

The Growth Of The Kingdom

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[0 : 00] What a love, what a cost. This is the power of the cross. And we love to sing about it because the cross is powerful.

! That doesn't look powerful.

That looks weak. That looks so insignificant. Something that looks like defeat. How can that become a tool of victory and kingdom growth?

Well, one of Jesus' parables tells us exactly how God can take something so weak and so small and make it the most powerful tool for change in human history.

I'm going to read that parable, but it will come up on the screen behind me. And in Matthew 13, Jesus says, he says, he put another parable before them, before his disciples, saying, the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

[1 : 20] It's the smallest of seeds, but when it has grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and make their nests in its branches.

He told him another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened.

And so the first thing we see in this parable is the humble beginnings of God's kingdom, this kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says that his kingdom is going to start off really small, seemingly insignificant. You know, not many kings will liken their kingdom to a mustard seed.

If anything, he wanted to be likened to a mighty oak or some big and majestic tree, not some bush that grows in the garden. And by the time Jesus dies, his kingdom was looking really small and insignificant.

[2 : 30] He's managed to do, all he's managed to do is gather a bunch of fishermen and a handful of women. But this small and insignificant kingdom, by worldly standards, hides a powerful truth.

And that is, when God acts to save, he does it by overthrowing the strong and powerful with something seemingly small and weak. When God acts to save, he does it by overthrowing those who think they are strong and powerful, that look strong and powerful in the world's eyes, and he overthrows them with something seemingly small and weak and insignificant.

And we see this again and again in the story of the Bible. For example, in the story of Exodus, God's people are held captive by the superpower of the ancient world, the Egyptians. And God's answer?

Moses. A dude with a stammer and a stick. And how is that going to change? How is that going to challenge this powerful nation?

But this stick does some amazing things. It beats the mighty magicians of Pharaoh's court. It opens a path through the sea and makes water flow from the rocks in the desert.

[3 : 51] All that people see is a stick. But the unseen reality is that through God's power, that stick drowns an army and frees a nation.

2,000 years after Moses, God's people were again held in tyranny. This time, by the mightiest empire of them all, Rome. God's answer?

Jesus. A carpenter's son from Nowayville. Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing special to see. No power. No money. No influence. Except for the unseen reality of who he really is. God's chosen king that carries with him the power of heaven to establish God's kingdom on earth.

But the way he does it is completely unexpected. And that brings us to Jesus on the cross. You see, the cross doesn't look powerful.

[5 : 04] It looks like the most bitter defeat. But in God's kingdom, the way that God works, it's the sweetest and most powerful of victories. You see, the world always looks for value in the things that

look and sound impressive.

But the gospel undermines all of that and establishes the weakest thing, the cross, as the only true power that saves.

The apostle Paul, reflecting on this truth, writes this in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. He says, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

[6 : 14] That's an amazing line. The weakness of God is stronger than any human strength. And the place we see that most clearly is in the power of the cross.

And the cross stands as a kind of banner that God planted into the earth to say that from this time forward, His kingdom was going to grow, and no power of man or hell is going to be able to overcome it.

But, it sure can sometimes feel like God's kingdom is still small and hidden. Like, not much is happening. If anything, it seems like the other kingdoms and various evils of this world, well, they seem to be winning.

So, Jesus makes the next point in His parable, that the mustard seed will grow, and the leaven will do its work.

And so, the kingdom will grow to huge proportions. You put a seed in the ground, it's going to grow. It can't help itself.

[7 : 26] That's what it does. You put a bit of leaven in bread, and there's an automatic reaction that will turn that dough, that flat dough, into something really yummy, if you do it well enough.

But, there's this inevitability about the growth of God's kingdom in this parable. And, it's not just stunted growth, but growth so much that it overtakes all the other plants, and birds come to nest in its branches.

This is imagery taken from the Old Testament, describing in picture form how the empires of Babylon and Assyria ruled over the other kingdoms of the world.

And so, what Jesus is saying, is that in the long run, His kingdom is going to be the one ruling the world. It is the kingdom of God that is going to overtake and supplant all the other kingdoms of the world.

We're in fact proof of that. And this overtaking of the world is not only going to happen at the end of time, it is currently happening.

[8 : 39] Jesus' kingdom is growing through time and space. That ragtag bunch of nobodies that were gathered around the cross, scattered for fear, didn't know what to do, they were transformed by the power of the cross.

And they, in turn, transformed the world. So much so, that the modern world would be entirely different were it not for 2,000 years of Christianity. Nearly everything we count as a blessing comes from Christians applying Jesus' teaching to all areas of life.

Education, medicine, science and technology, the rule of law, private property. All of these things find their roots in Christianity. And all the good things that we enjoy now, that's just a foretaste of what is to come.

Well, where does that leave us today? Well, one thing, if you want to be on the winning side of history, you're going to want to be a part of the kingdom of God, which means you need to have Jesus as your king.

And so I need to ask you, do you have Jesus as your king? If not, why not? Are you still struggling with trying to make life work for you on your own terms, in your own wisdom and strength?

[10 : 05] But when you do that, you need to know that God considers that what you're actually doing is fighting against His call on your life to join His kingdom. And that's not a battle that you can win.

But if you're not quite ready, but maybe you're thinking about this, you want to investigate the claims of Jesus further, we would love for you to join us on our next Discover Jesus course, which we run at the church regularly.

And you come along to the course, it's called Discover Jesus, and you can ask questions, you can get them answered, it's friendly, it's an open atmosphere. Please don't leave here not thinking through your next steps how you're going to relate to Jesus.

So if you want to, come and get the details about that course on our Connect app, or come and speak to myself or Nick to learn more about Discover Jesus. If you already belong to God's kingdom, and already have Jesus as your king, isn't it good to know that his kingdom is growing? Despite what it looks like? Despite what you may feel on any given day? And so on the days that you're struggling to believe that God is at work, that the kingdom of heaven is presently at, on earth, remind yourself, according to Jesus, I'm on the winning side.

[11 : 33] it's just a matter of time before everyone else realizes it. Revelation gives us a glimpse of what that day will look like.

Revelation 7 says this, after this, it's a vision of John, after this I looked and saw a multitude, too large to count, from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried together in a loud voice, salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And friends, won't that be a sight to see? That's the king that we serve, that is a kingdom worth joining. I'm going to pray for us and after that we're going to share in some communion and so let me pray.

Lord Jesus, we know that on that Good Friday all those years ago, it didn't look like your kingdom was being established, it looked like you were being defeated. indeed, Lord, in one sense you were.

[12 : 50] Your death wasn't for you though, your death was for us. It reconciled us to God as our Father and brought us into this kingdom of light and life and blessing.

Thank you, Lord, for your sacrifice. help us to live lives that echo, that are based on, that show your love for us to others and build your kingdom in our works of love and in the words that we speak about you.

In your name we pray. Amen.