

How His Kingdom Comes

Luke 13:18-21

March 7, 2021

If you could turn in your Bibles to Luke, Chapter 13, we are finishing up a section today. Two brief parables from Jesus, and you'll find them in Luke 13:18 to 21. Luke 13:18 to 21. Two simple parables. But once again, we find, what appears to be simple on the surface is profoundly searching and at the same time profoundly encouraging to us.

Jesus said, "Therefore," Luke 13:18, "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 nests in its branches.' And again he said, 'To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.'"

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

If you find those two parables familiar, that's because they are also found in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. He delivered those same two parables at an earlier point in his ministry back in Galilee, recorded by Matthew, by Mark. Those are two parallel accounts and they're common. There are things that you could see coming up in his ministry, time and time again, as he teaches in different places.

Same two parables on the kingdom. Matthew gives both of the parables, just as Luke has recorded them, here, in Judean context, Matthew in a Galilean context, Mark just gives the one parable, just the parable about the mustard seed. In both of those places, Matthew and Mark, the parables are recorded without reference to any historical setting. They're interpreted in a more of a literary context. That's what Matthew and Mark provide, is a literary context, to interpret the meaning of the parables.

Both Matthew and Mark follow the telling of those parables, with a comment about why Jesus spoke in parables. In Matthew 13: 34 and 35, Matthew tells us this, "All these things Jesus said to

the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet. 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.'"

Mark says something similar. He adds in Mark 4:34, "Then Jesus did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples, he explained everything." The crowds get parables; truths that are hidden since the foundation of the world. There's nothing lacking in the truth that Jesus conveys, but he cloaks that truth, in a story. What seems to be common, simple on the face of it, on the surface of it, and yet it is truth hidden, since the foundation of the world.

And a biblical term for that; a truth hidden from before the foundation of the world now made known, that's called a mystery. So, the mystery of the kingdom is revealed in parables. To most of the crowd, they listen without any understanding, and they say, huh, nice story. Kind of weird. Kind of common, but interesting. Let's move on.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

True disciples, though, they drew near for more understanding. And to them, to those who draw nearer to those who sense something deeper, in the parable, Jesus is pleased to reveal that truth. To explain it, to fully interpret it. So, what Matthew and Mark record without reference to a historical setting, we see that Luke records this time, a later time, in his ministry. A Judean context, maybe a Perea context, where Jesus told the same two parables. The mustard seed and the leaven.

In this case, though, we can see that Luke has kept these parables connected to an historical setting and that helps with our interpretation. Notice, said Luke, has said in verse 18, introducing these two parables, he introduces them with the word, therefore, beginning of verse 18. That's an inferential particle. That's a coordinating conjunction.

So, it connects these two parables with what came before. What's in the preceding context that he wants us to see here? Well, he wants us to see that these two parables are illustrating, or reinforcing, interpreting, or even drawing out

the implications of what everyone that day witnessed in the synagogue. What was that? What did everybody see in the synagogue? Well, we've been covering that for the past couple weeks. So, for any of you who are visiting today, welcome, by the way, glad to have you, but let's go back and do a little bit of a review.

Part one, that is back starting in chapter 13, verse 10. It's about the power of the kingdom that's set a woman free and restored her physical body. She was restored physically, but that also had implications for her financially, socially, and many other ways. Look at verse 10. "Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your disability.' And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God." This woman, as we come to find out, she's a true believer.

Jesus is pleased to see her, to liberate her from the oppression of this evil spirit, and then to heal her body and restore her. But let us be clear, this woman is no giant of a figure in the story. She is pictured as bent over. She's relatively insignificant. She's a smallish character in the account. She's not strong, she's weak, she's not healthy or whole, she's bent over, crippled, and broken.

If a headline were published in the next day's newspaper, if her name even made it into print in the newspaper, it would have been an incidental detail to the reader. Because it's not really about what, what, who she is. It's about what happened to her. And what's featured here, even in Luke's account, isn't even her name, isn't her back story. It's the liberating restorative power resident in Jesus Christ. He bringing the kingdom of power to this synagogue.

That brings us to part two, the synagogue. What's going on in the synagogue? This, there's a controversy that's raised by a synagogue ruler. A controversy. Some kind of a conflict that, he's has, a problem he has with the healing. Everybody heard this offense taken by the synagogue ruler. It was as if, in the

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

words of Matthew Henry, "As if our Lord Jesus had committed some heinous crime in healing this poor woman."

Look at it there, in verse 14, "But the ruler of the synagogue." Look at this, indignant, that means angry.

"Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, he 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.' Then the lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and, leader, lead it away to water it? Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?' As he said these things, all his adversaries," that synagogue ruler, all his buddies, "they were put to shame. All the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him." He'd effectively silenced the critics.

Jesus had put his adversaries to shame. He exposed this man's duplicity, his pretension, his hypocrisy. He has an issue with Jesus, but he doesn't directly talk to, Jes, he addresses the

people, in this sanctimonious language about Sabbath propriety. He's pretending an interest here, in, in lawfulness, but he's actually more interested in retaining his power. Maintaining control. He used the law unlawfully here, restrictively, denying mercy to those who most needed it. Those who wanted to be healed.

This oppressed, severely crippled woman, her condition is, her condition frankly, is far easier to remedy than the blindness and the hard heartedness of a synagogue ruler. He and his friends failed to discern the purpose of the law. It's seminal connection to the gospel.

Unconverted religious leaders, they are the very worst of tyrants. They bind the conscience like jailers of human souls. And when I say unconverted religious leaders, keep in mind, I'm not just talking about people who take up residence in a pulpit, or in a church, or a synagogue, or a mosque. I'm talking about that, but I'm also talking about those in our secular age who are beginning to sound a lot more religious with a woke religion. They're trying to bind the conscience, too. To a dead

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

religion of works from which you can never be free, in which there is no forgiveness, nothing but condemnation, and judgment, and reparations, and you pay.

Unconverted religious leaders are the very worst kind of tyrants, because they think themselves justified by a righteous cause. Watch out for them. That's the setting for these two parables, which form a stark and profound contrast to the sinful tendency. These parables are a contrast to the sinful tendency, the impulse of all false religion to restrict, and to limit, and to bind, not to loose, not to free, not to give expression of abundance, and joy, but to bind.

In verse 17, all these people, though they are rejoicing at this moment, because the synagogue ruler, his powerful friends, they've had a little bit of their comeuppance. They've been publicly shamed, publicly humiliated, Jesus knows, that without a greater inducement, injection of kingdom truth, they will not be induced to come to salvation. They will remain in a worse condition than the woman had, a crippling state of their souls,

where they are bent over, crushed, trapped in their sins, and heading for an eternal hell.

And so Jesus here, he spots this. He sees the effect. He doesn't want anybody there to lose sight of the fact that it was not about just putting these leaders in their place. It was about telling them the truth. A freeing, saving truth, they so desperately needed to hear. They're rejoicing, as it says in verse 17, not in all the things he said, not hearing his teaching, and understanding, and rejoicing. That's what the woman did. They're rejoicing in all the things he was doing. All that he had done. They're looking at the spectacle. They're seeing the power. They're seeing his getting over a good one on the leaders. That's what they're happy about. So, Jesus speaks to them in parables.

There's a hint that Luke gives in the text. ESV translates the word here as, the people were rejoicing. It's the word, *ochlos*, in Greek, which is the word, crowd, and this tells us that Luke, he wants us to see this as a crowd, like all the other crowds in his gospel. It's a mixed multitude. Predominantly, many of them

unbelievers. They're religious. They're Jewish, predominantly Jewish, but they're mostly unbelievers.

And though these people rejoice, it does not mean that they understood. It doesn't mean that they were believing people. They just liked what they saw. End of verse 17, rejoice over the things done by him, not necessarily the things taught by him, so he's gonna double back and teach. He wants them to understand.

This is why he spoke to them in the parables, hiding the truth of the kingdom in parables, to cull the crowds from the, separate all those insincere listeners, those superficial, trivial minded listeners. He wants to separate them out, and he wants to cull the crowd, and he wants to pull out, and draw the serious seekers closer to him.

Several things Jesus wants to teach about the kingdom of God, all intended to upset our own human expectations, our assumptions. We look back at the Jews, in Jesus' day, these first century listeners, we can see them recorded on the pages of Scripture and they don't get it, do they? They're often

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

missing the point completely. And we read, and we say, we kind of stand on the side of Jesus, we say, how could they not see that? Well, this is the after-action report. I mean, this is the word of God explaining and interpreting it to us. So, let's not become too haughty, as if we'd be any different.

In fact, even today we have certain expectations and assumptions that we carry into the text, all the time. We have certain expectations and assumptions about what the kingdom of God looks like, what success means, what a fruitful ministry is. We're Americans, after all. Some people who've moved here recently are Texans, right? Everything in Texas is big. We are Americans. We love what's big. What appears on the outside to be successful and what is that? A lot of numbers and a lot of money, right? We think in terms of a, of American religion. It's not, at all, the assumptions that we should bring into the text.

We should let the text determine our assumptions and set our expectations. If we all let go of our limiting, limited understanding and if we enter into the text and allow Christ to shape our thinking, we're going to come out of this thing not

only with understanding, but with a deep, deep sense of gratitude, and joy, and wonder, in the work of God in his kingdom, as he spreads his kingdom across the world.

So, I've got six. This is gonna be a, a, different sermon. I've got six points. Six points to walk you through.

First point. One by one, we got the kingdom subverts our expectations. Let's start there, number one, the kingdom subverts, overturns, our expectations. And I, I, should just add, our sinful expectations, our limited expectations, our, our, human expectations. We could even add the words, our inherited expectations. The way we have been cultured. The, the sense that, we all have growing up in the world. We need to lose that.

Kingdom subverts our expectations and we're just gonna start here, making an observation about how Jesus gets into the parables. It kind of portrays him here, in verse 18, as sort of searching for the right metaphor. What is the right image? He says, in verse 18, "What is the Kingdom of God like? And to what

shall I compare it?" You think he's puzzled? Again, in verse 20, he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?"

You know what he's doing by voicing the question. He's not trying to tell you, Hey, I'm human like you. I gotta search for stuff. No. By voicing the question, he's calling on those in the crowd to kind of join him in coming up with the proper analogy. I mean, what do you think the kingdom of God is like? If this synagogue crowd is left to fill in the blank, if he stopped there and just gave them time to muse, provide the imagery or the simile, what do you think of first century Jewish crowd would come up with here?

"What is the kingdom of God like?" Well, oh, the kingdom of God, well, it's the, of God kingdom, and God is bigger than any other. So, it's like the empires, of maybe, like Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, only greater; like the might and the glory of Rome under which we are dominated and oppressed, only stronger, more powerful. Full of heavenly glory.

GRACE CHURCH

Perhaps there would be some godly folks who are looking back to Israel's glory days and the kingdom of God is like the kingdoms of, of, David or the kingdom of Solomon. Or maybe both David and Solomon all rolled up into one. Military force, able to both project power around the world and also provide security for the homeland at the same time. Maybe a just judiciary with the wisdom of Solomon, impartial, showing mercy, also able to execute swift justice on evil doers. And consequently, with strength, and wisdom, and judicial righteousness, there is an unimaginable degree of wealth, and health, and prosperity.

That's what the kingdom of God is like. It's just like all those restoration promises. This speaks of the millennial kingdom of God that will rule over the earth. That's the image. That's the kingdom. That's what the kingdom of God is like. Verse 20, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God?" Hmm, well, it's like the mighty mountains for height. It's like the oceans for depth. It's like the expanse of the earth that runs East, West, North, and South.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

We compare the kingdom of God to the sun and its brilliance, to the stars, and all of their wonder and glory, to the heavens for awe and majesty. We could go on and on. And I don't want you to misunderstand me here. Those comparisons are not wrong. They are true, even biblical. This is how these folks would have answered the question. That's how we answer the question, of what, as well, when we're called to make comparisons. What is the kingdom of God like? But notice, that's not what Jesus said. He said the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed. And when it grows into a mature tree, everybody can picture a mustard tree, or plant, or bush. It provides nest for the birds.

Ever seen a mustard tree? It's no cedar of Lebanon. Thoughtful Jewish listener, reflecting on this, hearing this from Jesus, his mind may have recalled similar sayings in the scriptures. Nebuchadnezzar was portrayed in Daniel 4, as this massive tree, "the top of which reached to the heaven itself, visible from the ends of the earth." Nebuchadnezzar, "whose leaves were beautiful, it's fruit abundant in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches, the birds of the heavens lived."

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

That portrayed a pagan king, Babylonian king who came under divine judgment, but there was also a restoration prophecy that they may have called to mind, an illusion. This may have been an illusion for many to Ezekiel 17. Ezekiel 17:22 to 24, it foretells the kingdom of God. So, it's perfect context. It's the perfect setting. Verse 23 says, "On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble," not mustard tree, "a noble cedar. Under it will dwell every kind of bird in the shade of its branches, birds of every sort will nest."

Jesus has taken a common biblical image; he's given it a little twist. He does that often in his parables. So, a tree with its top reaching heaven. Visible to the ends of the earth. A mighty noble cedar like the renowned cedars of Lebanon. Now those are trees conveying strength, power, glory, height. But for his analogy, Jesus uses the scraggly, relatively unattractive image of a mustard tree, more like an overgrown bush.

He also compares the kingdom to a woman in her kitchen. Domestic setting. She uses leaven in her baking to make her

bread rise. Again, the, the, thoughtful Jewish reader may have heard this. And his mind wants to go back to Moses, right, for bread imagery. Manna coming down from heaven. Nobody's gotta work at all. Just gather it. The very bread of angels.

For his analogy: Common woman, in a household setting, leavening her bread. From the very beginning, Jesus is subverting expectations, about the human, or about the kingdom of God. Human expectations, thoughts that we have about what the kingdom of God should be like. He subverts those expectations using common, rather mundane figures of speech, common metaphors.

And some might call, this, these comparisons a bit pedestrian, so, others, others may even dare to say they're a bit boring. And if that crossed your mind, consider the scene. Consider the setting of the history, the historical setting, here, how the kingdom of God came into this common setting of a synagogue. Common world of a crippled woman; unnoticed by these. so common coming in and out for 18 years with a bent over back. Unnoticed by people for 18 years!

Consider how these people and Jesus drew on this, and confronting them. Consider how they went about with their weekly habits, as unthinking as the animals that they were untying and leading to water. Totally unthinking about what they did week by week and how that should translate into, if I show mercy to my animals, how to show mercy to a woman who needs mercy. Common, used to illustrate the principles of God's kingdom. What God considers the right use of a day of rest. So that's the kingdom that subverts our expectations.

Let's go onto a second point. That the kingdom ignores our assumptions. The kingdom ignores our assumptions. The assumptions that we make. The common is the setting for the uncommon. And in that setting, we see that big things come from very small beginnings. We see this in our common world, all the time. If we'll just quit looking at what's marvelous, and great, and glorious, and just look at our day-to-day life, big things come from very, very small beginnings. Every single one of us is a testimony to that. What did we come from? A fertilized egg in our mother's womb. Invisible to the eye.

And now look at us. God seems to delight in ignoring all the assumptions that we want to make, as he accomplishes his will. Jesus says, in verse 19, "The Kingdom of God, 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 nest in its branches." And then, verse 21, "The Kingdom of God it is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened." The tiny grain of mustard seed. The tiny particle of yeast.

If we're thinking according to our own assumptions about, what the kingdom, how it should come in glory, and power, and strength, and all that. When we look in contrast to these very small things, we tend to assume very little of things that are so insignificant, so small. But God just delights in ignoring all those assumptions and setting them aside and accomplishing his will.

A lot of ink has been spilled by commentators as they tried to identify the exact seed and the exact plant that Jesus is

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

identifying here. It's the mustard seed. It's, it really is this, you know, the smallest seed of all the seeds of the earth. Some say, ha, there are smaller seeds on the earth than the mustard seed. It's just, he's not trying to talk in terms of botany here. He's trying to speak in terms of what anybody would use in their garden.

So, it is indeed the smallest of all seeds anybody would care to plant, willfully, in their garden anywhere on Earth. What variety of mustard plant is it? Is it the mustard bush, what's called the *Sinapis Nigra*, which grows from a tiny little black seed to a height of a maybe even 15 feet. Is it that? Or is it the *Salvadora Persica* tree, which can grow in height of up to 25 feet? Many commentators still not getting the point, they want the 25 foot version, not the 15 foot version.

Again, it's not the point. Jesus doesn't want us to go off and study botany here. He's talking about common, mundane, known things to everyday people. He is drawing attention to it. Very simple contrast. Something that anyone in his day, listening to him, anybody could see plainly the, the, mustard plant. Starts

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

from a relatively small size, in its nascent form. A tiny little, tiny little seed, and by contrast, in its mature form, with deep roots, strong trunks, sturdy branches, a broad canopy of leaves, it provides shade and refuge, home for all kinds of birds, such that when you look from the outside, you can never see the birds hidden in there. That's interesting. Just if you stop and think about it, small to that.

Similar contrast with the woman baking her bread, verse 21, kingdom of God like a woman. "Leaven that a woman took hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened." Now, unless you've been studying in your Bibles, the, in the back the table of weights and measures, you're not gonna get the significance of what three measures of flour is. It's not going to strike you with the same force that these listeners would have heard.

His audience understood three measures, three *sata*. The word *saton* is the Greek name, for the Hebrew, *se'ah*, single *se'ah*. A single *saton* of flour, a little more than 16 pounds of flour. So, if you prefer the metric system, seven kilos of flour or in dry measure 13.13 liters. That's nearly 50 pounds of flour. This

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

woman is making enough bread to feed more than 150 people. This is an astonishing baking operation. But it can't happen without the addition of a little bit of yeast.

Some yeast particles with invisible influence working its way through the flour. Small bit of leaven that works its way through, the, the whole batch. Changing it. Affecting all of it. Big things come from very small beginnings. As we bring this into, just some things we've seen in Luke's gospel, so far we can see how this principal transfers clearly to us. Start with the citizens of God's kingdom, those whom Jesus calls in Luke 12:32. He calls them, little flock. I mean, they're not much to look at. Small, small in numbers, small in stature. What are they?

I mean, those who believe in Luke's gospel so far, they're generally anonymous. They're unknown to the pages of history. In the world's eyes, they're insignificant at best. At worst, they're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Romans 8:36. They're not only that, though, they may appear small. They may appear weak as sheep, "but they are more than conquerors, not on

their own strength, but through him who loved us." Romans 8:37. Many of them, most of them come from small, insignificant beginnings.

Many of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. Three closest friends, Peter, James, and John; fisherman. One of the disciples was a tax collector, hated despised. Another was a zealot of a failed political cause. Several of the others are hardly known. By the world's estimation, these are unremarkable, relatively unimportant men. And yet they became the foundation of the church. Their names are going to be inscribed, if you look at Revelation 21:22, their names are inscribed on the 12 foundation stones of this incredible city of God, the New Jerusalem.

Other citizens of God's kingdom that we've seen in Luke's gospel, some unknown, unnamed disciples, Luke 8:1. Also in Luke 8:1-3, some women who've been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Luke 8:2. That doesn't sound like a great recruiting pool, for your team, that's on a dream team, you're putting together.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

You gots, People have issues. One of them, Mary called Magdalene, seven demons came out of her. You imagine the scrambled mess that her life looked like at that point, before the transforming power of the spirit changed her. Doesn't sound promising, at all, to start with. Jesus is pleased to be supported by these people. Many of these women supporting him out of their own means. He was pleased to do it. Because he didn't see the small beginning. He saw God's greatness in, hidden in treasure, treasure hidden in jars of clay, and he saw what they would be.

Consider their leader, Jesus Christ, king of this kingdom of God. He doesn't enter the scene riding on a white stallion dressed in knights' armor, conquering Romans, seizing the throne. It's how we would have written the story. As far as anyone knew, this king came with no fanfare at all. In the smallest, humblest, most insignificant, of beings, of beginnings. The king of God's kingdom, he's born into the world in the darkness of night. A baby, a human baby, weak, vulnerable, swaddled in cloths, laid in a manger. He's completely and utterly dependent on his mother for his survival, can't even take care of himself.

His parents, they hadn't even consummated their marriage. So, he came with the appearance of, not the truth of, but the appearance of illegitimacy. They're quite poor, these two parents, this family he came into, even when they came and presented Jesus at the at the temple for the, the, offering, they only could, could, offer up two turtle doves. Two pigeons maybe? I mean they had nothing.

They had to flee to Egypt for their lives. After returning, they sought the refuge of anonymity in lowly, insignificant Nazareth. That's where Jesus was raised. He entered into ministry, and one of his would-be disciples had the bad sense to point that out to his face: Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Jesus' ministry in Nazareth, as he entered into ministry, as he was baptized by the spirit, in the waters of baptism, with John, when the voice from Heaven said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. He went back to Nazareth, almost a fatal first step in his ministry. People of his hometown, they're so

offended by him, they almost throw him off a Cliff. Not great beginnings. Doesn't look promising.

He set off, an, on an itinerant ministry throughout Galilee, supported by these women. Seemed to be a wasted effort, because many villages, they received his ministry, but they rejected his teaching. They've refused to repent. Refused to believe in him. Even places like Capernaum, where he had spent so much time, people refused to believe in him. His mission, his mission looked like an abject failure from a human standpoint. Especially when it ended in a humiliating death on a Roman cross and, at that point, even his most loyal disciples, even his closest friends defected. His closest, Peter, three times, "I don't know this man."

Small beginnings and our assumptions; nothing's gonna go well. Yet this Jesus is none other than the son of God. He is the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. He came as the son of man, who was known from ancient times. Daniel 7:14, "He was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an

everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away. His kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed.”

The scandalous message of the cross, the story of a crucified Christ; complete foolishness to most people. But to those who know it's transforming power, to those who are being saved by this message of a crucified Christ, it's nothing less than “the power of God and the wisdom of God,” 1 Corinthians 1:24.

This crucified Christ, God raised him from the dead. God glorified him. He set his seal of approval on him. He gave him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus, Philippians 2:10, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Every tongue should confess that this Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the Father.” God put his, he staked his own glory on this one.

This Jesus Christ, Revelation 1:5 says, “He is the faithful witness,” he is, “the first born from the dead,” he is “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Look around at the kings of the earth right now. He's their ruler. They owe him worship.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

This one is the one who loves his people. He is the one who's freed them from their sins by his own blood. He has made them a kingdom, priests to his God and father. Who were they? Veritable nobody's, not many wise in the world's estimation, not many mighty, not many powerful, not many of noble birth, but God delights to elevate those.

He chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, 1 Corinthians 1:27. "God chose what is weak in the world. To shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are," or seemed to be. He subverts. He just completely abolishes and ignores all of our assumptions, and he does his own thing. Why? 1 Corinthians 1, "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

Brings us to a third point, when God has done what is great, through what is small. Point number three, the kingdom exceeds our predictions. The kingdom exceeds all of our predictions. And that stands to reason, if we've had false assumptions to begin

with. We can't predict anything rightly. So, the kingdom exceeds our predictions.

A grain of mustard seed is small. It's really small. If you cast it into a garden like this guy did, it would be impossible to find it again. It's not even as shiny as a needle in a haystack. It's black. It's small and invisible once you throw it on the ground. Yeast as well, it's actually, yeast is actually a, a, singled cell fungi. It has relation to the mushroom. Hmm, didn't know that. Takes 20 billion of those little single cell fungi to get a gram of yeast. So small that a bit of yeast would be almost impossible to see.

If I took a single grain of mustard seed and put it in your hand, without you knowing what that seed was and I ask you to predict the outcome: Tell me the yield that's gonna come from this little thing. The size of the plant. Or if I gave you yeast particles. Ask you how much flour that could affect. What it's good for. For you, that'll be impossible to predict, what's gonna, how that yeast is gonna affect anything.

Packed into that tiny grain of mustard seed is an outsized power. There's energy in that tiny little thing to produce this massive tree. Internal power potential within the seed, and that potential actualizes, externally, visibly in a tree that's large enough, and foliage thick enough, for birds to find a home. To be hidden and safe. Starts out small, accomplishes what is very great.

Likewise, leaven hidden in flour relatively invisible to the naked eye. It's, it's potential to leaven 50 pounds of flour, and let's not limit it there. It can affect any kind of, number of measures of flour. The invisible process of fermentations: we call it leavening. It spreads through the whole mass. As that leaven gets in there and does its work, basically is chewing up sugars and then releasing carbon dioxide gas. It causes these bread loaves to rise and expand. It improves the flavor and, as we all know, there's aroma that's pleasing and inviting. The batch size enough to satisfy 150 people. That's irrelevant the batch size.

GRACE CHURCH

The leaven works. Does its work. Again, what starts out so small, seemingly invisible, it has the potential, that God put in it, to accomplish what is superlatively great, to become visible, noticeable to all. God put the power and the principle of maturation into the seed. It illustrates how the death of Christ can bring life to so many. He put the power and the principle of saturation into the leaven.

He illustrates how the life of the spirit transforms all the citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, John 12:24, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth" and does what? Dies. It remains alone, but if it dies, "it bears much fruit." The power, the principle of life. In his life, his seed planted, his life, death, resurrection, that has, brought life to all of his people.

1 John 3:2 says, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." "We've been united with him in his death," like his, Roman 6:5, "We shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

The principle of maturation. The principle of saturation. 1 Corinthians 15:42, "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what's raised is imperishable; it's sown in dishonor, it's raised in glory. It's sown in weakness; it is raised in power."

Since God so often subverts our expectations. Since he delights in ignoring our assumptions and since his invisible, unseen work always exceeds our predictions, folks, this needs to shape the way we think about the way God works in the world. Isaiah said, Isaiah 55:8 and 9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Folks, every time the church forgets this, gets into trouble.

We love to count things, don't we? We're impressed by big stuff. Mighty powerful things, large numbers, big armies, lots of money, big guns, big influence. We're conditioned as Americans growing up in this culture. We're conditioned to value

what is immediately effective. We love to correlate cause and effect.

We always favor what has a pragmatic sense within us that something's gonna work. If it doesn't work, I don't want any part of it or it has to have this therapeutic sense that it's gotta do something for me right now? Oh, I don't wanna study doctrine because, what practical relevance does that have to me right now? I don't have a sense of healing and mental peace, I don't want anything of it, but I can't see an immediate payoff, I'm not interested. If I don't get a spiritual buzz out of this, I get the sense, this is wrong. Something's not working. Something's not clicking.

Patience, advises the farmer. Growth takes time. From the moment a seed falls into the ground and begins to germinate to the day that we see birds nesting in the fully mature plant, listen, growth takes time.

Patience advises the woman baking her bread. The leavening of the loaves, the invisible process of the fermentation, that

takes time. Get out of the kitchen. Quit crowding me. I'll get you your bread and your butter. Nice glass of milk. Just get out and wait. We need to learn this and we need to learn this now. We need to learn this for the sake of our souls. We need to learn this for the sake of our health, before, before God, before one another.

We're so impatient with each other, we make demands on one another, as Christians, that we cannot measure up to. Growth takes time. The maturation and the saturation, it takes time. We need to abandon fleshly assumptions. We need to reset our predictions biblically. We need to set expectations according to God's power. According to his revealed will. Listen, that's kingdom reasoning. That's kingdom thinking. Takes us to a necessary consequence, which is a fourth point.

Point number four, the kingdom defies our limitations. The kingdom defies our limitations. Try to put limitations on it. Like an old wineskin surrounding new wine, it'll burst right out. Kingdom defies our limitations. kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed. Man took. So discarded. Grew. Became a

tree. Birds of the air made nests in its branches. It is like leaven that the woman took, hid in three measures of flour until all was leavened.

In contrast to the restrictive impulse of the synagogue ruler, whose impulse was to bind the conscience falsely, even having the audacity to use a Bible verse. Narrow the scope, impose limitation, that is not in keeping with God's plan to expand his kingdom and saturate the world with kingdom influence. The size of the kingdom is massive and all-encompassing. Its influence is thorough and universal. That is completely lost on this synagogue ruler, his adversary friends. Come on work days to get healed, okay, not on the Sabbath day of rest.

Kingdom of God exceeds all limitations. The birds of the heaven is a metaphor. This hints at Gentile inclusion in the kingdom. It's not only one kind of bird that nests in the branches of this tree, it's all the birds of the air that come to take refuge and find rest and make a home. So, it's not just Jewish birds that fly into that tree, but the birds of the nations as well. And in this parable, just stop and think about that,

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

folks. Jesus envisions you and me, us Gentiles, half a world away, separated by two millennia now, he's thinking of us.

In leavening three measures of flour, he assures us that in this kingdom there is no worry about running out of food. In the kingdom, resources are plentiful. Abundant. There's plenty to go around. There's enough to feed everybody and the spirit of the kingdom is a spirit of generosity. Completely unlike the synagogue ruler and a lot more like Jesus. Spirit of the kingdom is a spirit of generosity, and mercy, and giving.

Think about your own life. Think about your own impulses. And the real question here is, do you belong at this table? Do you take refuge in the branches of this tree? Look what's coming next in the text. Skip ahead to verse 26. He's speaking to the Jews, those who consider themselves a sure in, in the kingdom, because they're connected to Abraham. And he says, you're gonna begin to say, verse 26, We ate and drank in your presence. Hey, you taught in our streets. We're buddies. We're pals, Jesus. "And he will say to you, 'I tell you, I don't know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'"

That's how he describes the synagogue ruler there, imposing limitations, binding consciences, falsely and unlawfully using the law, "workers of evil". "In that place," where I'm gonna cast you into, verse 28, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And it especially so, not just the pain of the separation, not just the pain of hell, but look, it's also the pain of what you lost out on when you see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God. But you yourselves cast out, and people will come from East and West and from North and South and recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

That just, that just rubs it in, doesn't it? Not everybody is gonna be nesting in these branches. Only those whose growth comes from the true seed of the gospel. Why is that? Because God's power for growth is only in the true seed of the true gospel. Not everybody's gonna be sitting at that table. Only those who are transformed by Christ. Only those whose lives are saturated by his word and his spirit in the heart, by the Holy Spirit renewing the inner life, which leads to a transformation of the outer life.

The transforming power has to come from God. Leon Morris said this, said it this way, "The dough does not change itself." That crippled woman is a true daughter of Abraham. She didn't change herself. She was changed, acted on from the outside, and no matter how she was judged by others in her own time, Jesus knows she certainly belongs there. She found refuge in the branches of this tree. She has a place reserved for her at the table in the kingdom. Synagogue ruler and his wealthy friends, no, no, matter how religious, how important, how wealthy they appeared on the outside. They proved adversaries to Christ.

Those birds that they would have excluded from the kingdom, keeping their own place, well, guess what, their place is handed over to somebody else. They're gonna be disappointed. They, have, find they have no place at the table. They're gonna be outside looking in. What about you, my friend? Are you trusting in Christ? Are you resting in the refuge of the kingdom of God or are you trusting in yourself? Are your days, and nights, and weeks, and weekends, and months, and years, are they occupied with you busy building your own tree? Looking to yourself and

your own strength, your own money, to provide a refuge for yourself. Don't do that my friend. Trust in Christ.

Trust in Christ alone. And if you claim to trust in Christ: Is the power that leads to growth evident in your life? Is the saturating power of the gospel, and the spirit of God, and the word of God actually doing its renewing work in your life internally? Is it changing the things that you love and that you hate? Is it changing your affections to conform your affections to the affections of Jesus Christ? Or are you pretty much the same?

Is it transforming your life, so that you don't have to tell everybody that you're saved, you're a Christian, but other people come to you and say, hey, what's different about your speech? Your behavior? Is it visible? Is the visible connected to what's internally a reality to you. So important, because a transforming life is evidence of a power that comes only from God. The dough does not change itself, right? It's called the fruit of the spirit because it's only spiritually produced by

him. Many people try to mimic it. Many people claim it. Only kingdom citizens have it.

Fifth point: The kingdom fulfills our dominion. The kingdom fulfills our dominion. The kingdom of God actually fulfills what God set forth to accomplish from the very beginning. I'd like you to turn to the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, just, just briefly, and follow this with me. Starting in Genesis 1:27, we read, "that God created man in his own image and the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

That's genesis 1:27. Look at verse 28. "God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and,' then this, 'subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" What is, what does the word kingdom mean? What does it describe? If not the exercise of dominion.

The kingdom of God refers to a universal dominion. A dominion that is expansive. A dominion that is not limited. Universal

dominion is supported by an unlimited bounty of God's generosity, his abundant goodness. Look at verse 29, God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that's on the face of all the earth, every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food." Whole lot of flour, right? That is an abundant self-perpetuating food resource, right there.

Can you imagine all the, in a pre-fall world, all the pleasing aromas that would come out of mom's baking? All the delicious tastes. All the fruit pies. Accomplished all the work that God intended to do, having taught and equipped Adam to join in the work. Having given Adam the honor of representing him by bearing his image and then exercising dominion over all that he made, making Adam a regent of God on earth.

God sent him into his work, entering, into his very first full day. Which was a day of rest. Look at Genesis 2:1 to 3, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, all the hosts of them. On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done. He rested on the seventh day from all his work that he'd done. So

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

God blessed the seventh day God made it holy, because on the, on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

You know what's missing from that text by intention. You go day one, two, three, four, five, and six, and what does it say? There was evening and there was morning the first day, the second day, the third day, fourth day, fifth, sixth. Where is the boundary placed on the seventh day? It's not there, is it? God intended Adam to enter into his work, in a day of rest. He intended his work to be a work of rest.

All of the exercise of dominion, subduing the earth, and all the rest, it's rest. But the first man, Adam, by sinning he forfeited the ability, the opportunity, to fulfill that creation mandate. By sinning he would no longer be able to exercise dominion in the sphere or in the condition of a Sabbath rest. And now, turn ahead to Genesis Chapter 3, in verse 17. Genesis 3:17 to 20. This is the reality that we know. This is what we were born into.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

This is how we live after the fall, in our fallen condition. We live under a curse to Adam. He said, verse 17 chapter three, "because you've listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, but you are dust, and dust you shall return." That's how we live. That's what we experience.

And prior to salvation, that's all we know, is the pain, and the toil, and the labor, and the hurt, and the sorrow. But thankfully, because of Christ, that's not the end of the story. At the macro level, the gospel tells us that this last man, Jesus, he fulfilled all that God had given him to do. In his earthly life, he fulfilled all righteousness. He obeyed everything to perfection.

GRACE CHURCH

He was obedient to the letter, and the spirit of the law, and the attention of the law. All the ten commandments in thought, word, and deed. Never committing a sin of omission. Never committing a sin of commission. He loved God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. He loved his neighbor as himself. He did that perfectly, without a moments break ever. He was so obedient. He was obedient to, the whole mission that God sent him for, is to become obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

He was perfectly obedient to God's perfect law. He's perfectly righteous, internally, externally. He finished all the work that God had given him to do. Came to save his people. He came to restore them to that Sabbath rest, that God had intended and planned from the very, very, very, beginning. I want you to see that. So go to the, and the other side of your Bibles, Hebrews chapter 4.

Hebrews chapter 4. This synagogue ruler, he finds himself condemned in the Book of Hebrews; Hebrews 3, Hebrews 4. He's clearly identified, even in our texts, by Luke, as an adversary.

He's one whom Jesus put to shame. He, he, failed to understand the Sabbath in terms of rest. He imposed his restrictive mentality on that woman and, and, really tried to bind the consciences of the entire synagogue, congr, congregation. Kept them wrapped up like a boa constrictor. Squeezing the life out of them.

That woman had been bound by a spirit of oppression, but this man kept a whole congregation bound and oppressed by a spirit of slavery. This man's mind is under the dark spell of a very false view of God. A satanic view of God. Namely, we can trust that God is good. He failed to see God's good. He failed to trust in God, as a God of freedom with a generous heart of liberality and goodness. He's enslaved to the law.

He's driven to find his own righteousness. His is a righteousness of human works. And as you know, you can never work enough, to erase your stain. All of our righteousness are what filthy rags before God, right? Because his own heart was bound, it's the only way he knew. The only leadership he could provide was into greater degrees of bondage, tighten the chains

of enslavement. Seal the lock on the door that bound them in prison.

So when Jesus came, he entered, bringing liberation to the people. He taught freedom in the kingdom of God. He demonstrated freedom by liberating the woman, illustrating freedom by the largesse, and the abundance, and the rest, in these two parables about the kingdom. And they invite the sincere seeker to find refuge in the kingdom, to renewal and transformation through kingdom power to enjoy the Sabbath rest of the people of God.

That's what it says in Hebrews 4 verse 1, "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." Faith marks the difference between the crippled woman and the synagogue ruler. The freed woman and the enslaved ruler.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

Faith separates those who hear the message of the kingdom parables and those who do not. Look at verse 3, "For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'I Swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest', although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.'"

Skip ahead to verse nine, "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." That's the rest that Jesus lived in. It's what he worked for. It's what he taught to everyone. It's what he called them to strive for. That is the rest that he offers in his teaching. That is the nature of his gospel, to cease our striving, to stop working under these false impressions of God and his law.

And to enter into the Sabbath rest that is, on, offer for all the true people of God. Folks, this is the offer for you. If

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

you're not yet a Christian, it's an offer for you to enter into the rest of salvation. Stop making your own way. Stop worrying about all this little stuff of the world. Stop building your portfolio, building your wealth, building your company, pouring energy, after energy, after energy, into things that are gonna die when you're dead. Repent of your sins. Believe in the finished work of Christ for you. He atoned for your sins through his death on the cross, and he leads you in a life of true rest by his lordship, if you'll believe.

Well, since the kingdom of God is how we fulfill that original mandate to exercise dominion over all the earth, what's the nature of our involvement? And when we see what Christ did? He is the last Adam. What about us? Well didn't Jesus do it all? What's left for us?

Brings us to a sixth and final point, just briefly. Very brief, the kingdom becomes our preoccupation. The kingdom becomes our preoccupation. It's what's always on our minds. I mean, we go to work, we go to school. We have kids, grandkids. We got all the responsibilities of life. But you know what's always on our

minds. The kingdom. Seek first what? The kingdom of God. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Matthew 6:33.

Or, as we saw back in Luke 12:31, "Seek his kingdom." Why would we not seek his kingdom? It's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. So, seek it. Sell your possessions, give to the needy. Get involved in proclaiming the gospel. We have the honor and privilege of joining our Lord and savior to proclaim his rest, which is found in his gospel. Remember the mustard seed, the leaven. How did the mustard seed get into the soil? How did the leaven make its way into the flour? By human agency, right? The man cast his seed into the garden. The woman kneaded the leaven into her flour.

God is pleased to spread the gospel and the power of his kingdom through human agency. And I love that Luke, records both of these parables, right here and, and, that Jesus said, a man and a woman. Both of them involved in gospel work. Individual men. Individual women. You and me. Nothing fancy.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

A man goes about his work. He's casting seed into his garden. A woman goes about her work, she leavens, and she bakes her bread. Nothing, nothing great required on our part. Just get the right seed and the right leaven. Make sure you use that. Power for growth and maturation is in the seed. It does the work. The power for transformation is in the leaven. It does the work. You and I, we just need to be faithful in spreading it right, and God will give the increase. Let's ask him for that very thing, shall we?

Father, we're so grateful to see the sending of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who continues to astound us with truths about the kingdom. And honestly, only in this hour, only as you know, that only the half is known. And it's just a fraction of what is here. There's so much to meditate on, in these kingdom parables, and our Lord Jesus was so pleased to use common everyday things to illustrate and hide, in them, such profound truths. Like a common seed or common leaven that contains incredible power and energy.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

So, his word contains such power, and energy, and life. Oh father, help us to be faithful, obedient, to spread this seed and this leaven. Let it be manifest in our own lives that we are growing into maturity and that our lives are being transformed by this gospel. Let that be an attractive and consistent witness to the message that we have to bring to a lost and dying world.

Give us favor with people that we speak to. Let their hearts go before us and let their hearts be malleable, soft. Prepared by your Holy Spirit to receive the good seed of the kingdom. To have that good leaven worked into their lives, that they are truly transformed through and through. And one day, we as a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, will be before your throne. Casting our crowns before you, because you are worthy. We love and thank you in the name of Jesus our savior, Amen.