

REVOLUTIONARY STORIES OF JESUS

Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven

Bottom Line: No matter how things may appear, the Kingdom of God is advancing and will never be overcome.

Can you think of a person or a thing that at first glance seemed small, meek, or insignificant, but ended up having much greater potential or impact?

Read Matthew 13:31-32

Bahiagrass is a grass that is grown primarily in the southeastern United States. It has a lot of uses, but is not much to look at, so you don't typically want it in your lawn. The problem, though, is that bahiagrass is notoriously difficult to get rid of and it spreads like wildfire. Once you see even one stalk of it, you can be assured that before you know it, the rest of your yard will be covered in it. It has an outstanding heat and drought tolerance which allows it to persevere through extreme conditions where other grasses cannot. You can try your best to keep it out of your yard, but without extreme care and constant maintenance, it's a losing battle.

In these two parables, the way that Jesus describes the Kingdom is a lot like bahiagrass. The kingdom of God started out small, with just a band of rough, illiterate, uneducated men. But like the mustard seed, the leaven, and bahiagrass, Jesus taught that the Kingdom would eventually grow to become more than anybody ever expected.

Think over what you know about church history from the time of Jesus until now. What evidence do you see that this parable is true?

How does this truth relate to our mission/Kingdom building efforts today?

If there is one clear truth shown to us in these parables, it's that outward appearances count for very little. Doing the work of ministry is hard (and ministry is something that we are ALL engaged in, by the way). At times it can feel like we're not getting anywhere. We keep sharing, keep praying, keep serving, yet we're not seeing the results that we would like. Or if we do see results, they're about as spectacular as a mustard seed. However, even Jesus' ministry began with the most humble beginnings—His "kingdom" consisted of only twelve people who were hated by the world. But look at what has happened! You are doing this study today, in a room full of believers, in a church full of Christians, that is only one church of countless others all over the world who all bow the knee to King Jesus. And all of this 2000 years removed from the time of Jesus. What started out as small as a mustard seed has grown into a colossal, worldwide movement that has lasted thousands of years and shows no signs of slowing down. If things seem insignificant and slow, don't be discouraged by what *appears* to be happening. Keep sharing, keep praying, keep serving, and trust that God is working behind the scenes.

Read Matthew 13:33. What significance does this parable have for us? In what way does the kingdom spread like leaven? How does the leaven change the flour and what parallels does this draw to the Kingdom?

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In the parable of the mustard seed, we are surprised by the contrast between the beginning and end product: the tiny mustard seed blooms into the largest of garden plants. In the parable of the leaven, what is surprising is not the end result, but the *method* through which the result is brought about. The leaven spreads through the flour silently, internally, and unseen. This was not the way that the Jews expected the Kingdom of Heaven to be inaugurated on the Earth. The Jews were expecting a King to come and initiate a powerful military and political takeover. They anticipated that the Kingdom would come visibly, quickly, and powerfully. But instead, the change the King caused was one that happened within the inner, unseen person. Just like the leaven within the flour, Jesus said “the Kingdom is within you” (Luke 17:21). We don’t physically see the Kingdom itself, we only see its effects in the lives of those who are its inhabitants. Jesus rescued souls, He did not capture land or overthrow rulers. But nevertheless, just like the leaven, His Kingdom would spread and pervade the entire world.

In what ways do we sometimes make the same mistake as the Jews? What are some incorrect expectations that we may have about the Kingdom of God? Does your life look like the life of someone who belongs to the unseen Kingdom of God?

What do these parables teach us about how to respond when it seems like our witness is ineffective?

What does the parable of the mustard seed teach us about what we are capable of as believers? (Even the smallest, weakest, and least of us have incredible potential to create an impact in the Kingdom).

With both the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven, Jesus defied the conventional understanding of the Kingdom that was prevalent at the time. There are some ways that these parables defy our own expectations about the Kingdom as well. God will bring about the Kingdom through humble means, and often in ways that are not obvious. We must rely on His timing, His process, and His power in this work, trusting that even though our efforts may be small and seemingly inefficient, God can cause their effects to be far-reaching and powerful.

Reflection

Do you doubt that you are sufficient enough to do anything for God’s Kingdom? Why do you feel that you are inadequate? How can you increase your level of trust in God’s ability to take what you have and magnify it into an incredible impact?

Are you pessimistic about the advance of the Kingdom here on earth? Is your pessimism due to the fact that you are expecting more physical indications of God’s activity in the world rather than spiritual? Do you falsely equate the success of the Gospel in the world with how politically stable the world is? Do you falsely equate the influence of the Kingdom in the world with how politically influential Christianity is? How can you take your focus off of the physical, which is deceiving, and place it on the spiritual?