

Parables of the Kingdom – Talk #3 – Kingdom Growth- Matt 13:31-33

You know the nursery rhyme, “Mary, Mary quite contrary how does your garden grow?” Do you remember that from when you were a kid? Well let’s ask Jesus the same question, shall we? “Jesus, Jesus, ‘Son of David’ how does your kingdom grow? And Jesus gives us these 2 parables, these 2 word-pictures. **The mustard seed and the yeast to show us what his kingdom is like and how it grows in the world.** That’s a massive surprise. When you think of a kingdom, growing in the world- that’s not how you imagine it! You naturally think of military might and majesty and power, don’t you? You think of conquering lands and taking cities. You think of massive parades of soldiers and tanks and missiles and helicopters and fighter planes. If you were a Jew in Jesus’ day, this would come as a massive surprise. They were expecting the Messiah to come and smash all their enemies. They thought God’s kingdom would come with power and great glory. Jesus, Jesus, ‘Son of David’ how does your kingdom grow? And Jesus says, – it will grow from the smallest and most insignificant of beginnings – a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, so small you can hardly see it, and it will grow quietly and secretly like yeast in a lump of dough. Let’s take a look at that:- I have 2 main points and a bunch of applications.....

1. My first point is this- - “**from little things big things grow**” (apologies to Paul Kelly) Look at vs 31, Jesus says, “**The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree,**” Now this is not a botany lesson. Strictly speaking the mustard seed is not the smallest of seeds- it’s tiny- it’s probably the smallest seed they were used to handling. It’s so tiny-about a millimetre in diameter. Jesus is speaking proverbially here not scientifically. When the rabbis spoke about a minute drop of blood, they spoke of a drop like ‘a mustard seed’. In other words, it’s something so small you would hardly notice it. And to be botanically accurate it doesn’t grow into a tree, it’s more like a shrub or a bush, which grows to about 4 or 5 ft tall. And that’s significant, because if Jesus wanted to show the

greatness and the grandeur of his kingdom, he would have chosen a **Huon Pine** or a **Cedar of Lebanon** not a **garden shrub**. But that's not his point. The Jews knew that God's kingdom would be magnificent. What they didn't know was **how it would grow**. This great and glorious kingdom they have been waiting for, will grow from the smallest and most insignificant of beginnings, to fill the whole earth. Look what it says in **vs 32, "...the birds come and perch in its branches."** That's almost certainly an allusion to our OT reading in **Ez.17:23**, where the birds symbolize the gentile nations coming to know the God of Israel. This is no mere backyard shrub. It's more like **the magic beanstalk that Jack sowed in his back garden, with the branches getting bigger and taller until they push their way up into the clouds**. And that is precisely what's happening, even as I speak. This OT prophecy is being fulfilled right now as the gospel is preached. **Spin a globe** and randomly put your finger on it and chances are there's **a bird on the branch**, if you know what I mean. Here's this great mustard tree filled with all the birds of the air, just as Jesus said. There are exotic Brazilian birds, and inscrutable Chinese, and laid-back Australians, and dour Scots and stiff upper- beaked English birds. And the sight and the sound of it is awesome isn't it? Look around this room tonight and you can see it can't you? The Kingdom of Heaven, this little mustard seed planted in Galilee two thousand years ago has grown into a tree – the biggest, longest-living kingdom in history! The Egyptian empire? The Assyrian empire? The Babylonian Empire? The Aztec empire? The Ottoman empire? The Mongol empire? The Roman empire? The British empire? Christianity has outlived them all, by 2000 years and counting. It has spread over all the earth, and all kinds of exotic birds are perched in its branches. And some of you are here tonight! And all from such insignificant and unimpressive beginnings. Think of it- **Jesus of Nazareth, born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman; Never wrote a book; Never held an office; Never had a family or owned a home. Didn't go to college. Never travelled more than 200 miles from the place he was born. Did none of the things usually associated with greatness. And yet today he is the central figure of human history. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on earth as much as this One**

Solitary Life. The mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, so small you can hardly see it, and yet it grows into the largest bush in your backyard, and the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. ‘From little things big things grow’ And then it says in - vs 33, “He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” And here’s our second point! In the Kingdom of God....

2. “A little goes a long, long, way” Look at it with me, vs 33.... “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” – 60 pounds of flour is enough to feed 150 people! That’s a huge loaf of bread! Nowadays it’s the men who make the bread isn’t it, not the women? **We used to be the breadwinners now we are the bread makers.** If you’re a sensitive, new age guy like me, you will know how to make bread. I remember when we first had a bread machine, proudly misreading the instructions and putting in a tablespoon of yeast instead of a teaspoon. The results were dramatic! You see with yeast, a little goes a long, long way. A tiny pinch will permeate the whole lump and cause the dough to rise and fill your house with the delicious aroma of fresh bread. There’s something about the smell of fresh bread isn’t there? Supermarkets have been known to put it in their air conditioning to entice customers in. **That’s how my kingdom grows,** says Jesus, like yeast in the dough, secretly and mysteriously doing its work. It’s hidden, it works invisibly but it has enormous influence and power to change things. In Luke 17:20, Jesus told a bunch of pharisees- ‘the kingdom of God doesn’t come in ways that can be observed, it is within...,’ It doesn’t come with an outward show of pomp and pageantry. You can’t say here it is or there it is. It’s not an earthly kingdom at all, yet it penetrates every level and area of society. The early church had no great strategy of evangelism and yet they turned the world upside down. They reached the world because they lived lives that demonstrated the kingdom. It was infectious. The gospel was caught as well as taught. God’s kingly rule is not remote from the world but hidden in it to benefit it. Did you know for example that the first institution for the blind was founded by Thalassius, a

Christian Monk. The first free dispensary was founded by Apollonius, a Christian merchant. The first hospital was founded by Fabiola a Christian woman. Paganism doesn't produce compassion, Christianity does. Paganism leaves sick new-born babies on the hillside to die, Christianity takes them in to enable them to live. What is that? It's the **yeast in the dough**- it's the message of Jesus transforming society. It's the aroma of Christ in the world. One of the greatest periods of social improvement in England was during the latter part of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century. While France had a bloody revolution in the name of the Enlightenment, England had revival under the preaching of Wesley and Whitfield. Hundreds of thousands of people were born again under the preaching of the gospel. Including William Wilberforce and the Earl of Shaftesbury. And it led to the abolition of slavery and prison reform and the improvement of working conditions and a whole lot more. What is that? It's the yeast in the dough- it's the message of Jesus transforming society. It's the aroma of Christ in the world. In 1904 there was a massive revival in Wales – a million people converted in just a few months- and Wales became known as the land of the white gloves- because when judges had no crime to try, they wore white gloves. What is that? It's Jesus growing his kingdom in the world. It's the yeast in the dough. It's the message of Jesus, penetrating peoples` lives, affecting whole communities, transforming society **But it`s hidden- it`s secret, it`s mysterious. Not everyone sees it!** You can have the highest IQ in the world and not see it. James Watson and Francis Crick were awarded the 1962 Nobel prize for discovering the structure of DNA. And in his acceptance speech Watson said something really stupid. He said “I didn't get to be where I am by meekness. What future can there possibly be for a religion that promotes self-denial and humility- it's doomed to failure from the start.” He said, “The 2 stupidest sentences in the English language are, “love thine enemy” and, “the meek shall inherit the earth.” What a fool! A brilliant fool, but a fool, nevertheless. Blind unbelief will never be impressed by the kingdom of heaven. “The things of the Spirit of God are foolish to the natural man, Paul says in 1 Cor 2, he will not understand them - they are spiritually discerned.” Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Unless you are born again, you won't even see the kingdom, let alone enter it.”

Now let me apply this to you as I close..

- **Don't despise the day of small things.** Remember a little goes a long, long way in gospel work. "From little things big things grow." That conversation over the photocopier at work, or at the school gates, exchanging a few words with your neighbours, teaching the kids in SS, inviting someone to a meeting etc. Kingdom work seems so ordinary and unimpressive doesn't it. Just saying your prayers and living for Jesus every day and yet that is how the yeast works with dramatic results. So don't despise the day of small things and.....

- **Don't despair of ever seeing kingdom growth.** It's no accident that these 2 little parables are placed here slap bang in the middle of the wheat and the weeds. Matthew does that deliberately to show us that God's kingdom grows even in the midst of Satanic opposition. This whole section in Matthews' gospel begins with a very provocative statement from Jesus back in 11:12. **"The Kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing and violent men take it by storm"** It's growing, often in the midst of severe opposition but it's unstoppable. Victor Hugo, the French writer says this, **"like the trampling of a mighty army is the force of an idea whose time has come."** The message of the kingdom is **an idea whose time has come.** It advances not by force or military might but by persuasion, and nothing will stop it filling the earth. The day will come when **"the earth will be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."** So don't despise the day of small things and don't despair of ever seeing kingdom growth and

- **Don't forget, there's still room in those branches for many more birds.** There are still unreached people groups. There are still regions of the world where the gospel is not growing very much, places like Japan and Jordan, Italy and Ireland and many other places. Jesus said **"This message of the kingdom must first be preached all over the world and then the end will come."** So don't stop sowing the seed, don't stop supporting world mission. And closer to home.....

- **Let this vision of the kingdom shape your life.** God uses very ordinary people to bring in his kingdom. Mustard seeds not Huon pines. Paul reminds the Corinthians of this. They were a church intoxicated by the glitz and glamour of the Super Apostles. They were more into style than substance, just like certain sections of today's church. And Paul brings them down to earth with a thump. *“Consider your calling brothers: Not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world — what is viewed as nothing — to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one can boast in His presence.”* That's how his kingdom grows! Not by glitz and glamour. Not with pyrotechnics, expensive sound systems and strobe lighting and preachers in skinny jeans with trendy beards. Everything hyped up, exaggerated claims are made to impress. We think we have to compete with the world to reach the world. *William Carey was a cobbler (a shoe repairer) He was slight and short sighted and by all accounts, a very unimpressive looking man. God sent him to India for 42 years. He never returned to his native England. He spent 42 years translating the Bible into a score of different Indian languages and he hardly saw any results in his lifetime. He called himself God's plodder. ‘I can plod, he said, that is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything’.* Now we call him the Father of Modern Missions. That's the kind of person God uses to advance his kingdom in the world. Plodders! Is that you? Are you willing to be a mustard seed for Christ? To become a nothing, to remain a nobody, to wait a long time to see the results. To plant seeds today that won't grow into anything recognisable until after you are dead and gone. To bury yourself away in obscurity like William Carey. That's the way the kingdom grows. It's hidden but it's strong. It's inconspicuous but it's irrepressible. It grows extensively and intensively. It grows from the smallest of beginnings to fill the earth. It grows out of all proportion to what might have been expected. And it's still growing. *“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, says Paul in Colossians 1:6, just as it has been doing in you, since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth”*

What is the message of the kingdom? Grace- God`s Grace. That`s our message for the world but if we want to reach the world for Christ, we need to assimilate it ourselves. Don`t we? It needs to permeate our lives like **yeast in the dough**. We need to grasp **God`s grace in all its truth**. We need to become Grace filled people. Are we? We need to be living in line with the Gospel we preach to others. Are we? Those of us who believe in the doctrines of grace. Do we display the grace of those doctrines in our interaction with others, especially towards those who have a different world view to ours?

Let`s Pray:

“May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling all I do and say.
May His beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel, seeing only Him.”