

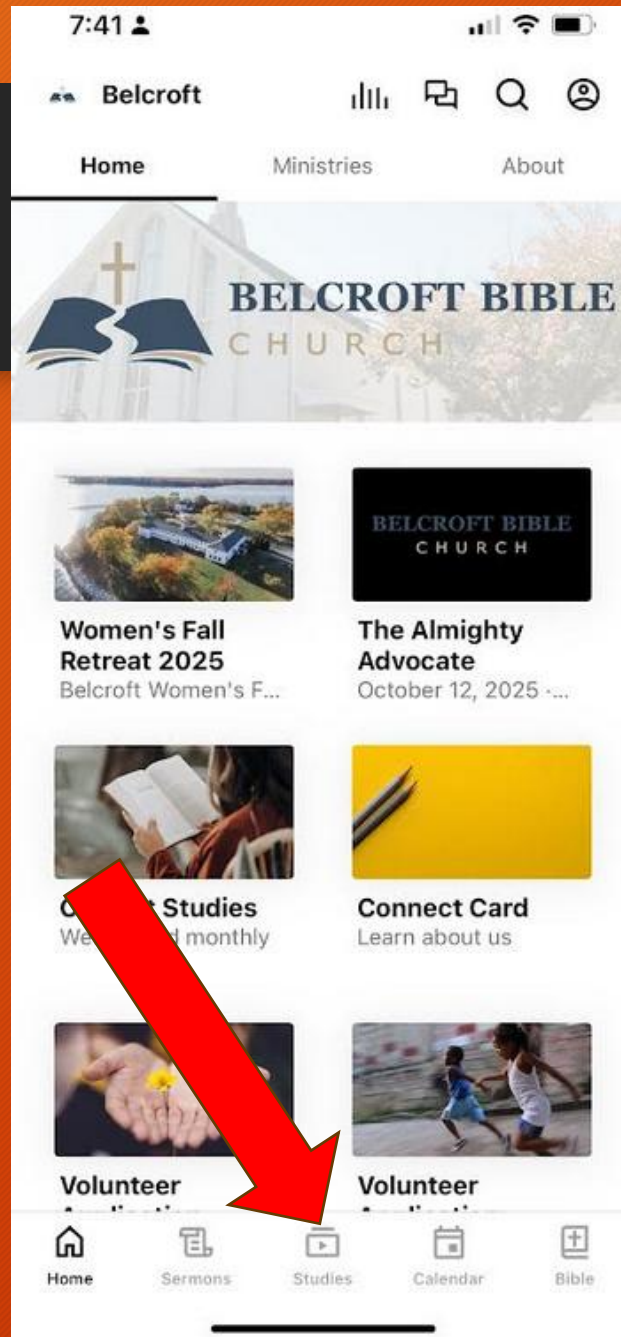
The Significance of the Seemingly Insignificant in Scripture

1

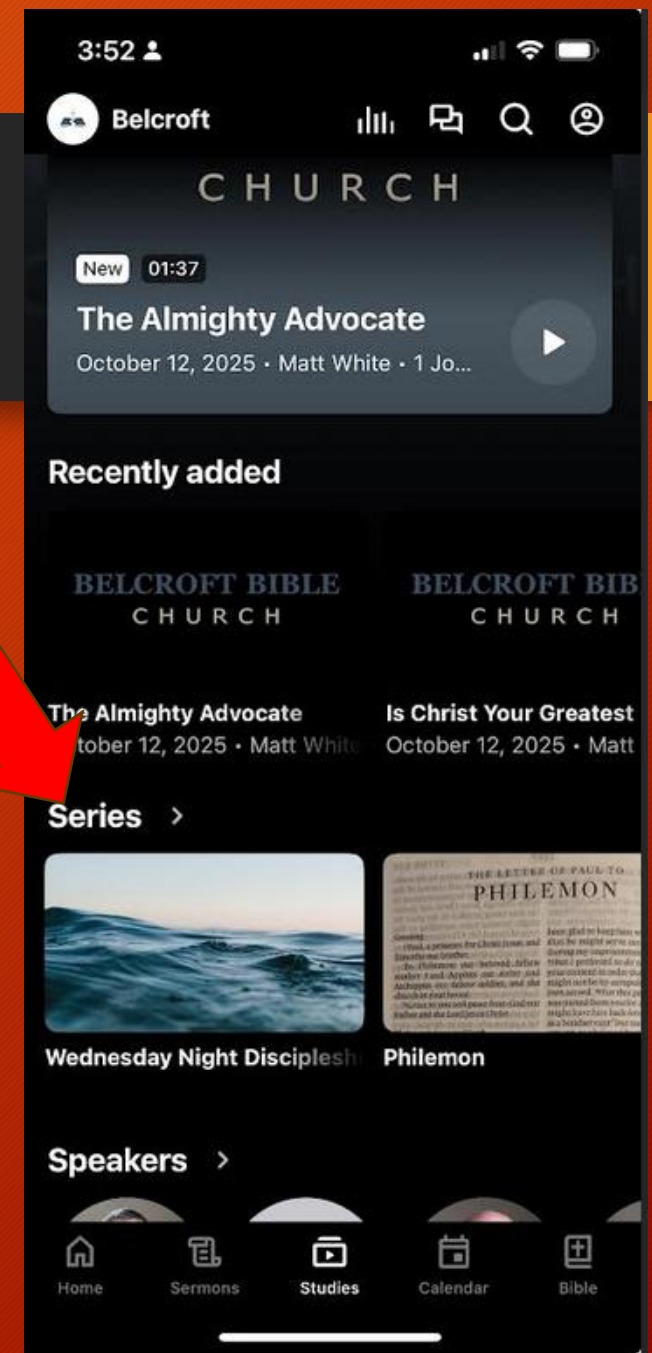
Session 2

Accessing Docs

1



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Accessing Docs

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Parable of the Mustard Seed

When Little Becomes Great



Share questions/observations from
Your Meditation this Week on the
Mustard Seed..

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Key Passage: Matthew 13:31-32 (ESV)

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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.”

Parable

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- Number of Parables in the Bible _____
- Range in length from one verse, Parable of the Old Garment, (cf. Luke 5:36), to the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which covers some 21 verses (cf. Luke 15:11-32).
- Some parables are unique, being only found in one of the Gospel narratives; other parables appear in each of the Synoptic Gospels.
- Note that the Gospel of John contains no parables—at least not as parables are commonly understood.

Parable

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- About one-third of Jesus' teaching is in parables.
- When asked the definition of a parable, many Christians might respond, "*An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.*"
- This definition most commonly attributed to Alan Cairns, a 20th-century Presbyterian theologian and preacher from Northern Ireland.
- So influential are these parables that even people who have never read the Bible use expressions drawn from them (e.g., "the good Samaritan" or "the prodigal Son").
- Though widely known, Jesus' parables are also notorious for their frequent misinterpretation.

- A parable in Jesus' teaching is a Spirit-inspired, reality-based comparison that uses familiar images of daily life to reveal the mysteries of God's Kingdom — unveiling divine truth to the receptive and exposing unbelief in the resistant.

Biblical Words for Parable

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- Hebrew: מָשָׁל (*māshāl*)
- Found throughout the Old Testament (e.g., *Proverbs 1:6, Ezekiel 17:2*).
- Broad meaning: *comparison, proverb, riddle, figure, or story with a lesson*.
- Not always a “story” — a *māshāl* could be a proverb, taunt, or symbolic saying.
- Root idea: to place things side by side for comparison — **to reveal truth through analogy.**

Biblical Words for Parable

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- **Greek:** παραβολή (*parabolē*)
- Used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) and New Testament.
- Literally means “*a throwing beside*” (*parabolē*)...from *para-* “beside” + *bolē* “a throw,” related to *ballein* “to throw”).
- Setting one thing beside another for the sake of *illustration or contrast*.
- In the Gospels, it refers to **stories, analogies, or metaphors** Jesus used to teach spiritual truths through familiar, everyday imagery.

Parables in Matthew 13

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- The Parable of the Soils (13:1-23)
- The Parable of the Wheat and Tares (13:24-30, 34-43)*
- **The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32)**
- **The Parable of the Leaven (13:33)**
- The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13:44)*
- The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (13:45-46)*
- Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-50)*
- The Parable of the Householder (13:51-52)*



Mustard Seed

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- **Matthew 17:20** — Faith as Small as a Mustard Seed
- *“He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a **mustard seed**, you can say to this **mountain**, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’”*
- **Luke 17:6** — Faith Like a Mustard Seed
- *“He replied, ‘If you have faith as small as a **mustard seed**, you can say to this **mulberry tree**, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea,” and it will obey you.’”*

Consider....

HYPERBOLE
IS WITHOUT A DOUBT **THE**
Single
GREATEST THING
IN THE HISTORY OF
THE UNIVERSE

Hyperbole

Greek: ὑπερβολή
(*hyperbolē*)

- From ὑπέρ (*hyper*) = “beyond” or “over”
- βάλλειν (*ballein*) = “to throw” or “to cast”

So, *hyperbolē* literally means “**a throwing beyond the mark.**”

Hyperbole

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**Hyperbole is the
“secret sauce” of
literary devices.**



“I’ve told you a million times....”

“I’m drowning in paperwork....”

“I nearly died laughing....”

Mustard

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- Short version: “**mustard**” comes via Old/Anglo-French *mostarde* / *moustarde*, which medieval writers traced to the Latin phrase *mustum ardēns*—literally “**burning must.**”
- Why that name?
- *mustum* = **fresh, unfermented grape juice** (“must”).
- *ardēns* = burning/fiery (from *ardere*, “to burn”).
- The condiment was traditionally made by **grinding mustard seeds and mixing them with grape must**, yielding a sharp, “**burning**” paste—hence “**burning must.**”

Key Passage: Matthew 13:31-32 (ESV)

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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.”



Mustard Tree

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Recap of Main Points

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1. The Kingdom of God Begins Small

- The mustard seed is tiny, one of the smallest seeds known to Jesus' listeners.
- God's Kingdom or God's work often begins in humble, unnoticed, or seemingly insignificant ways — such as Jesus' own ministry starting with a few disciples. *“It is the smallest of all seeds...”* (Matthew 13:32)

2. God Causes Remarkable Growth

- Though small at first, the mustard seed grows into a large plant or tree.
- This symbolizes the unstoppable and transformative growth of God's Kingdom — expanding beyond human expectations, touching more and more lives. *“...yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree.”* (Matthew 13:32)

Recap of Main Points

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3. The Kingdom Provides Shelter and Blessing

- The birds that come and nest in its branches picture how people from all nations can find **rest, refuge, and belonging** in God's Kingdom.
 - It points to the **inclusive and welcoming** nature of God's reign.
"...so that the birds come and perch in its branches." (Luke 13:19)

4. God Values Small Beginnings

- The parable encourages believers not to **despise small starts** — whether in faith, service, or ministry.
 - Even when results seem small or slow, God can bring about **great and lasting fruit**.
"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin." (Zechariah 4:10)

Faith

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This is by far the **most popular** Christian acronym for *faith*.

- **F** - Forsaking
- **A** - All
- **I** - I
- **T** - Trust
- **H** - Him
- This captures the essence of reliance on Christ alone, echoing *sola fide* theology: we abandon all self-reliance and depend fully on Jesus.

- Reformers spoke of faith as having three dimensions: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*.
- ***Notitia***. Refers to the things that we know about Christ.
- ***Assensus***. That's the conviction that these things we know about Christ are true.
- ***Fiducia***. *Fiducia* refers to trust and reliance. The kind of faith that saves a person is the faith that *trusts* Jesus. And the faith that trusts Jesus demonstrates itself when those who trust Jesus obey Him.

Why did Jesus use parables?

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- Jesus spoke quite directly about why He used parables, and His explanation appears in all three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.

Parables reveal truth to those who are receptive

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- **Matthew 13:10-11**

“Then the disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’

And he answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’”

Parables conceal truth from the hard-hearted

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- **Matthew 13:13-15**

“This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand...

Isaiah 6:9-10

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- Verse 9a

“Keep on hearing, but do not understand”

Persistent exposure to God’s word doesn’t guarantee repentance; hearts can be unreceptive.

Isaiah 6:9-10

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- Verse 9b

“...keep on seeing, but do not perceive.”

They will witness God's works (warnings, signs, judgments) yet fail to discern their meaning.

Isaiah 6:9-10

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- Verse 10a

“Make the heart of this people dull...”

Isaiah’s preaching, met by stubbornness, results in a judicial hardening—a heart growing insensitive to God.

Isaiah 6:9-10

30

- Verse 10b
“and their ears heavy...”

Their capacity to hear truth becomes weighed down—hearing becomes burdensome.

Isaiah 6:9-10

31

- Verse 10c

“...and blind their eyes...”

- Their moral/spiritual vision is obscured.

Isaiah 6:9-10

32

- Verse 10d
- “lest they see... hear... understand...”

This is purpose/result language: the hardening prevents a genuine grasp of the message.

Isaiah 6:9-10

33

- Verse 10e
- — “...and turn and be healed.”

God’s ultimate desire is repentance and restoration, but in this context the people are not turning, so healing is withheld.

Recap

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- Jesus cites this passage to explain why He teaches in parables—they reveal the kingdom to receptive hearers and conceal it from the hard-hearted (Matt 13:13-15; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10).
- **Not the final word:** Later promises (e.g., Isa 6:11-13; 55:6-7) hold out hope of a remnant and future healing; judgment is penultimate, not ultimate.

Next week...

- The Meaning of Yeast In Scripture
- “...Consider the Ant...”
Biblical Insights

<https://youtu.be/PRM3HVax14E?si=TECNCw0st1I4STM0>

