

The Greatest Cinderella Story



Mark 4:30-34

If you have your bibles, go to Mark chapter 4. Thursday night, I found myself being an avid Oregon fan. I was cheering for the Ducks as loud as I could. What's strange about that is I've never been an Oregon Ducks fan, ever. I don't think I've ever cheered for them for any reason, but here I was Thursday night cheering for the Oregon Ducks. The reason I was cheering for them is because Oregon was a twelve seed and they were playing Virginia. Virginia is a one seed. When I watch March Madness, if I don't have a particular team that I'm interested in, like if the Cats or Murray State aren't playing, then the person I cheer for is the seed that is the lowest, so I cheer for the twelve seed, the fourteen seed, or the sixteen seed. I'm always cheering for the underdog because I always want the underdog to win. Here I am cheering for Oregon as loud as I can because they were twelve seed and Virginia is a one seed. They're the underdog, the ones that aren't supposed to win, and usually they don't win. It reminded me when I was watching that game of last year's Virginia game. If you saw it, you know that in the first round of the tournament, Virginia was number one overall seed. They were picked to win the whole thing, and they were playing a sixteen seed, the Retrievers. There is nobody who is picking the Retrievers to win. It is basically impossible for a sixteen seed to beat a number one seed. It's never been done in the history of the tournament, so as you're watching this game, you know the outcome. You know Virginia is going to win. You know the one seed is

going to beat the sixteen seed because it's impossible for a sixteen seed to beat a one seed. Well, it's impossible until it actually happens. As you watch the game, you begin to see the Retrievers came out hot, came out on fire, and maybe it's luck, we're not really sure, but they take over the lead. Then the second half happens and you think Virginia is going to snap out of this. Virginia is going to win because a sixteen seed cannot beat a one seed, and then when the buzzer sounds everyone is speechless because a sixteen seed does in fact beat a one seed. We call these Cinderella stories in sports. We love the Cinderella stories, a team that's not supposed to win, a team that's underrated goes against a giant, and they actually win the day. We love Cinderella stories, we cheer for Cinderella stories, not just in sports, but we love it in our larger culture. A lot of the movies that we watch are built around Cinderella stories. Think about Lord of the Rings. You have Sauron, the great mighty power, and he gets defeated by a hobbit, Frodo Baggins, the most unlikely hero in the whole world. Think about Harry Potter, this little baby who is an orphan who grows up and beats Voldemort, the Dark Lord! There is no way these things can happen. Think about Star Wars. There's Luke, this moisture farmer who turns out to be a Jedi who wins the day and conquers the Empire. It's a Cinderella story. It's the ones who never actually end up winning the day. What do Cinderella stories really tell us? They tell us things aren't always as they appear. It looks like there's no way a sixteen seed can beat a one seed, but things aren't always as they appear because it happens. A sixteen seed does beat a one seed.

What we will see in Mark 4, beginning in verse 30 as we think about the parable of the mustard seed is Jesus is going to tell us things aren't always as they appear. You can look around, but things aren't always as they look. Things aren't always as they seem. Jesus has been walking along the Sea of Galilee talking about the Kingdom of God. He's been speaking about the Kingdom of God, but everybody who's listening to the Kingdom of God, which seems like it should be mighty, powerful, ruling, and reigning, there are people in Jesus' context who know that the power lies in the temple, and the ones who run the temple are saying Jesus is actually demonic. They're hearing about the Kingdom of God, but they're not seeing any power with it, but they see the power of Herod's temple. They see the

religious leaders, they can visibly see the power of that temple, but they can't see the power of this kingdom. As the Romans are receiving Mark's gospel and they're reading it, they're hearing Jesus talk about a kingdom, the Kingdom of God, yet they're standing in the midst of Rome. They're looking around and hearing Jesus is Lord, but it sure seems like Caesar is lord. It seems like the Christians aren't winning the day. It seems like Rome is winning the day. It seems like being on Caesar's side is actually the right side of history. That's what it appears. That's what it looks like. Jesus, in this parable, to the original hearers, is saying things aren't always as they appear. To those who received the letter in Rome, He's saying things aren't always as they appear, and to us in 2019, as we hear this parable, Jesus is telling us things aren't always as they appear. I think what Jesus wants us to remember is at the end of the day the church is the greatest Cinderella story, the most unlikely people actually inherit the entire earth. Let's go to Mark 4:30.

Scripture

"And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything."

(Prayer)

Father God, I pray that You would help us to see this morning that things are not always as they appear. I pray You would help us to remember that in the midst of our time, what feels like we're losing, ultimately, the church is the greatest Cinderella story who wins the day. We pray this is Jesus good name, amen.

Let's walk back through this parable that Jesus gives. He's been talking about these various parables about the Kingdom of God. He says the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in gospel. In other words, He's announcing that He is the King, the Kingdom is here, and then He starts telling all these parables explaining the Kingdom of God. He gets to this parable and it's sort of summarizing or ending these parables on the Kingdom, and He asks what can we compare the Kingdom of God to, or what parable shall we use for it. So He begins to say we've been talking about the kingdom, what can we compare it to, or what should we liken it to, what illustration could we use to show this parable? Now, most of the commentaries that I referenced all said this was actually an echo of the Old Testament because in Isaiah 40, starting in verse 18, Isaiah asked the same question about God. Who can we compare God to, or what illustration can we use for God? Jesus is sort of pulling in that framework, and He's saying remember when Isaiah asked the question how do we compare God, how do we explain God to you? Now Jesus is going to ask the same question, not just about God, but about the Kingdom of God. What can we compare the Kingdom of God to? What should we liken it to? What's a good illustration? What's a good parable to say here is what the kingdom is like? I can just imagine the hearers thinking...the kingdom of God; that sounds really big. That sounds really grand. They would have been people who knew about kingdoms. Rome was a kingdom. They've heard in history about different kingdoms, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, the Assyrians, Babylon, and all these different kingdoms. They had to be thinking God's kingdom had to be really, really, big. So how do you compare something to God's kingdom? Is it like Mount Everest? Is it like the sea? What could you compare the vastness, the glory, and the greatness of the Kingdom of God to? Jesus is going to compare it to a mustard seed. The reason He is going to compare the mustard seed is because He's going to try to explain why there is this gap in what they're hearing and what they're seeing. They're hearing the kingdom is big, the kingdom is great, but there's this gap in what they're actually seeing. They're seeing Jesus walking along the sea with a few fisherman and some ex-tax collectors. It doesn't look very powerful, it doesn't look very grand; it doesn't look like this is the Kingdom of God. Jesus is going to explain the

difference in their hearing and their seeing. Jesus says what can we compare the Kingdom of God to, and in verse 31, He says, "It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth." You've got to picture; what can you compare the Kingdom of God to. Everybody is waiting for a Mount Everest, or something obviously big and massive, but Jesus says you can compare it to a mustard seed. What is a mustard seed? It's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth, Jesus says.

Let's just pause for a moment and chase a little rabbit. I've heard people say the Bible isn't inerrant, the Bible is not true, because it's filled with all sorts of errors, and here's one of the errors. Jesus says a mustard seed is the smallest seed of all, and it's not. We know there are smaller seeds than the mustard seed. So, Jesus actually said something wrong. He miscommunicated, or the Bible is untrue, full of errors, so just walk away from it. You hear this all the time. I had somebody just last week after church tell me, "Hey, my friend says the Bible is full of errors. What should I do with that?" I said, "First, let them show you where the error is because there is probably a good explanation." Usually, when people say the Bible is full of errors, they're talking about things like this, Jesus saying the mustard seed is smallest of all the seeds. But it's really not. If you ask a botanist what the smallest seed is, they're not going to say a mustard seed. So Jesus is wrong, the Bible is wrong, so get over the Bible, and go live your life; that's usually how the argument goes. So how can Jesus say a mustard seed is the smallest, when in reality, it's not? Let's look at the context a little bit. What is Jesus doing? He's telling a parable to a group of people. The group of people is in Palestine. Jesus uses mustard seed because mustard seed was a common metaphor used in Palestine to talk about the littlest tiny thing you could imagine. It was what people would say when they wanted to say this is really, really small. Like when a grandma says a new little baby, "Aww, he's like a mustard seed! He is the smallest little thing I've ever seen!" Jesus is pulling that imagery of a mustard seed that everybody is used to talking about because mustard seeds are the smallest, little, tiny, most insignificant thing you could ever imagine. He's pulling that imagery into the parable He's telling. Jesus is not acting as a scientist trying to tell them the smallest seed, because if He had

named that seed, nobody would have been familiar with it. Instead, He's using imagery in their own culture. This is how they spoke, "Aww, she's a little mustard seed." What you're saying is she is little and tiny. Here is what I want to say the Kingdom of God is like; it's little, it's tiny, it's micros, it's itty-bitty. Jesus is not making a scientific declaration; He's telling a parable. He's using the language of the people that He's speaking with. There is no error here. You have to understand the context to see what Jesus is trying to do by pulling in a familiar metaphor to speak to the people. I want you to try to think about the smallest thing you can imagine.

He says the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, and I can just imagine the audience. They've been waiting for what He is going to compare the Kingdom of God to, what it is like, and Jesus says it is like a mustard seed. Everybody just starts laughing...what! That's the smallest, tiniest, little, most insignificant thing we can possibly imagine! A mustard seed? That's what you're going to compare the Kingdom of God to? It's like this little bitty thing? That's the Kingdom of God? Yep...that's what it is; it's like a mustard seed. But notice what happens to the mustard seed because in the parable, there's this beautiful little word, "yet." It's a word that I want to feel this morning, a word I want us to stand on, a word I want us to glory in. Jesus says a mustard seed, when it is sown, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth, he's using their language to say it appears like the Kingdom of God is really, really little. It is insignificant. It's me and some fishermen and we're telling everybody to love their neighbor like themselves, to pray for their enemies, to be meek and to mourn, and it seems like that's not the way to live your best life. It seems like that doesn't really make sense. Jesus says that's right, because the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed; sometimes the reality of the kingdom is not visible to the eye. Sometimes the kingdom doesn't appear to the people around you in the vastness of what it really is.

Notice He says the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, "yet." I love this word, yet. It is a beautiful glorious word. He is talking about the mustard seed, "Yet, when it was sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can

make their nest in its shade." That is the Kingdom of God! It's like a mustard seed. It starts out really little; it seems tiny and insignificant, but just wait. Wait until it's sown. Wait until it grows. Wait until the end and you will find the mustard seed actually outgrows all other plants in the garden. I can just imagine dads and moms in the audience as they're hearing Jesus. I can imagine them going back to the stories of when they had kids, and I can imagine when they planted their own garden. We planted a garden last year with our kids, and it still blows me away that you can open a packet and pull out a little seed, plant it, and weeks later a little sprout comes up. Before you know it, you have a huge tomato plant that you have to stake because it becomes so large. You have these big tomatoes that came from a tiny little seed. It blows me away, and it blew my kids away and they asked if it was really going to turn into a tomato. Just imagine moms and dads in Palestine saying to their sons and daughters, "Hey, would you plant this little seed?" They can barely hold the seeds in their hands, "I don't even see it, Dad!" "I know; it's a mustard seed, just put it in the ground." "Why, it seems so little, what is this going to do?" "Just put it in the ground." Maybe the daughter covers it up, and the dad might say, "Let's go put a stick here and write mustard seed so you can remember how little that seed was that went into the ground. Do you remember how tiny it was? You couldn't even see it. You could barely handle it. We're going to put it in the ground and we're just going to wait." You can imagine as time goes on, this family is playing and doing their normal stuff; they're tending the garden. One day I can just imagine a little girl runs into the house and says, "Daddy, Daddy, come out here! You're not going to believe this! Look at the mustard seed! It's the biggest plant in our entire garden! It's taking over the garden! There's actually birds coming and making their nest in it! Do you remember when we planted that? It was tiny! Look how big it is now!" It was micros, now it is mega. Jesus says yeah, remember those times, remember those stories...that is what the Kingdom of God is like. When it's first planted, when it's first here, it seems micros, it seems small, it seems little, and it seems insignificant. It seems like Jesus is walking with a group of misfits and outcasts. It seems like the temple is where the power is, Rome is where the power is. But Jesus says just wait a moment, just let it grow, because

you will find that one day when it comes to the garden, when it comes to your life, you're going to see that the kingdom is actually the largest. The kingdom is the biggest.

He's trying to answer the question, why is there a gap between what we're hearing and what we're seeing? You're talking about this Kingdom of God that we're supposed to leave everything to follow, and it doesn't seem like it's that grand, it doesn't seem like it's that big, and Jesus says it's because things aren't always as they appear. It doesn't look like it's the greatest, but just wait. Let it grow, just hang tight a moment because what you're going to see and that is the all-encompassing kingdom and those who follow Me actually inherit the earth. That's what the Kingdom of God is like. It might seem insignificant, but it's the thing that is the most important in all of the universe, the Kingdom of God.

He makes another Old Testament illusion. So when Jesus says this thing about the birds make their nest in it, I can imagine some of the listeners who are familiar with their Old Testament says, hold on, I've heard that before. That's what I did when I read through this parable the first time. It struck me, why does Jesus talk about birds coming and making their nest in these branches. It was not only a tree, but these huge branches that birds will come and nest in this tree, so why does Jesus talk about that? I remembered that two Wednesday nights ago, I was sitting in The Point hearing Bro. Nick preach a sermon to the youth and he talked about Nebuchadnezzar and his great kingdom in Daniel chapter 4. He had this massive kingdom, the biggest kingdom in all of the world, and do you know how God described his kingdom? It was like a big tree. It was such a big tree that the birds of the heavens came and made their nests in it. It's this imagery from Nebuchadnezzar's day of the greatest kingdoms in the earth. They are like trees that are so big that the birds come from all around. Ezekiel used the same language to talk about a giant kingdom. Psalms 104 also uses the same imagery that a kingdom is so big birds are going to come and make their nests in it. What Jesus is trying to do is pull their attention to this...do you remember all those kingdoms that were way bigger than Israel that actually brought Israel in, actually captured Israel? Do you remember all those great kingdoms of the earth? The kingdom of

God is like that but even bigger. The Kingdom of God is not only going to be a kingdom of Israel; it's going to be a kingdom of the nations where the birds of the heavens, all people, will find their place in the shade under the Kingdom of God. Jesus is saying not just is it big, but we see this illustration of it is this big kingdom that even the Old Testament spoke of, Jesus is saying the Kingdom of God is like that.

Jesus is trying to answer the question, what is the difference in what we're hearing and what we're seeing? The original hearers are hearing the kingdom but they see the temple. The temple is big, the temple is glorious, and the temple leaders are telling them they're crazy, they had probably better go with the temple. The people who are reading Mark for the first time are in Rome. 'You're telling us Jesus is Lord, but it seems like Caesar is Lord. If You really are the King, it seems like you would be doing a lot more kingdom things. It seems like You would be overthrowing, conquering, ruling. It seems like if we're on Your side that would be the best side. It seems like if we are with You, everything will go great because we're in the right kingdom. It seems like what we're hearing is You are the King of a kingdom, but we're seeing bigger kingdoms all around us.' Jesus says that's exactly right because the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It's like a little seed, but the reality is it becomes a tree. He's trying to get His followers to see the tree is not here yet. So yes, you're going to suffer. Yes, there's going to be persecution. Yes, there's going to be hard times because the reality right now is that it's just a little seed; it's just Me and My followers. I think He is eluding to when He comes back, when the kingdom is fully here, there will be a tree.

So what does He want us to do? We're in 2019, what do we do with a parable about the mustard seed. What do we do about the seed and the tree? I think for us, we experience the same thing on almost a daily basis. What we hear and what we see doesn't always match. We come here this morning and we're going to hear a sermon talking about the kingdom of God is the very most important thing on the planet, then we will get in our cars, drive home, turn on the television, and it will seem like the kingdom of God is really, really insignificant. It's going to seem like there are many things today that are more important than the Kingdom of God. We're

going to go to work tomorrow, home tomorrow, or school tomorrow, and our to-do list and all these things that are coming our way will seem like the kingdom that we heard about yesterday is not as important as all the things I need to do today. We turn on the cable news channels and it seems like the Kingdom of God is not the most important; it seems like politics are. It seems like other things are, not the Kingdom of God. So we hear from Jesus, He is Lord, He is God, and the kingdom is here and it's growing. Yet we look at our movies and listen to our radios, and it doesn't sound like the Kingdom of God is here. It doesn't seem like it's the biggest deal, so we feel that even in our own culture. They were standing in front of a temple saying, Jesus, I don't know if following You is the right thing to do because it seems like the temple is where the power is. They're standing in Rome saying, Jesus, I don't know if following You is the right thing to do because it seems like Caesar is the one who has all the power.

We today are standing at a crossroads where we are being told over and over again, hey Christians; you are on the wrong side of history. Hey Christians, we are modern time. We are progressive now. We have got past the Bible, so if you're thinking what God says actually matters, you're crazy. You can believe in God, but if you actually hold to what the Scripture says about things like gender and sexuality, then you have to know that you're on the wrong side of history. You're going to be left behind because there is a greater kingdom, a greater power, and it is the kingdom of this world. As we look at news, media, television, movies, as we consume culture, it seems like that's exactly right. What we see is we are not winning. What we see is we are losing. What we see is we are the sixteen seed and we're up against the one seed, and it's impossible for us to maintain what we are doing in the Kingdom of God. Jesus says that's exactly right because you have to understand something about the Kingdom of God. It starts as a mustard seed that grows into a tree. What you're experiencing right now, what you're standing on right now is that little word, 'yet.'

Look with me in verse 32. That first word, yet, is where we're standing right now. That is where we're living right now. We are in the place of the 'yet,' where we're standing here and we know the kingdom has come, but

it's not here yet. We've seen Jesus, we believe Jesus, but we're sure not seeing the Christian worldview encompassing the earth. What we're seeing is persecution all over the world. What we're seeing is our brothers and sisters in China being imprisoned for believing the faith. How could Jesus be Lord if that's taking place? How could people be losing their lives right now for claiming Jesus if Jesus is really Lord and really sovereign? He says because the kingdom is like a mustard seed, and things aren't always as they appear. The seed has come, but the tree is not here and you're standing on that little word, 'yet.' What I want us to do is figure out how to stand on that little word, 'yet;' how to live in the tension of the 'yet.' We know Jesus and believe Jesus, but we don't see the reality of Christianity in the way it should be. So we stand on that little word, yet; what do we do? I think what we have to have is 20/20 vision, to see both the seed and the tree at the same time. We have to see both of those. We have to see the seed and see the tree at the same time. What can happen is we can actually have blurry vision. What I mean by blurry vision is some of us only see the seed and some of us only see the tree. If you only see the seed, you will live in despair because the only thing you see is how culture is taking over. The only thing you see is how your conversations at work aren't going as they should. The only thing you can see is all your arguments are losing. The only thing you can see is your personal persecution, or when you see the Bible, it seems you can't speak up anymore. You only see the seed, so it leads to despair. The other way to have blurry vision is to only see the tree. It's to only see the kingdom. You live in a holy huddle around people who are only like you, only think like you. You only watch news programs that are thinking just like you do. To you, the kingdom is here. There is no opposition, everything is great, so we read our bibles and don't engage the world at all, and what that leads to is pride. We're conquering! We're ruling! We're here! We're now! Everyone should do what we say! That is seeing only the tree. What we've got to do as believers is stand on that word, 'yet,' and we've got to see the seed and the tree, both that the Kingdom of God is here, but it is not in its final stage. So we hold onto the seed as we hope in the tree. We hold onto the gospel as we hope in the reality that Christ is coming back and He will make all things new.

What do we do in these moments of standing on the 'yet?' How do we keep our vision 20/20 instead of blurry? I want to give you three things. There are many more, but here are three things I think will help to keep our vision correct, to hold both correctly.

1. Gather and Go

You can't do one or the other, you have to gather, and you have to go. What I mean by that is what you're doing this morning by gathering as the saints to come and worship the Lord, to be surrounded by other brothers and sisters, and to sing, pray, and hear the preached Word of God. You are celebrating and embracing the kingdom. You're walking in here, maybe a little downtrodden, maybe a little bit in despair, but then you look up and see, oh, I've got brothers and sisters, I've got a family. I'm not the only crazy one; there are other people who see the seed. There are other people who know the gospel; here's what the kingdom is like. We get to do a little dress rehearsal every Sunday of what the kingdom will be like. The gathering keeps us focused on the tree, but as we leave here, it is why we say you are sent, because we want you to live a life on mission. We want you to actually go and engage the world. Going and engaging the world will remind you the kingdom is coming, but it's not here yet. There is all sorts of opposition, all sorts of ridicule and persecution. I'm going to go to my work, my hobbies, my home, and I'm going to fill it with trying to engage others with the gospel. In doing so, you will be reminded that it's like a mustard seed. It seems tiny and it seems insignificant, and that is exactly what the world sees it as, tiny and insignificant. Then after a week of going, and almost at the point of despair, you come back on a Sunday and you look at the tree. You see the kingdom, 'oh yeah, the kingdom is coming. The seed becomes a tree!' The way we stand on the 'yet' and feel both, the way we see both the seed and the tree is we gather and we go.

2. We Cultivate the Most Important

I love the imagery of a garden. Why does Jesus talk about a garden in this account in Mark? I think the garden talks about home life. It talks about the thing outside your window. You have all these plants, and the truth is in your garden, you have all of these plants. You have priorities, work,

ambitions, vacations, kids, dogs, and all this different stuff to take care of, all these different things to do. Jesus says the mustard seed outgrows all of the plants of the garden. It becomes the biggest. I think what Jesus wants us to remember is when it comes to your life, when it comes to your garden there is one plant that is the most important. It should be cultivated first. That's why Jesus says, seek first the Kingdom of God and all else will be added to you. He says don't forget that in your life there is a little seed, and it might seem small and insignificant, but it's actually the most important. The way we live on the 'yet' is we cultivate the most important. We seek first the Kingdom of God.

3. We Hold and We Hope

We hold and we hope at the same time. What do we hold while we hope? We're hoping in a tree, but we don't have a tree quite yet because we live in that 'yet.' That 'yet' is a hard place to live.

On Wednesday, we're going to get in our van and head to the Smoky Mountains. We're going to spend two nights in a Gatlinburg cabin and we're going to hike. I'm so pumped about it! Last night, little G said, "I don't want to go. I want to stay home." I pulled out my phone and showed him pictures of the cabin, the mountains, the chimney tops, I showed him a bear, and I said, "Hey buddy, that's where we're going." He said, "I want to go." We're going to get in the van and take off, and as we go on this trip, I know what is going to happen...somebody at some point is going to say these words, "Are we there yet?" That's what we have all asked when we were kids. "Are we there yet?" "Are we there yet? This seems like forever!" So we've tried to prepare for that and we got them some little games and some coloring books. When they ask, are we there yet, we're going to try to give them something to hold onto even though we're not quite there.

So what do we do in that space of, "Jesus, are we there yet?" I think He's given us imagery. He's taken out His phone and showing us pictures of what it's going to be like. There's a kingdom coming, and it's going to be good. Ok, but I'm in the van now, and it doesn't seem like fun, are we there yet, Jesus? What does Jesus give us to hold? He gives us Himself.

Notice how it ends. He says hey, that thing about the parables, the reason I spoke in parables is because they're secret and I'm only giving private information. What was a parable supposed to do? It was supposed to draw people into a relationship with Jesus. It was supposed to draw them to Jesus. He doesn't say take the Bible, take these stories and go somewhere and live your life; He says the stories and the Bible are meant to draw you into Me because though we're not there yet in the tree portion of the kingdom, you have Me. I'm right there with you. I'm every step of the way. So as we stand on that 'yet' and we get a little restless in the van because we feel a little persecution, or we just don't feel like life is going like it should, it should go, what do we do in the backseat of the van, and we hold onto Jesus. We think about where we're going, that tree that's coming, and we hold on in the back of the van to Jesus. We seek after Jesus because He is with us every step of the way. We hold Him as we hope.

Here's the problem with this message of the kingdom. Jesus is giving it to people who see the temple. It doesn't make sense. The people that are receiving Mark's gospel are in Rome, and it doesn't make sense. 'Jesus, You are Lord? We know who Lord is; his name is Caesar, because just look at Rome! Look at the vastness of this kingdom. It's eternal. It's never going to fall. It's going to always be here.' That was their perspective, yet Jesus comes in and says things are always as they appear. There's a seed that some people can't see, but it's growing and it's actually going to take over the earth.

I got to go to Rome in 2013. It was for the capstone of my seminary and I got to go and walk around Rome and study and hear the journey of the early church. It was amazing to go to all these places. I went to the Circus Maximus, which was this horseracing, and they would race chariots around it. They told the story of Nero when he first built this. He put some hundred thousand Christians around it and set them all on fire on poles to celebrate this grand event. We got to go into the colosseum where we got to hear stories about Christians who would be brought in and thrown to the wild beasts and all of Rome would cheer as their bodies got torn in two. We would hear stories of Nero at night. He would light up Rome with

human torches, human lanterns, and they were Christians because he hated Christians that much. So these people are reading this little parable, reading about the Kingdom of God, and they say it doesn't quite seem like that. It seems like those who follow You are on the wrong side of history, they get burnt, and they die. Jesus says I know because things aren't always as they appear. It's a mustard seed that grows into a tree, and the tree is not here yet. What blew me away as I'm standing in the presence of Rome and the Roman forum, they were making laws, making culture, and they were the center of all of the world, similar to what we are today. We have culture and all these laws and things that are happening, here I stand in the middle of Rome, and I bought a flipbook. They had these really cool little flipbooks and it would show you in Rome. You could stand in a place and the flipbook would overlay how the colosseum would look two thousand years ago. You would see it, it had gold and all this grandness, you would pull the overlay, and it would show how the colosseum is today. It's rotted. It's fallen in. It's un-useful. You would see these buildings, the Roman forum in all its glory, with marble, gold, and stone. Then I'm looking at it, thinking it just looks like a little column. I look at the overlay and I think oh yeah, that's what it is now, but when you put the overlay, it looks like it's the grandest, the most important. Here I am, standing in the same place that two thousand years ago the people received the gospel of Mark. When they looked around, they said no, this is the kingdom. Jesus says no, this is the kingdom. They didn't have that perspective. They could never have imagined that two thousand years later there would be a guy from America standing in their prestigious city with a flipbook and a hotdog. It's only a tourist vacation now! All of Rome has fallen! It is no longer the place where Caesar is lord! Why? Because Caesar is not Lord, Jesus Christ is Lord, but at the moment, it sure didn't seem like that.

Here's what I want to tell us this morning. At the moment, it sure doesn't seem like Jesus is Lord in our culture. We go to work and do our daily lives, even in our hearts, we have all these temptations, all these desires to just give up and move on. It doesn't seem like Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is looking at us and saying, yes, things aren't always as they appear. There is something else going on that the people in Rome couldn't imagine, that the people looking at the temple couldn't imagine. There's a seed that's

planted that overtakes all of it. There's a seed that encompasses the earth. Jesus is looking at us and He says I know things might not appear to be the way I'm saying them. I know it appears that tomorrow My kingdom is not the most important, but remember, in your garden is one that is the most important. Cultivate that. Tend that first. As you do, don't forget to gather, but also don't forget to go because gathering and going helps you focus on the seed and also the tree. As you do that, as you're in the back of the van, a little bit restless because you're not quite there, you don't know what's happening, and you're asking are we there yet Jesus, He says, no, but I'm riding in the backseat with you. Cling to Me. Hold Me as you hope in the tree to come because things aren't always as they appear. A sixteen seed sometimes does beat a number one seed. The Cinderella story actually sometimes comes true. What Jesus is telling us is don't forget church; you are the greatest Cinderella story. The meek, the downcast, the persecuted, the ones who look like they're on the wrong side of history right now in this moment of history, they are the ones that inherit the earth, so keep going. Stand on that word, 'yet.' Feel that word, 'yet.' Have 20/20 vision. See in the seed, but hope in the tree to come.