go out onto the campus of UCI this week. Find the professors and the scientists and the philosophers and say, [clap clap] you know what I'm all about? I all about God becoming man, dying on a cross, being tortured and beaten so that my sin could be atoned for by human sacrifice and I can be made right before a holy God and go an be with him in a kingdom that's coming. And all the people that despise it and all the people that mock it will be embarrassed and will grovel at his feet and then be cast out as the inheritors of the kingdom will brought in. They will laugh you out of the teacher's lounge. Get a spot on cable news and say I got an important thing to say during prime time news. Hey it's about Christ crucified, my sins nailed to his cross so that I can have my guilt forgiven because I'm a sinner and bound for hell but I have now permanent confidence in going to heaven because of what Christ did on a cross 2000 years ago. Quick commercial break. They're going to get you off right away. That's crazy talk. People are going to sit there at Harvard and Yale and Oxford and Cambridge and say you've lost your mind. That's nuts. That's what old people who feared lighting and thunder, who hid in caves, they believed that stuff. You can't be a modern, you want to talk about Christianity and talk about mosquito nets and digging wells and being nice and loving your neighbor. Well I guess that'll salvage your little religion thing but don't be talking to me about heaven and hell and sin and guilt and cross and a Christ. Does that set the stage for verse 18? (35:56)

For the word of the cross is folly. To who? To the team that thinks they've got it going on, and they're the losing team. And they've already lost according to God's playbook and it's done, it is in the books. You want to stay on that team? It's done, you're perishing. Oh but to those on the "Bad News Bears", to those on the "maligned" and "despised" team, man to us who are being saved, it's the power of God. It changes us and our status and it qualifies us to share in the inheritance with the saints. For it is written I will destroy, and you can put all these in quotes, the "wisdom" of the "wise". God is going to step on the stage and look at all the Hollywood elite just up the freeway, follow the 5 up to the fancy you know hills up there. Go there and talk to all the workers in the studio that are setting trends and pontificating on all kids of things and telling us what we should believe about all the things the Bible says. Go talk to them. Well, the Bible says the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning will all of that he's going to thwart. Now no one is going to thwart God's wisdom, no one is going to thwart God's

discernment. But he's going to thwart all of theirs. Oh by the way look at them now mocking here and calling these people. Hey, where is the one who is wise? Where the one who is wise? Hey where's the scribe - back in ancient days the top of the pyramid of the intellectual Jewish elite - the scribe, where's he? Bring him on. Where's the debater of the age? The Greeks love that. Where's the logic you know the man of logic who stands in the Areopagus and can debate anybody because he has reason. Where is he? Bring him on. Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world? Huh, well not right now he hasn't. I mean to us he should have but some of us are so afraid of our cultural elite we sit here and cower in their face. Listen God has made all of that foolish. For since in the wisdom of God, guess what they don't know? They don't know God. The world didn't God through their "wisdom". And it pleased God; God was happy and fine with this for the "folly" of what we preach to save those who believe. He's changing people's lives and pinning their sins to a cross. (38:04)

Now the Jews demand a sign and the Greeks they seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified. Which if you really think and put that into the context of the modern world and you standing before for all the people on television and all the hot shots on radio and all the people writing best selling books and say I want to talk to you about a crucified Christ. They'll stumble over that. The Jews don't like it; they can't imagine God becoming a man, dying on a cross. Muslims think that's nuts and crazy. The Gentile will sit there and mock you for thinking that's an important part. Aren't you good with God, isn't God loving? But to those who are called who of course he convicts and brings to a place of justification both Jews and Greeks he's plucking people out from all kinds of teams. Well Christ is the power of God and he is the wisdom of God for the foolishness of God, if you want to call it that as if God had any foolishness in him, it's wiser than men and the weakness of God as though he were weak, and of course he's not, it's stronger than men. By the way you want to talk about the Bad New Bears? Let's talk about your team. Consider your calling brothers. Oh I know it's looking pretty rag-tag here, not many of you are wise according to worldly standards not many of you are powerful, you know not many are of noble birth but God choose what is foolish in the world at least in their eyes to shame the wise. Why? Because we are going to walk into the kingdom while they grovel in shame and though their penitence will come too late they will recognize all that they maligned and mocked about the kingdom of God and about people that were kingdom citizens. It will be a source of eternal embarrassment for them. God choose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. He choose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God, verse 28, choose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to bring to nothing so that no human being might boast in the presents of God. Ask Nebuchadnezzar a pagan idolater a king who sat there in pagan temples he learned this lesson. Well no one is going to boast in the presents of God all authority belongs to him and because of him you're in Christ Jesus who became for us, and I hope I can open up the mic and you could testify to this, he became for us wisdom, real wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that we can stand back and really boast in a God who is all those things. And I hope not just on Sunday when we sing our songs cloistered in our auditorium. Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. (40:22)

You know why we're on the winning team? You know why our gospel is invincible and will never fail? Because God is among us and God is the author of the gospel. And there's no way this is going to lose. When Isaiah was prophesying about the coming Assyrians and how they defeat the Northern ten tribes, he answered the question of why are these people maligned and stumbling and opposed and conquered though they are, why are they the winners? And the answer was in something we sing every Christmas. Emmanuel, remember that? It comes from Isaiah 8, the prophesy of the child Emmanuel. And what does Emmanuel mean? God with us. Now here's the play on words as he talks about Assyria and he makes them to be this big power and then he says, "Oh but remember this. It will fall and like the Babylonians and like the successive Medo-Persians and the Greeks and the Romans. God will cycle through all these world kingdoms. And you can take counsel together; here it is I'm quoting Isaiah 8:10. Take counsel together, it will come to nothing; speak a word - you want to stand against us? great - It will not stand. Why? For God is with us. That's why this organization called the kingdom this thing that we call more specifically in New Testament times the church, not going to fail. God us among us, God is with us, God indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit if he didn't leave us orphans and when we see him face-to-face, it's over. The world and all that we're so concerned about fitting in with will be done. The kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. (42:07)

Acts chapter 18, Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia and Paul was preaching in the synagogues, he was testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And what happen there in verse 6 is what will happen for us today we just got to get use to it. I preached on it last week, they will oppose us and revile us. Just like they opposed and reviled Paul. But the Lord said to Paul a few verses later in verse 9 of Acts 18, do not be afraid the Lord says to Paul go on speaking and do not be silent. And that's my exhortation to you. Who feels like we are the outcast



marginalized losers on the wrong side of history Christians. Hey, don't be silent and here's his reason. For I am with you. I got a job for you and until you finish that job, he promises no one is going to attack you and no one is going to harm you. Why? I have many people in this city, there's more birds that are going to flock to this tree. There are more people that are going to be a part of the citizenship of the kingdom so I got work to do with you, you're a fisher of men, you're an ambassador of the kingdom, you're going to keep going about this if you just don't be silent. Keep on speaking. And he stayed there a year and six months in that place, teaching them the word of God. (43:24)

I know our culture is trying to scare you into silence. You need to speak up. Our gospel is invincible. Yeah, it'll be foolishness to a lot of people, you'll get a lot of rolled eyes, I understand that. But to those who are being saved, it's a life changing transforming eternity hinging power of God. Be certain about our invincible gospel, this tree is going to grow and a lot more birds are going to find their home in this thing called the kingdom. (43:52)

Verse 21, Luke 13. Second comparison, well the kingdom is also like leaven a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it is all leaven. Now we don't dare to make our own break in our house, maybe you do. Unless you know the ancient languages you don't know how much three measures of flour is, you've got to figure out what's the word, how does it translate, how much is that. Let me just tell you this, this is almost a comical statement. This is a lot of flour. If you're talking about some domestic situation where a woman is trying to bake some bread for her family, I'm thinking you don't need three measures of flour. I mean you can feed about 150 people with three measures of flour, in the 1st century if you take these words and do the word study and figure out. We're talking about a ton of bread; I mean this is not gluten free bread. But this is bread that'll just zap you man. That's a lot of bread to feed to your friends. He must be having a big party. Now how much leaven does it take? Well, that's the hard part about it, it's like a seed, it just keeps on infecting the whole thing. Well you're going to have a lot of dough and that little yeast micro-organism is going to keep metabolizing all that sugar in that dough and it's going to let off carbon dioxide, it's going to make those nice bubbles inside that dough, and it's going to raise that dough, and you're going to bake it and it'll be great. It'll be fabulous. It's a lot but it's just a little bit of leaven, a little bit of micro-organism that gets in there and does its thing. (45:17)

Now what's interesting about this is that a chapter ago, Jesus brought up the illustration of leaven and it wasn't a good one. Do you remember? Matter of fact, beware, beware. Beware of what? Beware the leaven of the Pharisees. Now I don't mean to make too much of this, but when you just taught us to beware of the leaven and now you're going to say, "Oh now the kingdom of God is like leaven." What are you saying by that? Well, what's the warning to us about the Pharisees? There's something going on with the Pharisees, he has to warn us of. Why? Because leaven, that yeast is so insidious, it's so undetectable, you don't even know it's there. And sometimes it just gets in there and does its thing secretly in the privacy of that dough, and you can't see it, so be careful. There's some things about the Pharisees you got to make sure it doesn't get in you. (46:02)

When it comes to the kingdom it's a lot like that. There's this hidden thing, as a matter of fact that's the verb. A woman she took this leaven and she hid it in three measure of flour. And what happen to the whole, it just leavens the whole thing. So I just want to highlight that, I've got to think this is part of what Jesus is trying to emphasize as he turns from the tree which is a familiar illustration in the Bible to leaven which is usually a negative illustration and now that leaven is a positive illustration about the secret, undetectable, mysterious way that the kingdom accomplishes God's decreed plan. (46:37)

Now I'll put it this way, when we don't see things working out the way that we would plan them out. When we talk about mysterious ways of God, it's usually because we're looking at it, going that's not the way I'd do it, I don't think that's the right way. If its between Christ coming in the first coming and he's going to establish a kingdom by his second coming, this is the straight line and I'm thinking, look at this, circuitous path of church history. Look at the way even in America, I'm thinking, you had kind of a good start here regarding biblical principles and I think it would ramp up this direction and it's going that direction and over here and over there. I'm thinking wow, I wouldn't write church history this way. I wouldn't write American history this way, God you must be out of control, you must not be working your plan right now. No, no, no, he is working his plan. Sometimes it's secret; sometimes it hidden, sometimes it's mysterious. Sometimes it is – here's a biblical word – inscrutable. Love that word, biblical word. At least in English it translates one word, one time in the ESV in Romans chapter 11 verse 33. Which reminds us, you know if the way you do it would be this way and God does it that way, just remember this he smarter than you, and he says it much more poetically. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!



How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways! God's working a kingdom and he's bringing in a group of citizens, birds if you will, in to the kingdom. And sometimes we think, well that's not the way I'd do it if I'm recruiting people for the coming kingdom. I wouldn't make things happen this way. I wouldn't let persecution break out that way. I wouldn't let the rise of militant Islam take root here. I wouldn't have that big Dark Ages in the middle of the church; I wouldn't do it like that. God are you sure you're at work? Yes, number 3; don't doubt God's inscrutable methods. (48:18)

3. Never Doubt God's Inscrutable Methods

I understand it's not the way that you would do it; you would council him to do different. Well let me read the next verse there in Romans chapter 11. Oh, the depths the riches the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable are his ways! Who's known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor? Well that's a rhetorical question, no one; no one is going to council him on this. Who's given a gift to him that he might repay? You can't manipulate his plan, why? Because verse 36, from him and through him and to him are all things. God is working his plan and sometimes it's a little bit of a head scratcher. Why did you do that? (49:00)

I know we doubt when things don't seem to go the way we would expect them to go if we're moving toward a collection of people to inherit the kingdom, I'm thinking you're not going to do it that way. But remember this, sometimes the church wants the easy path and the easy path closes in the doors of how we go about our work and it keeps us focused and introverted and centralized and we don't do the work we're called to do, because when it comes to a kingdom, let me read you the song in heaven. As they sing the song in heaven about Christ who takes the scroll, opens the seals it says this. This is Revelation 5:9. You were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe, every language, every people and every nation. So he's got people he's purchased as it says there in Acts 18. I have people in the city, there's more birds that are going to be brought into the kingdom. And he says and you've made them a kingdom – you've turned them into a kingdom – and priests to God and they will reign on the earth. I love that. You're bringing people from every tongue, tribe and nation into a kingdom that will then reign on earth when the kingdom is established. (50:08)

Well, that's important, can I take you back in your mind to Acts 18? I quoted here as Paul got opposition and he was reviled from the leader of the synagogue. And then he said, here's what he said next, I didn't read this for you. When he was opposed and reviled, he shook out his garments and said to them – this is Acts 18:6 – he said, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." And a lot of us put our flag in the ground and say, "That's where he turned to the Gentiles." But note what happens next. He tries to go to the Gentiles, verse 7. He left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus. Does that sound like a Jewish name? No, that's a Gentile, he's a Roman. Titius Justus. So he says, "I'm going to work with the Gentiles." Rest of the verse, his house was next door to the synagogue – it wasn't the synagogue he left, it's a different synagogue. Crispus, verse 8, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And then it says, many of the Corinthians were hearing Paul and they believed and they were baptized. I just want to show you this interesting way God slams the door shut on synagogue 1 and the ruler says, "You're crazy, get out of here." And he says, "I'm going to the Gentiles." And he starts with a Gentile, Titius Justus and he starts sharing the gospel, he's a God fearer, he's not a Jew and he just happens to live next door to the synagogue, who has Crispus as the leader that we learn about there in Corinthians that Paul ends up baptizing his whole house becomes a Christian household and then it opens up the door to a lot of conversions of Jewish people. And I think to myself, that wasn't Paul's plan but it was God's plan. (51:48)

And he won some Gentiles and that was his plan but it was God's plan to win some more Jews. And then if you look at the book of Acts you'll see sometimes when God slams the door on the church in Jerusalem through persecution they scatter. And they scatter and do exactly what God wants, and that is to collect the people from every tribe, every language, every people and every nation. All I'm trying to say is this. You will doubt God's work in your life as a kingdom participant to expand the kingdom when bad things happen. You'll lose your job and end up in another city. You'll get cancer and you'll be sitting there getting to know everybody on the Oncology ward at your hospital. And you'll say, "Wow, I didn't expect this. I expected to be here doing this but instead I'm over here and doing that." If you understand your role as a bird in the kingdom, trying to get more birds in the branches to see this kingdom expand and expand and expand until every seat is full so that Christ can come back and establish his kingdom permanently. Well then you'll recognize that every left turn, every closed door, every detour is exactly what God is doing to advance his cause. So much so that you can say this with much more confidence I hope.

(52:58)

Romans 8:28, that God works together all things for good to those that love him and are called according to – here's this Ephesians 1 word – to his purpose. God's got a purpose for you and it's not for health and wealth and happiness. It's for you to be his ambassador. It's for you to be his fisher of men; it's for you to be an active voice of the coming kingdom, an ambassador of the coming kingdom in a way that's unabashed and unafraid of what the world thinks of you. So that you can see a path opened up as John the Baptist was described as opening up for the coming of the Lord. Not the first coming but the second coming. You've got to recognize that God even in the left turns and the difficulties of your life just like it was in Genesis 50 verse 20, though people will mean things in your life for evil and even Satan, in your body, in your economics, people in this world will do it for evil persecution is going to break out. I suspect in a new way, in our culture against Bible believing Christians. And though they will mean it for evil, God will mean it for good. And you have to have that kind biblical optimism knowing that that's exactly how God will prove himself. How can God use bad things for good? What's the worse thing ever happened in human history? And what is the most unjust, terrible, awful thing that ever happened? Well, I guess if you were to rate it, the most unjust, terrible, awful thing that ever happened was the perfect innocent lamb of God being spat upon having a crown of thorns bashed into his head, to having nails driven through his hands and his feet, hoisted up on a Roman execution rack, mocked and suffocate to death. That's pretty bad. The perfect one. You can say the wages of sin is death, he's not a sinner. (54:43)

When Peter preached about that horrific event, he said, "Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, now you should have embraced him, he was attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs God did in your midst as you yourselves know. This Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Huh, you mean God is working his good plan in the worst of things that could ever happen? Yeah, and instead of us having the biblical optimism to see that for what it is, we are like the world, we start complaining every time we have an ache and a pain. Oh, but mine is more than an ache and a pain Pastor Mike. I can appreciate the depth of your pain and the unmet expectations in your life. But if you're a part of the kingdom of God, kingdom citizen you've got a God that has made an incomparable plan, he's carrying it out, he's given us an invincible gospel and sometimes he'll employ some inscrutable methods to get his purpose done in your life and mine. You have to believe that. The apex of which is the worse thing that could ever been imagined ends up being the most blessed thing we sing about and Jesus said remember it, remember it, remember it. Remember it! (55:54)

Well, it'll start up this afternoon I'm sure the bad press that you and I will be tempted to believe about the team that we're on. It is an all out assault against those who affirm the historic tenants of the Christian faith, who believe in the revelation of Christ, who trust in the perfect track record, the perfect prophetic track record of Christ. You'll be tempted to believe we're on the losing team, on the wrong side of history, and it'll affect your play if you will. You may be a dutiful Christian but we need some extraordinary things in these times of increasing opposition. We need Christians that are willing to stand strong in the face of whatever may come. We need you to be parents that prepare your children for a kind of world to stand on the solid rock of the truth of Christ. We've got to believe what God says, preceding the verses that I quoted in Ephesians 1 he puts it this way that we ought to be thanking God, blessing God, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing, not here, in the heavenly places. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him, in love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise not of our goodness but of his glorious grace with which he's blessed us in the beloved in Christ. In him we have redemption, through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. That's why we are winners because Christ has died for us. (58:05)

Back to the first verse you ever learned, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that who ever would believe in him would not perish but have ever lasting life. We're citizens of the kingdom if you are a Christian and that is something that should change the way you live the Christian life this week. Bold, confident. I mean the words I used were confident in God's incomparable plan, certain about the gospel the invincible indomitable nature of the gospel. And not doubting, not depressed, not distracted by the setbacks in our lives but understand that God uses some pretty inscrutable methods to carry out his plans, closed doors, difficulties, suffering, persecution. Jesus said in the world you will have tribulation but take heart you know I've overcome the world. I'm thinking, have you? I



doesn't look like it. No, no, I have, I know it starts and it looks like a mustard seed, it starts and it looks like a little bit of yeast, tiny little micro-organism you can't even see, trust me on this, it's a done deal. It's been decreed, it's been predestined, it's been planned, it's been purposed and you and I are a part of it because of the broken body and spilt blood of Christ. These are pictures and symbols, I don't know how you were raised you may think these turn in magically to something else, they don't. Jesus was very clear about that, he said a lot of things about being the light of the world, about being a fountain of life, about being a door, he's not a piece of wood and when he raised this cup and said this is the blood of my covenant later he said I hope you understand this I will not drink of this fruit of the vine again so it's very clear what it is and what it isn't. And I love this phrase, until I drink it anew with you in the kingdom. (59:46)

Kingdom, it's all about a kingdom focus. It's all about the coming of Christ that's how he taught us to pray. And I hope we're prepared for that because we have incorporated, from a human perspective, the benefits of the death of Christ through faith and repentance and if this is a reality for you and as Christ intended a reminder to you what Christ has done to make us inheritors of the kingdom. I'll read it again, it's such a great great phrase that in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses, I love that, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. That's good news, stand with me as I dismiss us in prayer. (1:00:25)

God you know this time to you it's not a mystery, we're not open theists here, we don't think that you don't understand the future. You're not just an odds maker. You know the beginning from the end because you've planned it all out. You're not bound by time, you are the eternal, immortal God and so when you tell us about how this all ends, we believe you, we affirm that we believe you and we want that confidence to effect the way that we live the Christian life this week. Let us have boldness, not to be brash or rude, continue to speak with gentleness and respect but not to cower, not to be afraid, to be confident about the coming kingdom and to work to get as many people involved in kingdom living, embracing the king as many as we possibly can. So loosen our tongue, open our mouth, let us be your good ambassadors this week I pray. Thanks so much for forgiveness through the grace that was lavished upon us in Jesus name. Amen. (1:01:32)