

Matthew 13:31-33 “The Power and Influence of Jesus”

2.26.17

This morning we're going to look at the third and fourth “Kingdom Parable” that Jesus told to describe what was happening to His confused and befuddled followers. These two parables need to be taken together and we'll see why as we go along.

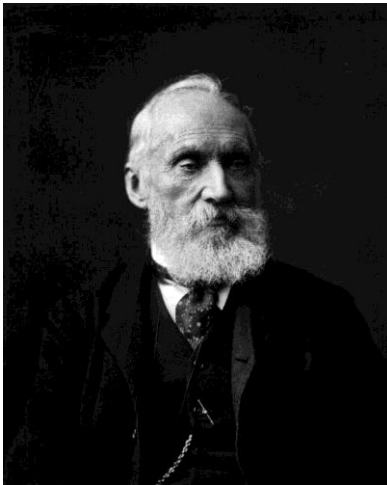
Matthew 13:31-33

31 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32** It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” **33** He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

Just three verses of Scripture gives us two of the seven explanations of Jesus' work on this earth and His future Kingdom. Just three verses...just 93 words and we get two parables that will bring great encouragement to His followers.

What Jesus describes here is the fact that small things can have very large influences and impacts. Think about it. In our English language all the profound words that have ever been uttered or written in English have come from just 26 letters. 26 letters! Small and almost inconsequential...yet... profound, extensive results.

I think of this man...



Do you know him? Probably not! I didn't either (by the picture), but I know him by what he discovered. That's Lord Kelvin, the man who made the discovery that Absolute Zero is -459.67 degrees Fahrenheit. It's from Lord Kelvin (aka William Thomson of Britain) that we have the primary unit of temperature measurement for the realm of physical science, which is known as the “Kelvin Scale.” It was Lord Kelvin who also did studies on inertia and movement.

Lord Kelvin wanted to determine if repeated small things pounding on something large could make a difference. So, he conducted an experiment by suspending a large chunk of steel weighing several hundred pounds from the ceiling of his lab. Now get this... He took regular paper and tore it in small pieces and wadded them up into dozens and dozens of pea-sized balls (what we would call spit-wads) and he began to systematically throw the wads at the steel chunk as hard as he could and as fast as he could. At first, the seemingly useless little taps on the steel looked to have

no effect at all. But, eventually, AMAZINGLY, the steel finally began to gently sway back and forth, back and forth because of the relentless tapping of those little pieces of paper. Small things can and often do provide profound and powerful results.

You see, in a nutshell, that's really the lesson of these two parables. Something big can come from something small.

Do you realize there were only 120 disciples of Jesus when He ascends back into heaven after His resurrection? That's what the Bible records in Acts 1:15... only about 120 believers. That's not many folks...not when you consider the thousands of people Jesus saw during His 3 ½ years of preaching and teaching and performing hundreds of miracles. 120. What a small number.

I must tell you...that many of you have told me that it has been helpful to learn things like this and even to study the chronology and timeline of Jesus ministry. It's helpful to know that it wasn't until Jesus was almost one full year into His ministry before He appointed and chose His 12 Apostles. You've told me that it's helpful to understand from the perspective of the Jewish people what their expectations were of the Messiah (Jesus) when He came.

You see, they thought He would come and set up His kingdom immediately and after one full year of preaching and teaching and healing...they were thinking, "Get on it with Jesus! Set up your kingdom! Let's go to Rome and overthrow the Romans and come back to Jerusalem and rule and reign!"

They were ready for the glory...for the power...for the pomp and circumstance of the kingdom! They were waiting with baited breath for Jesus to punish the evildoers who rejected Him and reward those who had left all to follow Him. Ha! They were looking for the music and the horses, the triumph, the wonder, the glory, the pageantry of the kingdom! But it wasn't happening that way, was it? And that's why they kept asking: "Is He really the Messiah or should we look for another?" They struggled with this all along.

Do you remember when Jesus was brought before Pilate and Pilate asked Him if He was a King? Jesus' response to Pilate gives indication to him that He was not here to establish His kingdom or overthrow Rome.

John 18:33-36

33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" **34** Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" **35** Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" **36** Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

You see, the disciples were looking for a kingdom of glory, a kingdom of power, a kingdom of majesty, a kingdom of worldwide dominance, but that was not happening and Jesus had to explain why. And He used these 7 parables to do so. Earthly stories with heavenly meanings. And He began His explanation by offering the parable of the sower and the 4 types of soil. Remember...

A Sower Went Out to Sow



packed soil



stony ground



thorny ground



good soil

Three of the soils produced no fruit, thereby indicating those people had never truly accepted Jesus' message, because only one of the soils produced fruit. Jesus explained what they had been seeing and witnessing for the past year. $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the seed produced nothing. This helped them to understand even why the Pharisees (their religious leaders) had walked away.

Jesus would use a second parable, (we saw this last week), to explain the fact that NOW was not the time to separate the "rejectors" from the "acceptors."



Tares - Darnell

Wheat

The weeds (aka tares) are going to be allowed to grow together with the wheat until the end of the age. The good and the bad will grow together, but at the end of the age, you'd be able to tell the difference. Jesus was teaching, "I'm not here this time to bring judgment...that'll come the next time when I come."

So you see, with the first two parables He explains the reactions of the people. Some will receive, some will reject, and He's revealing to His followers why He's not pulling out a King's crown yet. And that had to be discouraging for them. It's like a let down of the most mammoth proportions!

When I was in college at Appalachian, I got a call to come try out for the basketball team. And I did and I made it...for three days. I was told on Friday I had made the team. I was sized for my jersey and my shoes and given a locker. But, on Monday the coach called me and I went to his office and he cut me. He said they had decided they weren't going to keep any walk-ons that year. It was horrible. I was devastated! But, that was all part of God's plan. Because it was then that I decided (along with my roommate) to start a Bible study at Appalachian (which I would not have had time to do if I were on the basketball team) and it was from that Bible study that I met my wife Pam, and as they say: the rest is history. But, at the time, it made no sense. I was befuddled and disillusioned.

Is that you today? Are your circumstances causing you to shake your head? Things aren't going to plan? Oh listen...God is in control and He does things that take time. Like spit wads whacking a piece of steel. Can we trust Him when we don't see the steel moving?

This is what I believe Jesus saw in His disciples (disillusioned...frustrated) and now it's time to encourage them with two parables.

Matthew 13:31-32

31 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32** It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Take a look at this picture. Those are mustard seeds...



Mustard seeds when planted typically grow into a shrub-like plant that's about seven to eight feet in height. But, it can grow to be as large as 12 to 15 feet in height. Take a look and see this plant that's grown into a Mustard Tree.



Amazingly... you have this tiny seed growing into a 15-ft tall tree! And those folks living in and around Galilee had seen these types of trees many, many times. This was a common site for them. They knew all about mustard seeds. Remember when Jesus said, "If you have the faith of the grain of a _____ what? Mustard seed...you can move mountains. Now that's not literal. That's figurative. If you have a little bit of faith you can do great things. Like little pieces of paper whacking a hunk of steel and gets it moving."

Now, some accuse Jesus of lying here. Why? Look at the first part of verse 32 again.

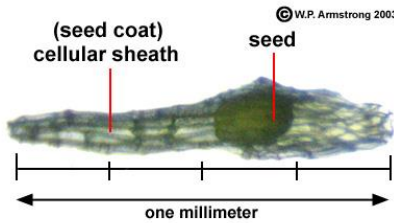
Matthew 31:32a

32 It is the smallest of all seeds...

People say, "Ah, ah, ah...the mustard seed is not the smallest of ALL seeds. Jesus didn't know what He was talking about." The smallest seed is the orchid seed. Take a look...



That's small, folks!!! But, wait a minute...that's not even the seed of the orchid. Take a look at this...



The seed is buried in that sheath and it's only $\frac{1}{4}$ of a millimeter in size! Wow! That's small! So, Jesus was mistaken, right? Wrong! Keep reading...

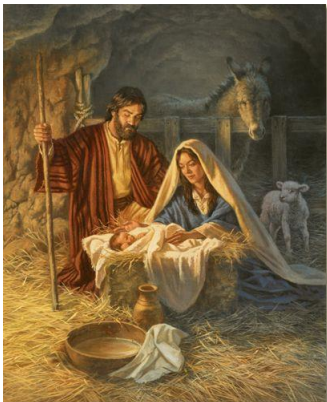
Matthew 13:32

32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Aha...it's the smallest of the GARDEN PLANTS! And it is. The Greek word for GARDEN PLANT is *lachanon*. That word literally means: "garden vegetables or herbs with the purpose of being eaten." You don't eat orchid seeds. You certainly can eat mustard! And the people knew exactly what Jesus was saying. Jesus was exactly right. The mustard seed is the smallest of all plants that are garden variety.

What Jesus is saying to the people is really simple. The kingdom is going to start small, but it's going to grow into something astounding!

Think of Jesus in the manger...in that animal feed trough, when He was born...



Think of that stinky, smelly stable...manure all over the place. A baby born in total obscurity in a region that was nothing...Judea...in a town that was nothing Bethlehem, to parents who were nothing more than poor peasants. Think of it. A wiggling little baby, being held in His momma's arms, who was under the dominion and authority of imperial Rome. So small, so inadequate, so inconsequential, so unqualified, so seemingly weak and tiny... Just an insignificant

dot on the face of the earth! Like a mustard seed.

And look at what Jesus would do. From that little baby in that feed trough was indeed eternal life that would burst forth and ultimately embrace a cross and then rise from a borrowed tomb to proclaim His power and His eternal kingdom. And here we are 2,000 years later...nesting like birds in the massive branches of the mustard tree of His Kingdom! Now folks, I don't know about you, but that's encouraging to me and it was to His disciples. But, Jesus isn't through. He has another example, because I believe He knows they need it. And isn't it just like Jesus to give us more than we deserve...all because of His mercy and grace!

Matthew 13:33

33 He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

Now, everyone in that audience of Jesus' day knew about baking bread. I will say that in our day and age of political correctness, I'm afraid Jesus perhaps would have been considered a bit male chauvinistic by some all because He said a woman was making bread. But, that's simply what took place most in the first century. Jesus, no doubt had watched His momma, Mary make bread many, many times. He undoubtedly and watched her pound out the dough with her hands, many times...



She would pound, pound, pound the dough, working in that leaven and then bake it and out would come the bread...



Ummmmm! Doesn't that look good?! Makes me hungry!

Now we all know what leaven is. It's yeast. Here's a pile of yeast...



It's yeast that makes the dough rise. Take a look at this picture.



Six pans of dough and if there's yeast in that dough, it will rise and taste oh so yummy! So, what's the difference between Leavened Bread and Unleavened Bread? Take a look...



Leavened
Bread



Unleavened
Bread

The leaven, makes the dough rise...without it...you have flat bread.

Now did you notice Jesus said the woman, “took and hid three measures UNTIL it was all leavened.” Three measures is about 50 pounds of dough and would have produced enough bread to feed around 100 people. Somebody is fixing enough bread for a feast! Maybe a wedding... It reminds me of what it will be like in heaven at the Wedding Supper of Jesus...that Grand Reception, Rev. 19 speaks of, after we are all gathered into His Kingdom. I can’t wait!

So what does this mean? Well, you have this massive amount of dough and that obviously represents the world and you have the leaven...the stuff that makes the bread taste real good and rise...that would be believers...followers of Christ...and it’s the believer that must be inserted into the world and like salt on French fries or butter on corn it makes it taste so much better. And you know it doesn’t take much leaven to do it.

You know what yeast does... It bubbles...



Yeast is basically a fungus that foments and through a chemical reaction, causes the bread to rise. You could say it has a positive impact or even powerful influence on the dough. Like throwing wads of paper at a hunk of steel. It doesn’t take much...but the bread begins to rise.

What’s the lesson? The power of the kingdom is great. I mean a little tiny bit of leaven goes a long way! The fact that the kingdom began so small didn’t mean that it wouldn’t have a powerful, widespread, permeating influence. Just look at how many of followers of Jesus there are throughout the world.

Did you also notice Jesus said that she hid it?

Matthew 13:33

33 "... a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

The leaven is to be inserted into the dough. It’s no good left sitting on the counter. That’s a message to us. We’ve got to get involved in people’s lives to help them. We can’t just look at people and say, “Oh that’s sad...they’re so messed up...hopefully they’ll figure it...while we go on our merry way.” When’s the last time you shared the Gospel with someone? When’s the last time you opened your mouth and shared something of biblical value to the world?

We Christians do a lot of talking and a lot of posting...and most of it ain’t about Jesus or His word? Yet, we’re supposed to be the yeast bubbling, bubbling in the bowl that will impact the world. We’ve just got to get off the counter. Church, we are God’s leaven...we’re His yeast! We’ve got to

permeate...we've got to Go and make disciples... He said YOU are my witnesses...my ambassadors... We're the yeast! We're the wads of paper that have to hit that hunk of steel and get it moving.

Another quick point here... Do you know that nasty, tasting bread we eat at communion?



What's wrong with it? It ain't got no leaven. That's why it's called unleaven bread. So, why do we eat that stuff?

Well, it goes back to the Children of Israel, the nation of Israel, hurrying to get out of Egypt. The people were told by Moses, (my paraphrase)... "We've get out of Dodge before Pharaoh changes his mind again." So, they didn't wait for the bread to rise. They'd been in Egyptian captivity for 400 years and it was time to go. But, I believe there may be even more to the symbolism of the unleaven bread of the children of God.

Let me set the scene as you're turning to 1 Corinthians 5. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth and he's encouraging the church to deal with sin. In the case of chapter 5 is was an egregious sexual sin and we arrive to verse 6 and he is going to tell the people to get rid of the sin!

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? **7** Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **8** Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

In this case, the leaven is considered bad... It's sin and just like a bad apple can spoil the bunch...so, can sin unattended in a person's life...it can bring devastating destruction.

When the children of Israel left Egypt. They were to cut the cord...they were to be finished with Egypt. "Don't make any leavened bread!" Moses told them. Why? Because the unleavened bread became a symbol of the disconnection from Egypt! They were done living in bondage and captivity! They were free! They were to start over again with no Egyptian influence...without the leaven of Egypt.

How about you? Do you need to start over? Do you need to get rid of the old leaven...the old ways of living and get some new leaven? Jesus will give it to you in ample supply if you'll repent of your sins and ask Him in faith. Leave the past behind! Cut the cord! Pick up some paper and start making wads so you can have some influence on those hunks steel in your life.

Well, those disciples of Jesus started out with just 120 as He left the earth. It's like they were little mustard seeds compared to the world of that day. It's been estimated only about 300 million people lived on the earth during Jesus' day. There's more people living in the United States today

than that. Listen only 120 people versus 300 million. Wow! Any way you slice that bread...that's not many people comparatively speaking to try to influence an entire world.

I don't know about you today, but I sometimes get discouraged when I look at the world and all the opposition to the Gospel. It almost feels like no matter how hard we try, it seems we'll be crushed and crowded out by the evil of this world. Perhaps you feel that way as well from time to time.

But church family, if you and I feel that way, can you imagine how they felt? How those few handfuls of disciples felt? They've been watching their leader Jesus Christ be blasphemed and mocked and hated for a year. You know there had to creep in to their hearts a sense of hopelessness, maybe bewilderment, discouragement, or even a sense of defeat. But, then Jesus tells them these two parables to encourage them. He says, "Oh, don't you worry, it's going to start small...but oh, it's going to end big."

Church, you know how it all ends don't you? We win! Jesus will reign! Evil will be destroyed! And every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and the gates of Hell will not prevail against the kingdom of Jesus! Take heart!!! And grab your mustard seed and your leaven and your little wads of paper and lets get sowing the seed, pounding the dough with leaven and whacking those hunks of steel as we proclaim the power of the name of Jesus throughout the world!
