

Little Things Build The Kingdom Of God 2

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[0 : 00] Let me say a prayer, just that our hearts may be prepared. Our God, we acknowledge that it's a lovely and very warm morning and that we haven't as much tolerance for heat that we perhaps would like or perhaps will need.

And so we ask that your presence may be with us, that you will open our hearts to your word and your word to our hearts. For Christ's sake, amen.

Amen. The passage that I want to talk to you about is the passage I want to talk to you about is Matthew 13, 31 to 35, and we've just had that read to you as a gospel.

And it's the story of, it's the parable of the seed and the mustard. Chapter 13, you can remember this, it will be a help to you, I'm sure, that when the chapter starts, Christ was by the seaside, where again I trust some of you might like to be.

And the crowd was so thick that Christ had to move onto a boat and stood in the prow of a boat, and that's why preachers stand in the prow of a boat to preach every Sunday, or that's what it's supposed to look like.

[1 : 27] And the crowd stood on the shore, perhaps in the water, and listened to them. So it's a lovely setting, and one you can think about, simply by reason of the fact that you're not in it at the moment and might wish you were.

However, Jesus spoke to them in a parable, and the parable was his way of speaking to a very mixed crowd of people.

And we this morning are a very mixed crowd of people. Inevitably, and I don't want to embarrass anybody by saying this, but when you have a baptism, there are always a number of people who find themselves in church saying, what am I doing here, and is the roof going to fall in?

So you may not be used to a place like this. You may not be used to spending your Sunday mornings here. And you may not really be at variance with the Christian faith.

I talked to a wonderful lady today, this week, who was at the stage where she can't read anymore because of illness.

[2 : 35] And she had some real and very hard questions about the Christian faith, and I was trying to explain them to her. And she was very stuck on the fact that all that I talk about has to do with the Christ legend, or the Christ myth, as she said.

So every subject I brought up, she said, well, of course, that's just part of the Christ myth, or Christ legend, so I couldn't get anywhere. And I tried to find some ground on which I could approach her without offending her by imposing on her a myth that she had not yet come to believe.

And so I think Christ came up against a lot of people for whom what he had to say was light years away from where the people were whom he was saying it to.

And so what he did was he told them in parables in order that they could at least take a parable away with them, and even if they didn't understand it, at least they had the parable securely in their minds, and they might one day learn what it meant.

And I think that for this little glass thing, which is cut glass, I would really love it to work, and I don't know how to make it work, but let's talk about it.

[3 : 53] get the partition everyone's thinking, all about it. I'm Jesus, you are not all about it. ng■■■i thought about it. He was just all stored and it mirrors that. What the hell is on the shell with my turn that was wreaking history.

It was worth all about it. It doesn't work. And yeah, I'm just a different person in writing. Individuals have to fight their reverse and the poverty. If you go ahead and make the ability to write, it's not great.

And I know that the power of others aren't speaking this morning, has to pay the ability of writing individual life to be punished, but they don't do that.

And that's why we have to break the road. And all I want to do is sometimes you can go wrong or you know, decide not to work.

Maybe you can turn to stand up and work. However, there is unbounded illustrations that you might have from watching that.

[4 : 55] A person who was a big help to me in understanding this particular parable was Helmut Pellica, who was one of the great German preachers in the post-war world.

And he describes this parable of the mustard seed hidden in a grain of field, hidden in the soil of a field, and how that tiny, tiny, insignificant beginning had great rewards ultimately in the growth of a tree that grew and finally all the birds came and nested in its branches.

So that he said, he remembers for him, one of the illustrations of that was when he began his ministry, it was in the days when Hitler was coming to power in Germany, and he was running a Bible study in his local church.

And you may guess that Bible studies weren't too popular in those days. And he said, there I was gathered with two rather elderly ladies and an organist who had some palsy in his fingers so he didn't hit all the notes, tragically.

But he said, there I was with these three people and the four of us were having a Bible study together. And he said, outside you could hear the Hitler youth marching up and down and you felt that's where the action is.

[6 : 18] What are we doing here with this tiny group of people? Well, I have somewhat the same because of my overweening ambition. When I hear that there are 80,000 people going to the Abbotsford Air Show, I think to myself, what have they got that we haven't got?

You all answer that quietly to yourself. Because I don't really want to know the answer. Or, you know, the church seems to be, in the area, you seem to be confronted with a very few people being very, very ineffective and not accomplishing very much and being a little confused about what they are accomplishing.

And you wonder what it all adds up to and whether it has any significance. And then he points out that in this parable the disciples who have come to Jesus and were following him, they had been doing that for some time, and they saw individual miracles happening, and they saw quite exciting things happening, but they didn't see their world changing the way they thought it ought to change, and they didn't see people signing up the way they felt they ought to sign up, and they were very discouraged with what was happening.

And so Jesus tried to tell them this parable in order to encourage them about the thing that they were involved in. One day this past week, I went over to one of the camps and met with many of the children who are from this congregation and many of the leaders who are from the young people and young adults of this congregation and watched what was happening for a period of about eight hours, and I saw Bible studies going on and prayer groups and devotions and swimming and all sorts of things happening around there.

But it's in that kind of setting that for a lot of people something very simple is happening which will bear enormous results in years to come.

[8 : 22] And when you look at those individual lives that are gathered there trying to struggle their way through the story of Lazarus or one other small passage of Scripture, the story of the woman taken in adultery, and their little minds are struggling with it, and yet in that community and in that place sometimes a tiny seed is sown which brings forth fruit and changes the whole direction of somebody's life.

Now the reason I'm telling you this is because Jesus persistently goes after these things to try and explain the wonderful reality of the kingdom of heaven.

And all this 13th chapter has to do with parables of the kingdom, trying to tell you things by which you can understand what the kingdom is.

And you will remember that in the pages of the New Testament people really struggle all the way through to understand the Christian faith.

I met with a gentleman who spent all his life in the church, and he's been a loyal Anglican all his life. And he said, but I don't think I understand what Christian faith is about at all.

[9 : 43] And a lot of people are in that position where they've been up against it but have never understood, have never come to grips with what the reality of the Christian faith is. There are some things we know and we understand, and Jesus comes along and seems to deliberately frustrate us with giving us parables that in one way any fool can understand and yet the wisest among us can't fully comprehend.

Anybody can hear the story of a seed that's sown in a field and ultimately grows into a shrub. But how does that reveal to us the nature of the kingdom?

But Jesus does it in many other ways that are similar to that. We understand certain things. Music we understand. You know, when you turn on the radio loud and your loudspeakers are just vibrating with the noise coming through them and somebody says, that I understand.

That gets to me. That's where I live. That's what has meaning. Give me more of that. Well, you can't reduce a parable to a drum beat somehow.

It doesn't work. If you go downtown and you talk about money and investments and how you invest and how you make money, then there are people who can say, that I understand.

[11 : 06] And they get involved in doing that. If you're talking about power and how you exert and exercise power, people say, that I understand. There is glamour.

There is travel. There is something big and important that's going on in our world. That we understand. We understand the World Cup. We understand great athletic competitions.

But how do you understand the parables of Christ? How do you get so that they become the very heart and center of your life?

Jesus saying to you that the ultimate reality, which is the reality of the kingdom of heaven, escapes us. And yet he tries to portray it to us in these parables.

So, what you have to do with the parable is, in a sense, what you have to do and what I wasn't able to do with this.

[12 : 07] That is, you have to hold it up to the light so that suddenly the whole of the building is full of light reflected from this little piece of glass. And so you have to take the parables of Christ and hold them up to Christ so that he sheds light through this parable in every corner of your world, in every corner of your understanding and emotions.

So, that's what he's talking about. And he's trying to explain in this parable how you have to come to recognize little insignificant things which ultimately demonstrate or reveal the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

John the Baptist understood this when he was told that, when he told his disciples, he said, I must decrease but he must increase.

He said, the purpose of my life is to disappear in order that people may see Christ. Now, we just don't think that way.

We need to become center stage. We need to draw attention to ourselves. We need to be doing the big thing. We need to be making the big decisions. We need to be in the important place.

[13 : 30] But John the Baptist said, no, I must decrease in order that Christ may be exalted. The biggest problem you have as a minister in the ministry is that people come to you.

Now, not everybody, but some people think you are wonderful, that there has never been anything like you before. And you have this basic desire to agree with them.

And the effectiveness of your ministry ends at that point. Because I must decrease in order that they come to put their faith and love in the person of Jesus Christ.

I can only badly shortchange and deceive them if they put their confidence in me or some other person. You see, it's this little thing that we lose sight of and that is for us, what Jesus says, is the thing that reveals the kingdom of heaven to us.

Do you remember Naaman, the great Syrian general, in 2 Kings chapter 5? And he had the leprosy and he went down to Elisha. And Elisha didn't even bother getting up from his desk, but sent out word to this man who was there with a great bodyguard around him and a chariot on which he was riding and six horses to carry him along and a great retinue following him because he was a terribly important man.

[14 : 57] And he went to good old Elisha. And Elisha, I think without perhaps raising his head from what he was studying, said to him, tell him to go and dip seven times in the river Jordan and he'll get better.

And he went on with his reading. And Naaman the Syrian was furious. And he said, I know that the rivers of Syria are far better than this dirty stream that he wants me to go and do, duck my selfie.

Well, that's such a wonderful story. But you see, what happened was that fortunately Naaman had a servant.

And when Naaman was in high dungeon and ready to walk away and dismiss this whole thing as being a farce that he'd become involved in, the servant said to him, My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?

You see, that's, I think, the problem we have with the kingdom. We are great and important people. We are highly significant people.

[16 : 12] And we want to be told to do some great thing. And we want the church to tell us to do some great thing. And Jesus comes along and says, The great thing is the kingdom of heaven.

And for you, the kingdom of heaven is so hidden that you can't even see it. You're not even aware of it. It's like a tiny seed, so small, that you can hardly pick it up between your fingers.

And it's taken and put in a field so huge that you can hardly encompass it. And that's what the kingdom of heaven is like. And it's varied.

So, once you've done it, you're not even sure where it was you did it. That's how insignificant a thing it was. And yet it's that that grows up to be an illustration of the kingdom.

And that becomes a great shrub, we're told. And then it becomes a great tree. And then the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. But you see, that's what the kingdom is always illustrated like as being in the New Testament.

[17 : 22] You know, we're to be salt. And the great advantage of soup without salt is that you know the salt isn't there. And when it is there, you know it's there.

When we live in our world, if the Christians aren't there, there is something dull, flat, and insipid about it that makes it tasteless. If the salt is there, then life is exciting.

You will know that there's a great debate going on about our ability to put ourselves to death at will. And life has lost its salt.

And so we think it is of no meaning at all. Or you can take light. You know, you can think of a little light hiding in the night against the overwhelming darkness that's outside, so that the light won't venture into the darkness.

But that one little light is such that all the darkness in the whole of the universe can't put it out. And Jesus says that's what it's like to encounter the kingdom.

[18 : 28] Or in the parable we read this morning following the mustard seed, it says that there is some yeast hidden in three measures of meal. A great, heavy, wet, sodden blob of meal that will stay great, heavy, wet, and sodden until the yeast, which is so tiny it's invisible, and works in it to make this sodden lump of meal into a glorious loaf of whole grain bread.

Well, that's the hiddenness of the kingdom of God. And it's hidden in our world. And that's why most of us, we tend to overlook it.

That's why, you know, the reality for us in the church, the delight of this morning, is the baptizing of all those children.

We're doing what Jesus says in Matthew 18 and 5 we need to do. What we did this morning, and listen as Jesus tells us about it, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

[19 : 52] Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Christ walks into this congregation and sees all the important people sitting row on row in the pews of this congregation.

And he takes a child and says, unless you become as this child, you won't even see the kingdom. Because the child belongs, the kingdom belongs to things that are tiny and small and insignificant, and we are prepared to overlook at our peril.

So, what I think this parable of the seed, the mustard seed sown in a great field, what I think it's about is that we're all waiting to be asked to do some great thing.

When you come and approach Jesus Christ, he tells you, well, what about your neighbor? What about your prayers? What about reading the Bible? What about doing this simple and insignificant thing?

What about teaching a Sunday school class? What about doing something very insignificant and very small? And finding in that the kingdom of heaven, the reality of the kingdom.

[21 : 21] And we just overlook it. We just don't see it. When this parable concludes, it says, the birds of the air come and nest in the branches.

And I'm not sure whether they're good birds or not. But you can read about them in Daniel 4, verse 12. Sometimes Daniel doesn't appear in this Bible.

That gives me time to look for it. And I hope to arouse your sympathy. But it says here about a tree, Its leaves were fair, its fruit abundant, it was food for all.

The beasts of the field found shade under it. The birds of the air dwelled in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it. And you see, what happens is that the kingdom of heaven Becomes a reality in the midst of our world.

And that reality is one in which, from which we derive nourishment, From which we derive shelter. And our brave world is trying to deny the reality of the kingdom.

[22 : 32] And all you get is birds perching in mid-air. And they last so long until they come crashing to the ground. And most of the institutions of our society, Which are dependent upon the ultimate reality of the kingdom, The kingdom, don't recognize that dependence.

And so they come crashing down. And somebody has said that it's sort of like the United States going into Kuwait. Everybody has the indignation.

Everybody is upset. Everybody thinks something should be done. But who has the soldiers, the troops, the ships, the planes, To go in there and do something?

Well, the United States has gone in, And everybody else is coming and nesting in the branches. Now that is not a political thing. And I'm not going to argue with you about it.

I just want to give it to you as a simple passing illustration. So in our world, the reality of the kingdom of God, Is the reality on which everything else depends.

[23 : 36] And your high principles and your ideals and your ethics and everything else, They really are dependent upon the reality of the kingdom. And if the kingdom isn't there, you've got no place to perch.

You have no place to sit. You have no food to eat ultimately. You have nothing that you can do. And that's the reality of the kingdom.

So that for all of us, when Christ gives us what seems to be an obscure reference to the nature of the kingdom of heaven, We need to hear him. Because unless we are in touch with that reality, Then the whole central structure of our lives just isn't there.

Our life is meaningless dust on the ground. And yet Christ has said that he wants us to know and he wants us to understand the kingdom.

And like Naaman, we might say, Ah, that's beneath me. And it probably is way beneath many of us. But it's absolutely important to all of us too.

[24 : 47] That we should, through putting our faith in Jesus Christ and our trust in him, Encounter the king around whom the kingdom of heaven is built.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you very much.