

Mustard. Yeast. Kingdom?

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Date: 09 June 2019

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[0 : 00] Well, how many of you like growing things?

Few. That's good. It's good to see those whose livelihood depends on it. Put their hands up there. How many of you like baking things?

Yes. Right on, Landon. I see that hand. How many of you have never watered a plant or baked anything in your life?

Okay. Pretty much all of us have. Maybe it's not all of our favorite things to do, but certainly we enjoy, I think all of us, the things that come from baking and gardening, whether it's flowers or a tasty loaf of bread.

Well, this morning we're going to be hearing from Jesus on the subject of gardening and baking. And some of you, when you hear that, might be wondering, did I come to the right church this morning?

[1 : 09] Don't worry. This sermon is not titled, Five Pro Tips to Get Better Yields in Your Garden. Jesus had a way of taking the ordinary and everyday stuff of life and using it to teach important truth from God.

We've been doing a series on the kingdom of heaven and some of the parables that Jesus taught on the kingdom of heaven. And this morning, baking and gardening are simply the ordinary things that Jesus has chosen to communicate that truth.

And so if you have your Bibles, please open them up to Matthew chapter 13, verse 31. Matthew chapter 13, verse 31.

Jesus told them another parable.

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 so that the birds come and nest in its branches.

[2 : 37] He told them still another parable. 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.

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet.

I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world. So these are the parables that we're looking at this morning.

And even as we've read through them, you'll notice that they're quite different from the ones we've looked at so far. These are very short and sweet. They go right to the point. They're kind of mini parables.

And we also notice that there's no explanation given. The last two that we've looked at, Jesus actually explains in detail what they mean to his disciples. But here, whether he did or not, we don't know.

[3 : 43] We're kind of, we're on our own here. So we're going to have to look carefully at the details of each of these. Because the big question is, well, how is the kingdom of God like that?

Like a mustard seed? Like yeast? So let's start with the parable of the mustard seed. 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 so that the birds come and perch in its branches.

So the first thing we notice is that Jesus is talking about a mustard seed. Now, there's been all kinds of research and scholarly conjecture as to what species of mustard plant this was.

You know, of the seeds we know about today, there's consensus that it probably isn't the mustard plant that gets sown into farmers' fields here in North America today. That much we're pretty sure about.

[4 : 52] But of the other choices, which one is it? You know, there's conjecture about the seed. I mean, is it really the smallest of all seeds?

What exactly does that seed look like? There's some good options. There's the black mustard seed plant that apparently grows in the Middle East, and it gets to be about 8 to 12 feet high, a small tree.

Is that what Jesus was talking about? There's another one called *Salvadora Persica*. I'm sure that's its technical name. But it apparently grows to be quite large, 20 to 25 feet, and it has these pungent berries that have a mustard flavor on it.

Is that the mustard seed tree that Jesus was talking about? At the end of the day, we kind of have to admit this is 2,000 years after the fact, and we don't know exactly which seed and tree Jesus was referring to.

But the point here is not so much to look at the accuracy of the Bible or the archaeology of the Bible. I mean, we could come to this to critique Jesus' use of metaphor.

[6 : 04] I mean, is there really such kind of seed or tree? Or are we here to hear from Jesus the point that he is trying to make about the kingdom of heaven?

I mean, Jesus was using common, everyday things to teach, and it's doubtful that he would have chosen something that a guy would be like, well, a mustard seed doesn't grow into a tree.

So let's give Jesus the benefit of the doubt and assume that there was some species of tree grown in the Middle East, typically in people's gardens or fields or near or around them, that had a very small seed, smaller than all the other garden variety plants, and yet it grew to be larger than all the other typical Middle Eastern garden plants, large enough that birds could come and nest in it.

And so what are the details that Jesus highlights for us in this little parable? The first thing that we notice is the size of the seed.

He says, though it is the smallest of seeds, the size of the seed compared to other seeds. So in your mind, most of you probably like to eat fruits and vegetables, I hope.

[7 : 23] Think about your seeds. You've got your pumpkin seed. It's pretty large. You've got your watermelon seed, your apple seed, kind of about the same size, little black things. Then you've got your cherry tomato seed.

Now we're starting to get small. And then you've got your mustard seed, the tiniest of all seeds. And now there's some conjecture here.

Is he talking about all seeds everywhere in the world? Probably not. The orchid seed, people have been quick to say, oh, that's smaller, so Jesus is wrong. But when he talks about plants, the word he uses is the word that typically describes garden or herb kind of plants.

Okay, so this is probably referring to the smallest of seeds that would go into the garden. So you've got your mustard seed, this tiny seed. Think of a peppercorn, but even that shrunk down into just a little black speck.

The smallest of all seeds. The next thing he emphasizes is what that seed grows into. It grows into the largest of all garden plants.

[8 : 36] You can imagine a garden. Maybe they planted it at the edge of the garden and kind of a tree, a large plant. Everything else is smaller.

It's the largest. In size. Even though it started as the smallest, it became the largest.

And, of course, Jesus is not just comparing seeds and plants. The point he's trying to make is look at how it started and how it ends. It started as the smallest.

And it grew and became the largest. And that's the first truth that we really see coming through here about the kingdom of God.

It's a kingdom that has surprisingly humble beginnings. But it grows to be the greatest and largest kingdom of all.

[9 : 39] It's a kingdom that has surprisingly humble beginnings. Think of Abram. A nobody to the world.

A guy from Ur of the Chaldeans. A shepherd. A nomad. A guy who lived in tents and rented. Who was he to the world?

By the end of his life, he'd finally earned the respect of the people in the land in which he lived enough that they let him buy a place to bury his wife.

He owned nothing except his flocks and his household. The kingdom of heaven has surprisingly humble beginnings.

Think of a baby in a feeding box. The son of, as far as it would seem to the world, a carpenter.

[10 : 43] Born in Bethlehem. A nothing town in a backwater region of the Roman Empire. He grew up in Nazareth.

Can anything good come from Nazareth? It's a kingdom with surprisingly humble beginnings. Yeah, there's a guy named Jesus out there at the lake with a bunch of fishermen and a tax collector and some others.

Pretty pathetic movement, if you ask me. I mean, three years after it started, their leader was executed. Executed. And it all came to nothing. To some.

It was a kingdom of surprisingly humble beginnings. And yet, the point that Jesus is making. There's an element of surprise here.

Because even though that's how it started, it ends as the greatest and largest and most glorious kingdom of all. This is not the first time that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, has been compared to kingdoms.

[11 : 59] If you remember back to the days of Daniel. Daniel was in exile. He was one of the king's wise men and advisors in the Babylonian Empire in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar.

And God gave Nebuchadnezzar two visions to remind him that even though his kingdom was great and glorious, it was not the greatest that this world would yet see.

The first was of a statue. Nebuchadnezzar had a vision or a dream from God of a great statue. And various parts of the statue, Daniel interprets this vision, represent various kingdoms that would follow.

And none of them compare to the splendor of the first, which is the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire.

A great and glorious kingdom. And then the vision takes a turn. And a rock comes and smashes the whole statue to pieces. And the rock grows and becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth.

[13 : 02] Daniel interprets the vision for King Nebuchadnezzar. He says that the rock represents how the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will in self endure forever. A kingdom that will be far greater and fill the whole earth.

God gave a second vision to Nebuchadnezzar. I guess he needed the reminder. He didn't get the point of the first vision. He was thinking to himself, Oh, I'm so great.

Look at what I have done in my kingdom. It's the greatest kingdom this world has ever known. So God gave him another vision. And interestingly, this time in his vision, he sees a large tree.

I looked and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.

[14 : 03] The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky. It was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful. Its fruit abundant.

And on it was food for all. Under it, the wild animals found shelter. And the birds lived in its branches. From it, every creature was fed.

And Daniel interprets the vision for him. This vision also takes a turn for the worst. An angel of the Lord comes down in the vision and calls for the tree to be cut down.

Daniel says that the tree represents you, King Nebuchadnezzar, and your kingdom, your dominion, which is spread out on the earth.

And until Nebuchadnezzar was willing to acknowledge that God was the true King of Heaven and that He rules, He would be humbled for a time.

[15 : 06] And eventually, Nebuchadnezzar did just that. I, Nebuchadnezzar, at the end of that time, raised my eyes toward Heaven and I praised the Most High.

I honored and glorified Him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

The kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven, is the greatest. And when it comes in its fullness, will very obviously be the greatest, the tallest, the most glorious kingdom that this world has ever seen or known.

But it doesn't start that way. It's a kingdom that grows, just like a tree grows, from the smallest and most humblest of beginnings.

One of the things that Jesus said in His teaching, He said, I say to you, many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven.

[16 : 27] The kingdom of Heaven has been a long time in the making, all the way back to the days of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It's not something that just, and it's here, like a flash of lightning.

It's something that grows over a period of time. The last detail that Jesus mentions about this mustard plant is that it becomes a tree and the birds come and nest in its branches.

What does that mean? It's kind of a weird thing. What does it mean the birds come and nest in its branches? I think the most helpful place to go to get Jesus' meaning is right back to that vision that we were just talking about of Nebuchadnezzar.

Some striking parallels there. The tree that Nebuchadnezzar saw, under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches.

From it every creature was fed. This is a positive thing. This is a good thing. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, his dominion was one in which people, people groups, found a home to live in, a place to take refuge.

[17 : 59] And that was a good thing. It's a very positive image. And if the tree represents the kingdom, then the birds in the tree represent the citizens who come to live in the kingdom.

I got to thinking about that this week. What is a bird? What is a tree to a bird? I mean, you could even back up a step.

Where will you find birds? Here in town, I notice it right away when I'm going down Hamilton, kind of towards, what is it, railway?

or the beginning of Washington, there's kind of those huge kind of canopy of trees over top of the streets there. Those streets, they're covered with little birds dancing around and flitting to and fro.

Other streets that have almost no trees have none. What is a tree to a bird? One of the details that Mark mentions in his gospel when Jesus told this parable is that it grows into a tree and it has large branches that give shade under which the birds can nest.

[19 : 28] We can kind of go off of that a little bit. A tree is a place for a bird to find shelter from the elements, shade from the heat of the sun, a hollow to nest in, to be out of the storm, branches to hold fast to when the wind is blowing crazy and it's not safe to be flying out in that.

It's a place high up, safe from the predators on the ground. It's a place of refuge, a place of shelter and protection.

It's a many-perched thing, numerous perches and sometimes I just saw this the other night, a whole bunch of wax wings perched in my neighbor's tree together.

In the winter in Edmonton we often saw them, just hundreds of them would descend on some of those trees that had little berries. It's a perfect place to find some fruit, some berries, some seeds to eat, to find some leaf-eating insects for a meal or to get some vantage point down on where they might find food on the ground or find materials to build a nest.

it's a perfect place for a whole flock of birds to perch and sometimes I just wonder what are they doing there?

[21 : 04] They're hanging out. They're singing together. They're making music. It's the ideal place for a bird to carry on its life to find its need the place where it'll find its needs met a place to build a nest and a home.

So too is the kingdom of God to the citizens of the kingdom of God. It's the ideal place to build a home to live in where all of our needs are met a place that's safe where we have no fear of danger or threat.

Such will be the kingdom of God for the citizens of the kingdom especially when it comes in its fullness as Jesus is talking about with this parable of the tree.

So to sum up this parable the mustard seed the kingdom of heaven will be the greatest and most glorious kingdom that this world has ever known a perfect place to live for its citizens but surprisingly a kingdom that came from the smallest and most humblest of beginnings.

the next parable that Jesus tells changes things up a little bit. We go from outside into the kitchen baking and this time it's a woman rather than a man.

[22 : 43] 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. Yeast is fascinating stuff and I didn't even realize just how fascinating it was until this week when I was trying to figure out what exactly it is.

Most of us probably just know it as that stuff that you get in a jar from the store and then you put that into your baking and it rises and it is that but there's so much more going on with yeast.

It has some surprising characteristics. You just put a little bit in and it can affect a lot of flour a lot of dough. Why is that?

Why is it so potent? There's just something about it. The first thing I learned this week and I'll give the disclaimer now I am not a baker or a biochemist but yeast is actually alive.

It's a single cell living organism and essentially what it does is it eats sugar and then produces carbon dioxide and those become little bubbles kind of entrapped in the dough and it's those bubbles that cause the dough to actually rise.

[24 : 07] Apparently in one teaspoon of active dry yeast there's an estimated amount of 40 billion yeast cells. cells. And so you can imagine when you're mixing even just that little bit all of those cells you can't see them but they're going all throughout the mixture so that once you have this lump of dough it rises you put it in the oven you bake it it comes out and you look at your bread and you wonder where did all those little holes come from?

that's where they came from. So next time you have a freshly sliced piece of bread don't look at the bread but look between the bread look at the holes each one of those holes when you take them all together are evidence of just how thoroughly that little amount of yeast worked through the whole dough leavened the whole lump it's potent stuff so too is the kingdom of God the stuff from heaven the stuff from God it's powerful stuff and it only takes a little bit to make a huge difference a surprising difference we could talk about this in terms of the number of people we started with just a little bit Abram Isaac and Jacob one family and over time from generation to generation as

Nebuchadnezzar said the kingdom has been rising and growing so that at the end when Jesus returns and the bread comes out of the oven and the world will go whoa where did that come from there's millions of them not holes in the bread but citizens of the kingdom this thing is huge where did this come from just from that little bit that God sowed in at the beginning you could talk about this in terms of one person's life I mean we all want to have to be I hope live godly moral Christian lives we wrestle with sin we want to do better all it takes is a little bit of God's power little word that he speaks and it can do amazing stuff in the life of one person and bring great change but as with the yeast and as with the tree it's not something that happens in an instant the dough takes time to rise it's a gradual process you can stare and look at the dough as much as you want but you won't see anything happen because it's gradual so too is it with the kingdom of God this is a kingdom that is very gradually rising so much so that to many in our world it's totally imperceptible it's invisible they can't see it there's an invisible quality to the kingdom of

God just like yeast you can't see it in the mix and if you didn't know that it was in there you wouldn't expect that when you came back to look at that dough it would be twice the size that thing's growing how because of the yeast in it I see this when I look at my kids you know every day I see them and every day they look just the same as they did the day before but then I go back and I look at a picture of Callie when she was one year old and I'm starting to look at everything else in the picture like where was this when was this because is this Callie when she was one or is this Laura when she was one I can't even recognize the kid in the picture anymore that's how it is with the kingdom of God the change is happening and it's drastic it's going to surprise us but when we try to look right at it and see it we don't see it it's something that

God is growing and bringing gradually over time Jesus once had a little bit of a conversation with the Pharisees and I'll read this for you it's interesting once on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come Jesus replied the coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed nor will people say well here it is or there it is because the kingdom of God is in your midst I've always found that to be funny in a sense you know you're the Pharisees when's it coming Jesus is like it's here it's already in your midst but you can't see it just like the yeast and the dough you can't see it it has an invisible quality to it it begins with something small and insignificant and it rises gradually over time but at the end it will be undeniable and it will take the world by surprise what

[29 : 53] God's power has done and so what are there in these parables for us today I mean this is interesting learn a little bit about yeast and a little bit about trees and what is there for us today in it why did Jesus tell these parables as I think of the Pharisees and their question I wonder if we kind of think the same way the kingdom of God kingdom of heaven like that that's all future when will it come what difference would it make in our lives if we really embrace the reality that Jesus is teaching here and that he says to the Pharisees that the kingdom is here it's now it's not just a future thing that you know our faith is is a ticket to get into that kingdom someday and in the meantime we just go about our lives no the kingdom is here it's now it's been in the works all the way back to

Abram should it not should we not be able to say that through us those of us who belong to Christ and believe in him to our world that the kingdom of God is in your midst I was trying to think what what analogy can I give to describe this and the only thing that rider nation I have always liked that term rider nation even though the fans of the riders are mostly from Saskatchewan rider nation is bigger than that it allows for fans from all over the country from any province you could be of rider nation even if you're living in Quebec and surrounded by Alouette fans I think that's what the kind of thing that Jesus is driving at here the kingdom of God is in your midst a nation within the nation and at the end a nation from among the nations which means that we are citizens we are sons and daughters of the kingdom those of us who believe and belong to

Jesus today right now we got thinking about this in terms of sports do you wear your favorite colors to your team's game proudly do you wear them proudly even when you're not at the game whenever the conversation turns towards that do you take the opportunity to remind people about how awesome your team is and what they did right in the game does your heart swell with pride whenever they score a goal whenever they win a game that's just sports and recreation how much more should it be with our belonging to the nation of God the kingdom of heaven do we wear our colors proudly because we belong to

Jesus nation do we take the opportunities when the conversation comes up to tell people about the nation the kingdom that we belong to ah but there's the rub the kingdom that we belong to is invisible it's seemingly imperceptible many people deny its existence we don't necessarily want to make much of or sing the praises of something that people don't believe in can't see or oppose don't agree with the values of Peter described it this way in his letter 1

Peter 2 verse 9 he said but you are a chosen people a holy nation God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light and he wasn't talking to the Israelites he this letter was written to the churches in Asia Minor whole mixture of believers different nationalities you are a holy nation you belong to a nation that doesn't have geopolitical boundaries just like rider nation this is Jesus nation do you wear your colors proudly and it's not easy when many in our world don't see it just like with the east don't see it

[35 : 36] Peter also said this in 2 Peter 3 3 above all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come scoffing and following their own evil desires they will say where is this coming he promised ever since our ancestors died everything goes on as it has since the beginning they don't see it they don't see the kingdom but as Peter says the day of the Lord will come like a thief it will take the world by surprise and on that day which side do you want to be on whose kingdom do you want to belong to the kingdom of heaven is not like any kingdom this world has ever known if you could spend your life for one cause what would it be if you can sing the praises of one thing what would it be for you are a chosen people a holy nation

God's special possession why that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light and so let's not be discouraged I think this is one of the things that we really get here from Jesus because it's easy to be discouraged we want change to happen now we want to see justice now we want the laws in our land to change now oh it's coming the kingdom of God will come in its fullness that tree will be fully grown it will be the greatest and most glorious when it comes but we need to be patient we need to be patient and wait or maybe it's that person in your life I just wish that they would change but it doesn't always happen in an instant with

God's kingdom he often does things gradually over time oh the change will be obvious at the end and it takes faith and trust that God is truly at work and that the stuff of his word his power is powerful enough to leaven that whole lump and so I asked it last week but I want to ask it again this week are you a son or daughter of the kingdom are you a child of the king which side of this are you going to come down on because the day is coming when the tree will be fully grown when what is invisible will become visible when the son of man comes in glory the world will be taken by surprise which side will you be on

God is building his great and glorious kingdom and it's going to be the perfect place for his people to live in to nest to build a home and so repent and believe the good news let's pray father in heaven thank you for your word we see the unseen reality and we believe we trust in your word and we ask that you would help us to carry on to persevere and to live like true sons and daughters of your kingdom here and now today this week no matter who we're with help us to wear your colors proudly we ask this in

Jesus name amen