

Out of Little Things, Big Things Come

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Date: 19 January 2014

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[0 : 00] Good morning, let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We ask that as we look at it now that you would be with us, that you would be speaking to us, that you would give us ears and hearts that are ready to hear and obey.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away and he's taking away my eyesight at the moment.

The disciples of Jesus had a bit of a problem. They were feeling a little bit uncomfortable, a bit threatened, I guess, because of how Jesus' ministry was panning out.

You see, Jesus was talking about a kingdom. Not just a kingdom, but he was talking about it as the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven.

[1 : 24] This was a grand claim and he claimed that this was, he was bringing this kingdom about. It was already started. And yet, here they were.

A bunch of unimpressive former fishermen and a few ragtag hangers on as well. And they didn't, they weren't really feeling much like the basis of a kingdom.

The start of something big and magnificent for God. Surely, if what Jesus was saying was true, then the kingdom, and the kingdom really was a reality and had already started, then there should be something a little bit more spectacular involved.

Maybe at least an army or at least a bit of muscle. Some impressive allies, maybe, and an impressive wealthy court around the leadership.

Something big, something flashy, something showy. And there wasn't. Yes, there had been a few impressive healings and exorcisms.

[2 : 39] But apart from that, it seemed like Jesus was all talk. And throughout the Gospels, we get murmurings of this from the disciples.

And Jesus was quite aware that maybe he wasn't impressing in the way that people wanted to be impressed.

And the kingdom of God didn't look like what people were expecting. And so he tells some parables about it.

Listen to these parables. The kingdom of heaven, he said, 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's the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds come and perch in its branches.

[3 : 51] Now, when Jesus talks in this way, the kingdom of heaven is like, he says the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. Well, he's not saying that it's actually the seed.

He's talking about the whole story. The kingdom of heaven is like this story. He's not saying it's like a bit of yeast. He's saying it's about, it's like the story that he's telling about the yeast.

We might rather say, if we were to express it, the kingdom of heaven is like when a man plants a seed or like when a woman takes some yeast.

The parables aren't meant to be allegories where each little part has an identifiable element that it represents or whatever. It's rather like a scene that's painted which represents the kingdom.

And so what he's saying here, the kingdom of heaven is like a man planting a seed which grows into a large plant.

[4 : 59] Now, some people get bothered by the fact that the mustard seed is not actually the smallest seed you can possibly get.

And the tree that grows is more like an overgrown bush and it's not the biggest tree ever. But that's not Jesus' point. The mustard bush can apparently grow to up to three metres or ten feet depending on what units you like.

But that's not the point at all. The point is that something mighty comes from something that is very small and seemingly insignificant.

That is what the kingdom of heaven is like. And there may be allusions in this parable to Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 31.

In those passages, empires, kingdoms, are represented by trees. And when the birds of the air come and rest in their branches, that represents the nations coming to all the different peoples coming to find refuge there.

[6 : 20] And so Jesus may have been sort of alluding to that as well. And that saying to his disciples that it's going to be bigger even than you imagine, than you know.

And include people that you can't even envisage at this stage being included. People maybe like us, like you and me.

And Jesus drives the point home further with another parable. 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.

A loaf of bread without yeast is pretty ordinary. I don't know whether you've experienced that.

My brother-in-law, before he became my brother-in-law, when he was just my sister's boyfriend, came into our kitchen one day when my mother had been baking.

[7 : 25] And that day, the yeast that she had used hadn't worked. And rather undiplomatically, this young man said to his future mother-in-law, Oh, Young's brickworks, eh?

And then, well, what it lacks in moisture, it makes up for in density. I wouldn't recommend those as good mother-in-law comments.

Anyhow, the thing about yeast is that it only takes a little bit of the good stuff. When it's mixed through, and the whole lot, the whole batch of bread will rise, which is usually what happened with my mother's bread, I might say.

She made six loaves at a time, and only a little bit of yeast was needed to make all that bread rise. only a little bit of bread, only a little bit of yeast was needed.

Andrew Price wanted me to say that. I got it. So, Jesus was telling the disciples that although the beginnings of the kingdom might not look like much, it would work through a much wider sphere, even the whole world, and change it forever.

[9 : 02] And imagine what hearing these parables might have meant to those early followers of Jesus as they tried to grapple with what Jesus was really on about when he was talking about the kingdom.

Jesus' message to them is that small though what is happening may appear, God can still use it. Insignificant as God's coming kingdom may seem now, it will work out and work through into the wider society.

and even the whole world and everything will be changed. And it's easy for us sitting 2,000 years down the track to accept that because we've seen it, we've experienced, we've seen how that message of the kingdom of God and the gospel of God's forgiveness in Jesus has changed things so radically throughout the world and is still changing things and is still that yeast is still being kneaded out into the world that hasn't heard and things are still changing.

God is still at work growing his kingdom bringing people to himself through his son Jesus. from those very small beginnings.

But Matthew didn't stop there. Matthew relates these parables then he gives a little bit of commentary. Notice what he says. Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables.

[11 : 00] 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.

Now it's true. From this point forward in Matthew's gospel Jesus doesn't speak publicly doesn't teach publicly except using parables. But I think that Matthew is saying something much deeper and more profound than even that.

he's saying yes Jesus did do his teaching in parables from here on but he's quoting here from Psalm 78 and because of the prophetic nature of Psalm 78 verse 2 that very fact of teaching in this way and revealing the hidden things of God in this way links it in to God's wider plan.

Psalm 78 is not just a random psalm. It goes on for the rest of the psalm to be a recitation of how God has worked his purposes out.

How he brought about his plan from the time of Moses right through to the establishment of the kingdom of Israel under David. And that story is the story of how God works in history.
[12 : 41] Now consider for a moment the broad sweep of God's plan. Think about it. From Genesis God creating man falling and then God calling out a people for himself.

How did he do it? He called out Abraham and then developed the promise through Abraham and his descendants to make the people of Israel and then lead them into the promised land. But right from the beginning this story of God working his plan out has been a story of God acting through people who are weak, people who are barren, people who are powerless, people who are too old, people who are slaves, people who are insignificant, people who are fugitives, even murderers.

God, as we trace the history of God working his purposes out, we see Abraham who was described as good as dead, Jacob the cheat, Joseph the slave and the prisoner, there's Moses the murderer and the fugitive, Gideon the timid, Ruth the widow, Hannah the baron, David the youngest brother who was only good for sending out with a sheep, that's to name but a few, you have Isaiah who said I'm too sinful, you have Jeremiah who said I'm too young, people who are unlikely, people who God can use.

You see the people of Israel when they returned from Babylon their efforts at rebuilding the temple, once mighty temple in Jerusalem, seemed pretty pathetic.

[14 : 48] in fact Ezra when he tells us about when the foundation was laid there was great rejoicing because the foundation of the temple was laid and yet the people who remembered the former temple wept.

You have rejoicing and weeping at the same time because yes but it's not very good and into that setting the prophet Zechariah speaks with the words who is it who despises the day of small things. God is at work in the day of small things. You see God uses the most unlikely people and the smallest beginnings for his purposes and we trace that not only through the Old Testament like I've briefly done but we see it in all God's purposes.

He uses the small, the insignificant, the weak right up to the culmination in the salvation of humanity through the criminal execution of the Son of God himself.

God at work through weakness. So Matthew is pointing out by referring us into this psalm that this is part of, this isn't just a small point at which things grow but it's part of this plan of God unfolding establishing his kingdom through small beginnings.

[16 : 41] And this is the way God works often bringing about his plan through small and insignificant and weak people. So what are the lessons for us?

What can we draw from this parable, these parables, this teaching of small beginnings growing into something bigger?

First of all, we need to look for and praise God for his actions in small ways. You see, we like the big and the spectacular.

We tend to think that God's power is better if the results of it are bigger. That's the way we like to think.

we look for the big and the miraculous. But God shows his power in the small and the weak as much as he shows it in the great and the spectacular.

[17 : 45] The changing the heart of an ordinary sinful person into the image of his son from one degree of likeness to another over a long period of time may seem like a slow and insignificant and sort of weak sort of process.

But it can have a powerful impact and it does have a powerful impact. Not only for that person but in the way that that person is used by God to minister.

And that can be as significant as the big spectacular mass conversions at a rally or whatever. God can take a little seed and grow it into something big.

God often takes the weak things and makes them big. Paul recognized that one of the things that he had to learn about God was that God's power was made perfect in his weakness.

God's power is. It's not about how qualified we are. It's about how good and powerful God is.

[19 : 01] So we need to recognize that it's the same God who is at work in the big things and in the small things and give him praise for both of those sorts of things. We don't we mustn't be the people who despise the day of small things in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Secondly, I think it's good for us to remember that no one is too small, no one is too weak, no one is too insignificant for God to use.

The kingdom of heaven is like a small seed that can grow into a big tree. It's like a small amount of yeast that can affect a whole batch.

So let us not be people who hinder what God may want to do with us or with others as small seeds or bits of yeast.

Thinking that we are too small, that we don't have the qualification, that we can't do this, but we're not, we can't, I, no. God is big enough to do big things with small seeds, to be available, be willing to be used because even the seemingly unimpressive and insignificant ways that we allow ourselves to be used by God can make big differences.

[20 : 47] So don't get in the way of that. It means that we need to be open to the small ways that God wants us to act, small acts of obedience in honesty and in little things, in sharing the gospel in everyday life, in small ways.

in an encouraging word, in a small act of kindness. The list could go on.

It doesn't have to be big to be what God uses in mighty ways because God can use those small little things to make beautiful things for him.

So God forbid that I stifle his works by not being obedient in the small things where I have opportunity. Let's pray again.

Lord God, we thank you that you use weak and insignificant people like us to work out your powerful purposes, that you are growing a kingdom.

[22 : 04] And your kingdom can start and be facilitated and grow through people, even sinful people like us. We thank you for that.

We ask that you will have your way in our lives, that your kingdom will come not just in big ways, in the church meetings, things, but in our lives, in the insignificant, the small things that we do, that everything will be done to your glory, and that you will receive all the praise.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.