

Journey to the Cross: The Mustard Seed - Luke 13:18-21

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Preacher: Jayson Turner

[0 : 00] Well good morning 4th. I want to welcome you this morning on behalf of Pastor Scott and the rest of the past oral elder team. We're delighted that you've chosen to gather here Sunday morning, first day of the week to seek the Lord and worship him and hear from him and so it's good to be together. You can go ahead and turn open to Luke chapter 13 which is where we'll be this morning. Before we dive in we've got a couple of things coming up that I wanted to just mention. First we have a family fun night coming up on the 10th. It's a Friday night of February and it's an opportunity just to gather with the family and get to know some others from 4th and just enjoy time together. So that's coming up and then on the 15th of February we have a book discussion for our Dead Theologian Society. We're reading The Hiding Place right now by

Corey Ten Boom and if you've never read it do yourself a favor and spend some time being encouraged and challenged by her words and her story. I've read it a couple times. I'm now reading it a third time and I'm so blessed to be able to dive back into her story. So let me pray and then we'll spend some time in the word together. Father we are thankful to be here this morning. We commit our morning to you. Lord it is good to gather with other believers and to seek your face. Would you provide for every person here whatever it is that they need this morning. Lord if it's encouragement, if it's conviction, Lord if it's simply just reminding them that you're for them and that you're at work both in our world and in our individual lives. We're so thankful to be called your children. We're thankful that we're here not based upon our own efforts and the good work we've accomplished Lord but by what you accomplished on our behalf.

That you died, you rose again and you're alive. And so we want to hear from you this morning Lord Jesus. We want to look more like you because of the time that we spent together. So would you teach us now from your word? It's in your name we pray Lord Jesus. Amen. So we are in a series Journey to the Cross and it's an exposition through Luke but it's not hitting every single verse section. We're just sort of trying to at least highlight some of the things that Jesus encountered and the things that he taught. And this morning we're in probably a familiar passage, story, micro story. So I'm just gonna dive in here and we'll be looking at just two verses this morning. Yeah. How long can I stretch this out?

You will be amazed. So we're looking at Luke 13 verses 18 and 19. Let me read it. He said, therefore, what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?

It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden and it grew and became a tree and the birds of the air made its nest in its branches.

[3 : 45] This is a famous parable of Jesus. Some would say it's just a simile or an analogy. It's actually there's a twin parable. There's also the story of the leaven but for sake of time we're just gonna focus on this one this morning. And here what Jesus is doing is he's describing to us something about what the kingdom of God is like. And it's something that Jesus taught a lot. He spoke a lot about the kingdom of God. And so the first thing that we need to think about or answer is what is the kingdom of God? What is this thing that Jesus calls the kingdom of God or in the gospel of Matthew the kingdom of heaven?

Those are interchangeable. I think Matthew used that because that's the most Jewish of the gospels and to sort of not offend the appearance of taking the Lord's name in vain the fourth commandment. He used that term kingdom of heaven but those terms are synonymous. So we're talking about the kingdom of God this morning and broadly speaking the kingdom of God is God's rule over the entire universe. That God is sovereign over all. In fact the psalmist says it this way in Psalm 103:19 the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. Which is why Paul can tell Timothy hey Timothy Jesus goes by the name King of Kings and Lord of Lords that he is sovereign over all peoples all things. That's sort of the large picture in terms of the kingdom of heaven. More narrowly it comprises those who belong to Jesus. Jesus says in

John 3 that the way that we enter into the kingdom of God is one must be born again or he cannot see the kingdom of God. So the kingdom of God exists today through God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people. The Pharisees wanted to know from Jesus hey when is this kingdom gonna show up and the way that Jesus responded to them in Luke 17:20-21 he says it this way the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed. Behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you and there was Jesus present right there. So the kingdom is not a region per se but it is a reign it is the reign of God over the lives of his people. And so God's people represent this invisible kingdom in the now in the lives that we live. We either show the kingdom or we hide the kingdom based upon the choices the lives that we lead. So it's now but there's also a future day when the king will return and set up his physical kingdom. So there is this contrast of the kingdom being present it is now but it is also not yet. So the question for us then this morning is why is Jesus talking about the kingdom here and giving us a description of it and the description of God's kingdom here it's that of a mustard seed and this parable if you will is in all three of the synoptics Matthew Mark and Luke but Luke is the only one to actually give the context of this parable. So leave it to the doctor to give us the details. So if you're a doctor here this morning you get a gold star. PhDs you count even though you're not doctor doctors you're your doctors okay. So Luke here represents you all but we know the context because Luke says here as he records in verse 18 it begins by saying he said therefore Jesus said therefore consequently and anytime you see this word therefore you need to ask the question why is it therefore therefore right. If you're a good Bible student you want to know and the therefore connects thoughts together and it connects this story with the preceding event. So let's sort of build the context before we get into this particular parable what has just occurred. Well let's go back to verse 10 Luke 13 begin in verse 10 Luke records now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath and behold there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. So this is Jesus final trip to Jerusalem. He's teaching in a synagogue perhaps for the last time. We don't know the actual location of this particular synagogue but he would have been a guest lecturer there to assume that Jesus was either invited or just simply welcomed a traveling rabbi to open up the scriptures and as he's teaching or perhaps following we don't know specifically but there's an interruption. There's a woman with a debilitating condition and she's had this for 18 years and as the story goes Jesus calls out

to this woman has her come over puts his hand on her and he heals her. 18 years she's been in this condition and we have a miracle. Rejoice! This is something good that has just occurred in our midst. God has healed this woman physically but that's not the response that Jesus receives from some that are present. In fact from those who have been entrusted with showing the kingdom. Look at verse 14 Luke 13 14 says but the ruler of the synagogue indignant because Jesus has healed on the Sabbath said to the people there are six days in which work ought to be done come on those days and be healed and not on the Sabbath day. So he's trying to hold true to the fifth commandment not to work on the Sabbath but here Jesus heals this woman and he gets a technical foul as a result. Should he heal during a weekday not on the Sabbath. You're not supposed to work on the Sabbath and you can recall that Jesus has confronted the religious leaders the Pharisees they love their traditions and they added to the mosaic law rule upon rule upon rule here delineating that if you are to heal that constitutes work. Well Jesus responds in verse 15 he says very gently you hypocrites does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it. Man Jesus is smart I mean it pays to be God and he's basically saying let's talk about work work on the Sabbath you take care of your livestock and essentially what he does is he's saying hey are you saying that your farm animals are more valuable than this woman. That's the frame church for this picture that Jesus is going to paint about his kingdom that's the context so this parable I want us to understand is a rebuttal against the religious elite of that day. The parable is a contrast and so this morning what I want to do is just talk about three realities that this picture paints of God's kingdom and so let's read it again together. Luke 13 18 and 19 he said therefore what is the kingdom of God like and what shall I compare it is like a grain of a mustard seed. Okay stop what in the world Jesus had just performed a miracle and he's talking about the kingdom of God and then he says something very unexpected shocking the kingdom of God it's like a mustard seed. He doesn't say the kingdom is like a hurricane the kingdom of God is like a supernova exploding it's like a great white shark. I mean there's lots of things in creation right all gods that he could have chosen and he chooses no no it's like the grain of a mustard seed a really small seed and I'm sure Jesus followers at this point are probably

just gobsmacked like did he just say his kingdoms like the grain of a mustard seed the smallest seed used in that agrarian society the black mustard seed and the seed of the time would have been like a millimeter in diameter it's it's it's nothing and and the mustard seed in that day was associated with smallness it was it was part of the idioms of the day in fact Jesus confronts small faith when he talks about faith like the grain of a mustard seed so I want us to understand like if this was in our day in our age it would have been like calling somebody small like small fry right pipsqueak you're gonna name call which we don't do maybe in Jesus day if you were trying to one up and talk down some of you talking about like oh little mustard oh poor little mustard gonna go cry to your mommy little mustard go home the seed it's it's inconsequential it's nothing to look at it's like the it's like the head of a pin and so the first reality related to the kingdom of God it's contrary to the power structures of the day the kingdom is built upon the virtue of humility the first truth about God's kingdom it's about a God who emptied himself a divine privilege to open the doors of heaven God's kingdom it had the most inauspicious of beginnings the king he enters but he shows up as a baby he's born of a virgin not a royal queen a commoner no palace wasn't born into pomp and circumstance there's no there's no nice Airbnb where Jesus is born he's he's born out back in the stables with the livestock think about it the king above all kings shows up in a feeding trough and then Jesus grows up in a forgettable town Nazareth right in the sand you'll remember what he says hey can anything good come out of Nazareth it's like Chouila or fake Cheney or whatever you want to fill in the blank right it's like nowhere from fish trap right God's kingdom is built upon an ethic of humility not power God's kingdom advances through humble means through simple gospel words they're remarkable that faith comes from hearing God uses just a simplicity of words Paul says in 1st Corinthians 121 for since the wisdom of God this world the world did not know

[17:11] God through wisdom it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe how did Jesus wield power and prerogative very differently than the rulers of the day very different from this synagogue leader who lorded his position over this tormented woman no it says in Mark 10:45 that Jesus he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many God's kingdom is built upon the ethic of humility and so when we think about showing the kingdom we show the kingdom when we serve one another we are at our best in making the kingdom visible when we serve others 1991 was the first year I visited fourth memorial and I came a few years after that I would bring a team a group of students as a youth pastor and we would stay here on our way to Montana to do a ministry trip and I was thinking about I was thinking back on my experiences of showing up at fourth and then there was a church that we would stay at in in court of Lane and and it was remarkable because I can recall back before you could text message you had to get a phone out I know it's a weird device it only makes calls that's all it does very antiquated but I can recall talking with and I don't even know who was here but I can recall you know we're gonna be in I don't know if we're gonna we got kind of a window we might be here and they're like hey no worries no worries we'll be here we'll be here I'll wait for you and I was so struck by that it's like the experience of God's people serving being selfless being humble and if there is such a thing as a as a humble people of God then there must be a God that they worship and follow I love the image of I don't even know if Mark is here where's

Mark Lopez he's usually right there right there I can see him but he's not but I love the image of Mark in his burgundy scrubs and I've seen him ubering and I think I picked somebody up at the hospital one time and there was Mark you know and I just love the scene of him pushing folks around wheeling them around the hospital just being a blessing to them and being paid not a king's ransom to push them around the hospital but to serve them like that's when we're at our best that shows the kingdom God's kingdom is a kingdom built upon the ethic of humility and I think there's great encouragement for us all because today we can show the kingdom as we serve one another is that gonna work really that's God's plan look at verse 19 it's like the grain of a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden and it grew and became a tree now the mustard is seed the mustard is a plant a shrub but a shrub that grows 10 to 15 feet that's a tree okay so Jesus using her hyperbole here but he's telling us something about his kingdom yeah that despite its humble beginnings and its current ways God's kingdom advance it's unstoppable it will mature we have 2000 years of history to go wow and it started in a feeding trough it's unstoppable yeah Jesus he's no longer welcome at this point probably in any synagogue but God's not stressed he's not fearful that his kingdom purposes are gonna fail and yes Jesus had the worst possible draft like that any coach team could ever possibly come up with related to the starting 12 that's the worst think about it Peter the guy just he said too much and then he said the wrong thing and you just if we could get inside the head of Peter and hear the

Holy Spirit there's probably a lot of the Spirit saying Peter no stop talking be quiet don't do that come on Peter probably didn't say Peter you dummy that's not the spirit but probably had a lot of like that sort of thing going on internally and God used him and then his brother Andrew who's the opposite he's quiet we don't have a lot recorded in Scripture about what he says but he brought a lot of people to Jesus he maybe he's the introvert so God's came he can advance through the people that like to talk and those that don't like to talk and then you have James and John that's a winner let's get yeah they'll be part of my team remember those two thanks Scott was sharing with us back in city of Samaria hey Jesus let's bring lightning down let's just like burn this whole city that's God's team right there that's who Jesus chose Thomas I'm gonna doubt people into the kingdom right then there's a tax collector is zealot that hate each other oh and off waiver wires oh there's a persecutor of the church let's bring him in and that's God's team what in the world the worst beginning ever and yet these 12 ordinary God yielded men saw God's kingdom advance is that encouraging church amen he can use them probably can use us God at work then

God at work today and most of the time it's this unseen activity done in the hearts of people through ordinary individuals so God does it he gets glory Paul reminds us 1st Corinthians 12:8 God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human no man no woman that they would boast in the presence of God and just prior to this Paul says hey God chose not the wise not the powerful not the noble God's into the weak the foolish at least in the eyes of the world and maybe you're thinking Jay it worked back then but our world is too hostile towards Jesus and his followers today for lives to change I want us to think about the image of the mustard seed that became a tree it's unstoppable it's unstoppable and there's nothing new here the first two centuries of

Christianity Christians were brought into the arena ravaged by wild animals and it was the Christians response to the hostility that God used to rescue still more tertulian one of the church fathers or we call them the apostolic father okay apostolic fathers are those believers that were after the apostles so Jesus the apostles and then that next generation and so one in that next generation tertulian 2nd century AD lawyer from Rome lived a fast loose lifestyle but he went to the arena to the games to be entertained he was confronted with the testimony of believers who were then martyred he was so affected that he trusted in Christ it changed his life God used it but Jay it's different today it's different like sure there was persecution but today we're mocked it's just there's a different sort of spirit everything related to Jesus in this this age it's a meme church it's the same it's always been the same you realize the first image the oldest depiction of Jesus that we actually possess either it's been dated from the first of the third century in their AD this is the first image that we have the oldest image of Jesus that we have I think we have a photo of it this is the Alex of menos graffito okay which is called the Alex graffiti and this image was etched in plaster the wall of believed to be a boarding school in Rome on the Palatine Hill and the inscription underneath it reads Alex Alex of menos worships his God and how is God portrayed he's portrayed as a donkey mocking the crucifixion of Jesus the oldest image we have think about it and if you were Alex in that day no doubt you probably might be thinking wow God's done nothing's gonna happen like

[27 : 04] Christianity is dead the kingdom stopped and yet we now have 2,000 years of church history that tell us otherwise the advance of God's kingdom church is unstoppable it's unstoppable listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 16 here in Caesarea Philippi he says and I tell you you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it the church in the kingdom the church is not the kingdom but the church advances the kingdom the church mediates God's kingdom we are God's choice tool his means of seeing his kingdom advance which is why the church were a church that is committed to planting other churches because that's God's choice mean to advance his kingdom in our day and here Jesus says hey I'm gonna build my church in their incestory of Philippi right there at the base of Mount Hermon this rock mountain and no doubt there's an image here Jesus to his disciples this rock the church unstoppable and this is image of what God said he's gonna do he's gonna do I'm gonna build my church I will build my church Peter on you the testimony that you have shared that I am God in the flesh and I love that he says you know what the gates of hell they're not gonna prevail against it so even death is not gonna cause God's kingdom advance to stop and no doubt this was a gift to the disciples on the night that Jesus was crucified for them to be thinking about what did Jesus just say what what was he saying oh and maybe that's what they reflected back to that even death not knowing yet that Jesus is gonna rise three days later church the kingdom it will come to fruition it cannot be stopped regardless of the spiritual temperature of the day it can't be stopped and the temperature in Spokane it's it's pretty bad it is I spent this week Thursday Friday Saturday and purposely driving Uber I wanted to stay in the Logan neighborhood I'm like who lives around us I got to meet a few of our neighbors and there's some things that are discouraging picked up one gentleman I was at Litz the little pub down the street multiple times dropping picking up the spiritual temperature of the city there there is a sickness here we are necessary we are needed well let's move on to our final image here God's kingdom built upon the ethic of humility the kingdom that cannot be stopped what a great promise days of discouragement and here's a final reality verse 19 it is like a grain of a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden and it grew and became a tree and the birds of the air made nests in its branches so God's kingdom like this mustard plant shrub tree it's so great in scope that the birds of the air come and make their nests in its branches so we got to ask the question is this a good thing or is this a bad thing is this positive or is this negative who are the birds and there are a number of scholar Bible teachers that would view these birds in the negative and they would say well the birds are like Satan because remember the parable of the sower right the seeds on the path the birds come Satan's trying to steal away that gospel message that was shared the question we need to ask

our birds always evil are they always an image of evil in scripture no I think it was just recently we heard about the ravens and you saying consider them look at them that's a good thing and there was even an image of them eating berries off of pastor Scott's tree the ash tree that's a positive image God's taking care of the ravens gonna take care of you birds are not always evil in scripture I mean remember like the Holy Spirit descends Jesus baptized and descends as what a shark no as a dove right it's a bird birds are not always evil they're not always synonymous with evil in scripture so I want us to understand whenever we read scripture context context context just like Jesus is a lion of Judah he's a lion lions are good and then we have Satan Satan's a roaring lion first Peter 5a well which is it context and I would suggest to us this morning that this image is actually a good and beautiful image in fact I think it actually comes from the Old Testament where great kingdoms are compared to trees we have a couple of those instances in Ezekiel speaking about Assyria Ezekiel 31 6 says all the birds of the heavens made their nests in its bows under the branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young and under its shadow lived all great nations this kingdom is so great it's going to be a refuge for other nations for other people that's who the birds are there other nations and then you actually have speaking of God's kingdom program in Ezekiel 17 23 on the mountain height of Israel I will plant it that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar and under it will dwell every kind of bird in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest so birds would flock and be blessed protected within birds representing here the Gentile nations who are the birds in the parable of the mustard seed and I would suggest to us that she's talking about people in need we could be talking about the unbeliever the only thing we know about this woman is she's called a daughter of Abraham that's all we know we don't know if she trusted in Jesus but she's certainly a woman broken and in need and I would suggest that the birds are those that don't yet know the king and I think that is actually the central point of this parable it's an indictment on the spiritual the religious leaders that failed to embody God's heart for people what are you doing healing that woman what in the world she's like what do you care about your livestock more than you care about people I think that's what

Jesus was intending with this story people church are never to be an inconvenience amen amen the third reality of God's kingdom it's a kingdom of compassion it's a kingdom of compassion for people right Jesus says in John 13:35 speaking about how we relate to one another people will know about us and they'll understand that we belong to the king because of the way that we actually care love one another and I think that just simply extends out right we hide God and his kingdom when we are unkind when we are unloving and when we are only concerned with us when we go into sort of bunker mentality and it's very easy to do some of you just need to stop watching the news period because it's causing you to not love people anymore it's easy to go it's easy to get there a couple nights ago somebody decided they're gonna drop off all of their trash kind of down the street from our house because we sort of live in a remote area when people don't want to go to the waste plant they just empty their apartment or whatever and they just dump it there and and it's like it's happened multiple times it's like ah people right just careless thoughtless and and it's like a heart check help me not hate people right oh is that too honest I mean we have a family I don't know if the random aces are here they had a drunk driver drive through their house this last week they're living in a hotel right now because there's a gaping hole praise God none of them were killed in this accident but those sorts of thing cause oh god your king is a king of a compassion and I'm struggling which is why we always got a constant look at the king amen because the king when they pushed a crown of thorns on his head what did he say from the cross father forgive them for they know not what they do I appreciate this word that Jeremiah gives to Israel as they're in exile probably don't want to have anything to do with their captors and he says in Jeremiah 29:7 he says but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf what for in it it's welfare you will find your welfare do life do life in this city live amongst its people and I think for us fourth live for the welfare for the blessing for the joy for the gospel advance of those that live in Spokane that's the picture of the mustard seed that the birds would be blessed by God's people and it has to intersect with vocation that whatever we do wherever we are it should be a place of greater blessing because we're a part of it the places where we work the places where we school people are colliding all the time with this invisible kingdom because of God's people and they're going to themselves what is this what is this thing I kind of like it it's sort of attractive I shared with our class our discipleship class I think last week one of the men and I think I've shared it here as well that I coach with when we will go out pregame high school football and he didn't know the

Lord he knew every sin and vice known to man didn't know the Lord and we would be at a restaurant together before the game and I couldn't participate in a lot of the conversation because it was just I got nothing nope nope nope so I just sit there pleasantly is there augling the waitress and just being foul in every in every way and then years later when he comes to faith in Christ he's like Jay I don't know what you had and I don't know what it was about you but like there was something about you that I liked I didn't understand it and I think that's that's what we get to be we get to be God's presence to the people that we live around that we work with some of you guys are reading I hope more of you because I've announced it will read the hiding place but Cory Tim boom her family the boom family like their ministry intersected their vocation they were watch repair people they had a watch repair shop and that was a place of blessing that people came in contact with the kingdom all the time as they interacted with those folks as they serve them how did they serve them they went so far as they actually saved 800 Jews from right from the Holocaust at the expense of some of them of their own lives that's how we show the kingdom I think there is room on our branch you are a branch you guys are good-looking branches too okay there is room for a bird or two amen Jay I don't know any birds yes you do you got to think a little bit well I don't well then you need to join a club or you need to go volunteer somewhere I'll help you to figure out how to drive Uber whatever it is we got to figure out a way how do we interact with the people that God has placed us around the kindest way by the way that we can love the birds how is it we tell them about the king amen I'll end with this I love the example of Bruce Olson Bruchko some of you read the book this missionary South America Columbia Columbia and I had a couple of my Colombian passengers that said they were going to be here I don't know if they're here if you're here you come say hi to me afterwards he went he served this Indian tribe the modal loans and he was there as a missionary and he was loving on these people for six months no a year no six years before the first individual said I want to trust in Jesus as my personal savior six years so we can endure and spoke in I love the response his name was Babarisha Bobby they called him or Bruce did so that we could pronounce it correctly but he writes this about that experience the experience was so transforming and dramatic that Bobby when he came to faith ran then from village to village telling everyone of his meeting God his method was of sharing was check this out a non-stop 14-hour long song that he sang to the captivated villagers and then like fire the music quickly passed to other Indian encampments Jesus changed my life church who would we be without the Lord let's not go there but let's be

God's presence his kingdom here so that the birds of the air might come be attracted be blessed and that we would see some come to faith in Christ amen Father thank you for time in your word thank you for the simple pictures that you paint using your creation to teach us something important about how you want us to live that we are the people that you have called to actually show your kingdom Lord we know it's a kingdom built upon humility not in wielding power and trying to control but emptying ourselves as you did Lord Jesus and we know that even in the fact that you love just using ordinary people your kingdom work it just continues because you're at work Lord would you grow our hearts for those around us because Lord any one of these individuals that we interact with they could be us if not for your grace in our lives we thank you for our time together see your name we pray Lord Jesus amen