

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

March 17

2024

Church Growth

Two short parables that have to do with kingdom growth are found in Matthew 13:31-33. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which is indeed the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them. The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

Perhaps the Lord is suggesting that the kingdom (church) enjoys two kinds of growth - external and internal. The kingdom was (and is) produced by seed - the word of God (Luke 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23). From a small beginning on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the church grew until, in a few years, there were churches of Christ in every major city of the Roman Empire. We are reminded of the prophecy found in Daniel 2. The stone cut without hands, became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the kind of growth symbolized by the mustard seed - growth that could readily be seen.

Leaven produces growth of a different nature. Dough rises and may even overflow the container, but the leaven is working on the inside. As each citizen in the kingdom feeds on the milk and meat of the word, strength builds (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Both kinds of growth are essential. External growth means that souls are being

saved, and internal growth means that the spiritual vitality necessary to Christian living is developing.

When local church growth is under consideration, there are other circumstances involved. There are some congregations that have grown rapidly in numbers, but with conversions few and far between. Because of their location in developing areas, they have been able to profit from the preaching and teaching of others. Then there are churches that have experienced unusual growth in size because of serious internal difficulties in other congregations. Also, over the years all of us have known of local churches that have determined to grow even at the expense of faithful churches of Christ. Sometimes this is referred to as "sheep stealing." Another means of growing, some churches have learned, is to tolerate sin. A local church might acquire a reputation of being the place to go if you want to gamble, get involved in adulterous marriages, or drink a little. Then, some churches of Christ have embraced the social gospel in order to grow enough to attract attention. They have learned from our denominational neighbors that a lot of people like to have their sensual appetites satisfied. And so they build their kitchens and so-called fellowship halls, install recreational equipment, bus young people to amusement parks, build "family life centers," and on and on and on. Now, one of the latest fads to attract the attention of those caught up in the growth syndrome is to always to be positive. The statement, "Churches don't grow on negative preaching" can be heard in some quarters.

We rejoice over every sinner that is led to the Lamb of God. There is no other way that God's universal kingdom can grow in number. There is no other way that the "little stone" can become a "great mountain and fill the whole earth." Likewise, we thank God for the growth "in grace and in knowledge" of God's people. But at the same time, we need to be cautious of placing emphasis on numbers. It can lead to compromising the truth, stealing sheep, embracing false doctrine, involving the church in unauthorized activities, and failing to plainly and forcefully condemn sin.

 Aude McKee

Do All Roads Lead To Heaven?

Have you ever heard someone say “all roads lead to heaven?” I venture to say, if you have ever had a discussion about spiritual things with very many people you have probably at some point in time heard this statement made. Why? Well, I believe it is simply because there are many today who fail to understand and comply with the plain teachings of the Bible. Therefore, many often make such a statement when they are asked a reason for why they believe or practice certain things in which the Scriptures speak nothing about or approve. So, knowing that, let’s examine the question, “do all roads lead to heaven?”

In answering that question, I begin by reminding us of these words of Jesus, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). First of all let’s point out the fact that God the Father is in heaven (Matthew 6:9, 10:32-33, 23:9). Secondly, let’s notice that Jesus informed that He is the way and not a way. Thirdly, understand that Jesus made it very clear that no one comes to the Father who is in heaven except through Him. So, a careful examination of this passage simply tells us that there are not many roads that lead to heaven, but rather there is only one road (i.e. through Jesus Christ) that leads to heaven.

Therefore, the statement “all roads lead to heaven” is false. For, the Bible simply teaches that there is one and only one way to the Father in heaven and that one way is through Jesus Christ. So, if we want to go to heaven, we must do the will of the Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21). We must believe in Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-17). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30). We must confess Jesus Christ before men (Matthew 10:32;

Romans 10:9-10). We must be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38), and therefore put on Christ through baptism (Galatians 3:26-29). Then, we must keep all of His commandments (Luke 6:46; John 12:48-50, 14:15, 15-14), and remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10), knowing that He is the author of salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

So, remember, “all roads do not lead to heaven” and although there is a way that seems right to a man, its end is a way of death (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25). Therefore, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (i.e. by His authority), giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:17). For by doing so, and only by doing so, will you be on the road that leads to heaven (Revelation 22:14)!

 Brad Phillips

Belleville church of Christ

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Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	4:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

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