

As children most of us were introduced to a young girl named Alice who fell down a rabbit hole into a very strange world of imaginary creatures. *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* plays with logic in some clever and often confusing ways and has sometimes been described as a genre called “literary nonsense.” The fictitious Alice was the invention of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson who made up the elaborate tale for young Alice Liddell and two of her friends. Alice was the daughter of Henry Liddell, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and Dean of Christ Church.

The story has been interpreted in many ways. Neurologists see within the scenes of the story a neurological condition that impairs people’s body image. Grace Slick of Jefferson Airplane (along with a host of hippies in the 60’s) thought the story described a drug-induced psychedelic experience. Charles Dodgson, a.k.a. Lewis Carroll, was hardly a hippie. In fact, he was a pastor’s son who wanted to be a pastor himself. Unfortunately he never pursued ordination in part because he stuttered. (The character “DoDo” was created out of Do...Do... Dodgson).

Dodgson grew up on stories about a strange kingdom very different than the kingdom of this world; a kingdom Jesus described in detail to His disciples. It must have seemed to them like Wonderland where, ***“Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see.”*** Stories about this kingdom, like Dodgson’s stories, are best appreciated by children. In fact, Jesus said, **“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*.” Mark 10:15**

Lewis Carroll wouldn’t be the first English author to describe the kingdom in a creative way. J. R. R. Tolkien, inspired by the biblical narrative, invented a land inherited not by the biggest and the strongest but by curious little creatures called Hobbits.

I suppose we’ll never know whether Charles Dodgson had the kingdom of God in mind when he wrote *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* but one thing is for sure – Jesus had the kingdom of God in mind every time He opened His mouth. He told stories to His disciples, strange stories that blew their circuits and turned conventional wisdom on its head. Jesus was captivated by the Kingdom. He had seen it. He was the architect of it. He knew what the reign of God would look like in our lives and in the world to come. He also knew it is hard for us to picture what life would be like in such a kingdom. Everything is so different from what we are used to, we feel a little like Alice in Wonderland. That’s why Jesus spent so much time explaining to His disciples what the kingdom of God is and how it works. Let’s consider some of the differences between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of man.

#### Kingdom of man

Visible  
Temporary  
Advances by force  
Power is found in strength  
weakness

#### Kingdom of God

Invisible  
Eternal  
Advances by faith  
Power is found in

Eliab shall be king  
Intuitive  
Salvation by human effort

David shall be king  
Counter-intuitive  
Salvation by God's grace

Note: There is a tension between these two kingdoms that we all carry within us. Eg. we all know people who attended a church that was a kingdom of man and not a kingdom of God. Yet it is hard to keep the balance of the church as a visible institution and as an invisible family.

Note: One way to measure growth is by how our behavior is shaped by the kingdom to come. Eg. tithing makes no sense financially in the kingdom of this world.

In Mt. 13:33-35 Jesus tells two parables that give us more insight into the kingdom.

**The Mustard Seed: An inconspicuous beginning...** 13:31-32. The mustard seed is a tiny seed. The size of the resulting plant is out of all proportion to the size of the seed. Jesus was telling His disciples, "Don't let the current inconspicuous nature of the kingdom fool you into believing that it will not come. It will have a small, inconspicuous beginning and then, over a period of time, will grow until Jesus reigns over all." In fact, Jesus quotes from Daniel 4 which contains a vision Nebuchadnezzar that all the nations of the earth would be drawn to a tree and rest in its shade and protection like birds in a mustard bush.

Using a mustard seed to describe the kingdom of God would have shocked the crowd. Israel believed that when God's kingdom was established on the earth, it would be a great and mighty kingdom. They were not prepared for such an insignificant beginning. Jesus is saying that the kingdom is already present but in a still tiny manifestation. Some who heard Jesus' description no doubt despised this manifestation of the kingdom and rejected his teaching about it.

**The Leaven: An irresistible transformation...** 13:33. Like leaven in a loaf, the kingdom is hidden, and not exposed like you would expect. Eventually you can see the effects of leaven but you don't see the leaven. God's activity is often hidden. He doesn't show up on the evening news. He is at work off the world's radar. Even when God shows up His appearance is often suppressed in this kingdom. Remember Colt McCoy's words after being knocked out of the national championship game? "I always give God glory. I never question why things happen the way they do. I know God is in control of my life. I'm standing on a rock." Those words were never replayed on Sports Center. This kingdom values the visible over the invisible.

The leaven of the Gospel grows and spreads in the most unlikely circumstances and under the harshest conditions. That's what happened in the book of Acts. For those of you who have accepted the 2010 challenge and "Joined the Journey" through the book of Acts, you know that the headline of these first chapters of Acts is: "The Gospel goes viral." There are 120 believers in Acts 1:15; 3,000 in 2:41; 5,000 in 4:4; and "multitudes" in 5:14. In modern terms, the kingdom spread like a virus. In the kingdom of man the early church doesn't stand a chance. The leaders had no formal training, they had no professional pastors, no church buildings, no choirs or worship bands, no marketing strategy, yet the kingdom grows. It cannot be seen and it cannot be stopped. The lesson of the mustard seed and the leaven is that **the kingdom of**

**God is presently imperceptible but ultimately irresistible.** Jesus inaugurated the kingdom with the words, “The kingdom is among you,” it is here, but the only way to see it is with the eyes of your heart.

In closing I want you to remember two things:

**Because the kingdom of God is invisible we lay hold of it by faith.** Jesus said, “Unless you are born again you will not see the kingdom of God.” **John 3:3**. We are born again when we transfer our trust from ourselves to Jesus. How much faith do we need? **Matthew 17:20** says, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.” Never underestimate the power of the smallest bit of faith in the King.

On my first visit to Israel I had the good fortune to visit the Herodium. It is a little harder to visit today because it is in Palestinian controlled territory and no Jewish cab or bus driver will take you there. The Herodium was one of Herod’s magnificent fortress-palaces. He had a voracious appetite for building things bigger and better and one day He spotted two mountains just south of Bethlehem and ordered his workers to remove the top of one and build up the other to prepare his burial place. The Herodium is only about eight miles south of Jerusalem and it is visible on a clear day from the Mt. of Olives. When Jesus talked about faith that can move mountains the disciples could very well have been thinking of this remarkable project of Herod’s to literally move one mountain to the top of another. Jesus was saying there are two ways to move a mountain; with 20,000 slaves over a three year period or you can put your faith in me and accomplish even greater things. It’s not the size of our faith that moves mountains. It is the object of our faith that accomplishes great things.

**Because the kingdom of God is irresistible we should never underestimate the size and significance of our contribution to His kingdom.** In God’s kingdom there are no little people and no little jobs. Last Wednesday we heard the State of the Union address by our President. This morning John Owen, Bible Story Bob, will be telling Bible stories to preschool children. John misses church every week to tell stories to kids. He watches the webcast during the week. Is it possible that Bible Story Bob’s address to the children is eternally more significant than the President’s address to the nation? Scott and Becky Palmer are teaching Kindergarten children. A small thing? Not in God’s kingdom. Leslie Rortvedt has taught the same group of girls since they were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Now they are in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Significant? Count on it.

Those who do the most good in this present kingdom are those who see the invisible. Those who cannot see the unseen will never rise above the kingdom of this world. My first glimpse of this truth came from an unlikely source. Not long after I became a Christian I saw the movie, “To Kill A Mockingbird.” A black man in a Southern town was falsely accused. A white lawyer named Atticus Finch took the case and faced the invisible enemies of hatred, racism, bigotry, and a good ol’ boy system. He paid dearly for his unpopular commitment to truth and justice. He and his children were shunned, even threatened by the community. The trial was a sham, an innocent man was convicted, and Atticus Finch suffered a humiliating defeat...OR

DID HE? In spite of his defeat, as he left the courtroom that day some people noticed his commitment to justice. WATCH...That's the Gospel folks. That's what we live for – the applause of heaven. In this fallen world sin reigns supreme. You can cave in and surrender or, by faith fight the good fight. When you do, you may lose in this life but a cloud of witnesses watch from the balcony cheering you on. In God's kingdom losers ultimately win. That's the message embodied in the cross.