

**MORE TO THE STORY: The Mustard Seed / The Leaven<sup>i</sup>**  
**Matthew 13:31-33**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Good morning, church family. Welcome to those of you that are guests today. Thank you for entrusting us with your Sunday. It is our prayer that our church already feels like home to you.

We love with our guests. We would ask you to text the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you text that keyword to that number, you'll be sent a link back that will take you to a form to enter basic contact information. It then notifies us, and we have the privilege of following up with you.

Or you can stop by Guest Connect located in the lobby. We have a team that would like to meet you and give you a gift as a way of saying thank you for being with us this morning. I will make my way there as well and I look forward to shaking your hand this morning.

**JULY 4<sup>th</sup>:**

This past week we celebrated the birth of our country. You know, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is much more than a holiday. It is an opportunity to reflect and remember the freedom we enjoy as citizens of the United States of America. And man, do we ever need to be praying for our nation. The last couple of weeks have shown that now is the time to have desperation in our prayers.

But as citizens of our country, one of the greatest freedoms we enjoy, in my view, is the freedom to gather in worship. The freedom to pursue what we believe to be God's will for our lives. And it is holidays like this that help us to remember that our freedoms were not free. They came and continue at a great price. We would not be able to enjoy our freedom if it were not for brave men and women that have fought to defend it.

The Bible says to give honor to whom honor is due. I think it is appropriate to honor those in our midst that are either currently serving or have served in our armed forces, the army, navy, air force, marines and the coast guard. If you are serving or have served, would you please stand so that we can honor you and say thank you for your service this morning?

On behalf of a grateful church, we honor you today. Thank you for your sacrifice and for your service. Can we give these one more round of applause of appreciation?! Amen.

**SERIES OVERVIEW:**

I want to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew Chapter 13. Last Sunday, we launched a new teaching series called, "More to the Story." We are studying a selection of Jesus' parables through the remainder of the summer. Last week we looked at the Parable of the Sower or of the Soils. Today we are looking at the Parable of the Mustard seed. And we will spend a little time looking at the Parable of the Leaven as Jesus coupled these two parables together. At least that is how it is laid out in the gospel accounts.

We defined what a parable is by saying that it is a teaching aid that teaches something unknown by relating it to something that is known. To cast a spiritual truth alongside something that people would know. It's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

We also mentioned how our hearts resonate with stories. In fact, I read an article put out by the National Institutes of Health that talks about neural coupling.<sup>ii</sup> That our brains actually fire differently when hearing stories. So, it is no mistake that Jesus, the master storyteller, would take advantage of our connection to story and use them to teach profound truths. He's the greatest storyteller.

**OPENING ILLUSTRATION: A Rich Runner<sup>iii</sup>**

Ripley's Believe it or Not tells about a man by the name of Craig Dawson and his unusual habit. Craig is an avid runner. And as he jogs, he keeps his eyes on the ground right by his feet. It is not for balance, safety, or even because he is shy. He does that to look for spare change. Over the past 25 years, he has found \$8,100 in lost coins! That comes to an extra \$324 a year in his pocket. Some of you are thinking, I'm going to start running! Me, too!

But this true story communicates a powerful truth. There is power in a small act done consistently over a long period of time. That little things can become big things. That is the case in our parable of study this morning. And in following with the outline of last week's message, we are going to look at the parable, the point of the parable, and then the practice, how we can apply the teaching in this parable.

**MESSAGE:**

So, let's look, first, at...

**1) The Parable.**

Jesus continues using an illustration of agriculture. Which only makes sense as first century jobs were predominately agrarian. Now, the two parables together only span 3 verses. But don't let the length of the parables fool you. There's much here. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 13, verses 31 through 33. *<sup>31</sup>He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. <sup>32</sup>It is **the smallest of all 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 nests in its branches."* <sup>33</sup>He told them 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." These parables are also recorded in the other two synoptic gospels, Mark and Luke.

I want to mention, here, that most skeptics of the faith use the parable of the mustard seed as proof that the Scriptures are in error. Or that Jesus made a mistake, therefore proving that He is not who He claims to be. They point to two things that Jesus mentions here. The first being Jesus saying that the mustard seed is, quote, "**the smallest of all seeds**," and the second objection being that it, quote, "**becomes a tree**." Let's take some time and talk through these objections as I believe skeptics have misapplied Jesus' analogy here.

First that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds. It is true that the mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds in the world. The most common mustard plant in Israel is the Black Mustard plant. It is approximately 1 millimeter in size. There are other plants that have smaller seeds. [\[show graphic\]](#) I have a graphic that shows that. It is known that begonias, petunias, and wormwoods have smaller seeds. The smallest known seed is the jewel orchid.<sup>iv</sup> So, what is going on here? Is Jesus in error?

Well, remember where Jesus is and what was grown in the fields of first century Palestine. The mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds that a Palestinian farmer would sow in his field. So, Jesus was not comparing the mustard seed to all seed in the world, but what would be known to his hearers in that day.<sup>v</sup>

The second objection is that mustard seeds do not grow into a tree. Jesus not only uses the term "tree" but also describes it as having limbs that can support birds and their nest. Now, in comparison to what we know as trees, especially in Northeast Texas, the mustard tree is more of a bush. But the mustard plant in the Palestinian region often grows to be 12 to 15 feet high.<sup>vi</sup> Again, in comparison to other garden plants in first century, it would be considered a tree. Here is a picture of a mustard bush or tree in Israel. [\[show graphic\]](#). And at certain times of the year, those branches become rigid enough to easily support a bird and its nest.<sup>vii</sup> Again, Jesus is correct in what He says here as He relates to the agrarian culture of 1st century Israel.

But I think it is also important to point out here that the parable, or story, Jesus is using is not intended to be scientific. Jesus is making use of proverbial speech here. That means that Jesus is also tying into proverbs often used in Jewish tradition. The mustard seed was commonly used to represent things that were extremely small. So, again, the master storyteller is captivating the minds of His audience on multiple fronts. There is no contradiction in Jesus here, instead we see His brilliance.

So, that is the parable. Now, let's talk through...

**2) The Point.**

What is Jesus' point in sharing this story? While we don't have record of Jesus explaining this parable, there are a couple of things that give us clues as to what Jesus was teaching.

First, notice how Jesus sets the stage before He tells the story. Verse 31. *<sup>31</sup>He put another parable before them, saying, "**The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed...** He repeats that phrase when He tells the story about the leaven. So, Jesus is describing The Kingdom of Heaven.*

The point Jesus is making is that **God accomplishes significant things from insignificant beginnings**. Let me say that again because I want you to grab ahold of that. God accomplishes significant things from insignificant beginnings.

The Kingdom of Heaven is both a place and a people. It is also already existent and not yet completed. The Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of God, is where the presence of God resides. The citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven are made up of those that confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is already in

that the people of God are all over the world worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth in local churches. But it is also not yet in that Jesus is coming again and will permanently set up His reign and rule in the New Heaven and New Earth. But Jesus is describing the Kingdom of Heaven in these parables.

We see evidence all over the Scriptures that demonstrate how God accomplishes significant things from insignificant beginnings. A couple Old Testament examples include Joseph. He was hated by his brothers and sold into slavery. He was falsely accused and thrown in jail. Yet he became the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command in Egypt and was God's provision for his family during famine. Significance from insignificant beginnings. What about David? He was the runt of the family and looked over in consideration of being anointed king, yet he became Israel's greatest king! Significance from insignificant beginnings.

Consider New Testament examples. Jesus was born into insignificance. Born to a virgin teenage girl, laid in a manger, in an obscure village, forced to seek refuge in Egypt and grew up in little ole Nazareth. Andrew posed the question, "What good can come from Nazareth?" That humble beginning was the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, the long awaited one.

Jesus' crucifixion was one of insignificance. Falsely accused, rejected by the people, beaten, and crucified in the company of criminals. Yet it became significant because Jesus rose from the dead and thereby purchased our salvation.

Consider the 12 disciples. Uneducated, ordinary men that Jesus left everything to. And yet that insignificant bunch launched the greatest movement the world has ever seen, The Church. God accomplishes significant things from insignificant beginnings. In fact, one of the things that guarantees God's glory is using the weak to confound the strong. Which is why the Apostle Paul says that he will boast in his weaknesses all the more because in his weakness God is strong.

That's the point of the parables. The smallest of all garden seeds produces the largest of garden plants. Just a little bit of yeast works its way through the whole dough. And what was just a few people gathered in an upper room became The Church of Jesus that now has billions of believers all over the globe. Significance from insignificant beginnings.

Furthermore, I think point Jesus is making about the birds coming and finding a nest speaks to the blessing The Church is to be to the world. Now, in many places in the Bible, birds refer to evil. But I don't think we always apply one application to all mentioning of birds in the Bible. The idea of making a nest refers to one of safety and security. The Church of Jesus is to be a refuge for those seeking safety in Christ. As a result, The Church is to be a blessing to the world.

So, we've looked at the parable and the point. Now, let's consider...

### 3) The Practice.

How does this parable apply to our lives? What are we to make of Jesus' teaching in this story today? I want to take a few angles that I think are presented in this story.

First, **God still uses insignificance to accomplish mighty things**. This is important for us to understand today. Because sometimes we feel as though we are just too insignificant for God to use in a powerful way. We beat our heads against the wall in raising our kids. Is anything going to ever be fruitful in my kids' lives? We work and toil at our jobs wondering if there will ever be a payoff. We think that we are just not gifted enough to do God's work. But listen, if God has always used the insignificant to accomplish significance, then He can and does use our faithfulness to Him in powerful ways.

Mom and Dad don't grow weary in raising your kids because it is going to yield a harvest one day. Faithful employee don't stop doing the little things well, because there will be a payoff one day. Believer don't stop serving The Lord because there will be someone in heaven that says to you, "Thank you for serving so faithfully. I'm here because of your faithfulness."

Hudson Taylor once said, **"A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in a little thing is a great thing."**<sup>viii</sup> Jesus' Kingdom enters and grows through what appears to be small and weak. But in God's economy, small is big. And it's in the small where God does His best work. God still uses insignificance to accomplish mighty things.

Second point of practice, point of application, is that **God is working even when you can't see it**. Consider the literal side of this parable. Seed is sown into the ground. And then what? Hurry up and wait, right? You can't see what is

happening to that seed in the ground. I bet there were even moments in the farmers mind wondering if something happened to that seed. Did it land on bad soil? Did it just die and fade away? Did I mess up in how I watered and cared for it? Is anything happening from all my hard work?

But then, a little shoot appears. And what began as a tiny seed begins to grow into a giant bush. God had designed the soil to provide needed nutrients. In the God-given DNA of that seed was instructions on how to germinate and grow. What the farmer didn't know was the God was working in that soil, beyond what could be seen, to bring about something of greatness. Something that would provide for that farmer and provide for the one using the fruit of the seed.

It is easy for us to get discouraged in the mundane of life's tasks and duties, isn't it? But you know, it is often in those moments where it seems as though God isn't working, that He is actually preparing us for what He has in store for us. You might be wondering; God where are you in what is going on in and around my life? God, do you even notice what is happening all around me? And it is to those questions that these two parables scream, God is working even when you can't see it.

Beloved, hold on. Don't let go of God because He hasn't let go of you! Don't give up on God because He hasn't given up on you. Oh, but it's hard and it hurts. God knows. But don't bail before you see the shoot come up. It is my experience that when you come out on the other side, you see the evidence of God's work in what seemed like His absence. Stay faithful. God is at work even when you can't see it.

But there is a third application point to the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven. We've talked about the positive side of this story. But there is also the negative side that is true. And that point is, **what we sow now becomes massive later**. Small compromises lead to major departures.

Here's how that plays out.<sup>ix</sup> It's just one modification on the tax form. It's only one drink. Now, that's not a treatise on drinking alcohol, you understand. But an alcoholic becomes that with their first drink. Or, it's only one time. I won't flirt with that person again. Or, it's not really pornography. Or it's just this Sunday; we really need the rest. And what is one Sunday becomes months away from investing in church relationships. Small compromises grow into major departures. A small thought works its way through the entire mind.

Maybe you are here today and find yourself in a mustard seed compromise. I don't want to be judgmental here. No, it is my heart to be helpful. What if you could sound the alarm now and save yourself from a massive failure later? Because every significant failure, bad habit, and addiction always begins with a small compromise. And if you find yourself there, I can tell you that Jesus stands ready to rescue and heal. That's the hope we have in Him.

### **CONCLUSION:**

So, we've talked about the parable, pressed into its point, and examined its practice. I trust that God, through the Holy Spirit, has allowed the preaching of His Word to stir your heart this morning. I want to encourage you to reflect on how The Lord might be leading you to respond. For some, your response would be to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, to be born again unto a relationship with Jesus. For others it might be repentance and turning from mustard seed decisions. However you need to respond, I want you to know that following this service, our elders will be here at the front and excited to visit with you today.

We are going to be led in a song of response. And let me set up this time for us. At the end of this song, we are going to partake in The Lord's Supper. And Scripture urges us to come to The Lord's Table having examined our hearts. We are to confess sin, evaluate relationships, and ready our hearts. And as we come to observe communion, we invite those of you that are believers to participate with us as it is a powerful object lesson.

Let me pray and I'll have John and the band lead us in this song of reflection.  
[PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation for this message: David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996; David Platt, "Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew," Holman: Brentwood, 2013; John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 8-15*, Moody Publishers: Chicago, 1987; David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary: Matthew 13 – The Kingdom Parables*, published by Enduring Word Ministries, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-13/>; Mark A. Copeland, *The Parables of Jesus: The Mustard Seed*, published by Executable Outlines, accessed online: [https://executableoutlines.com/topical\\_series/parables-of-jesus/pa\\_05.html](https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/parables-of-jesus/pa_05.html); Ray Fowler, *The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast*, published by Ray Fowler.org, accessed online: <https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/parables-of-the-mustard-seed-and-the-yeast/>; Skip Heitzig, "Expound: Matthew Chapter 13:18-52," message taught at Calvary Albuquerque, March 14, 2012, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/55/sermon/807>; Brad Gray, "Parable of the Mustard Seed," published by Walking The Text, May 25, 2021, accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=leEzJszHLE>.

<sup>ii</sup> "Brain-to-Brain coupling: A mechanism for creating and sharing a social world," published by the National Library of Medicine at the National Center for Biotechnology Information, accessed online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3269540/>.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Michael Shannon, "Sermon Illustration: Importance of Small Things," published by Preaching.com, accessed online: <https://www.preaching.com/sermon-illustrations/sermon-illustration-importance-of-small-things/>.

<sup>iv</sup> Harry F. Sanders, "Are Mustard Seeds the Smallest or was Jesus Wrong?," article published by Answers in Genesis, accessed online: <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/are-mustard-seeds-the-smallest-or-was-jesus-wrong/>.

<sup>v</sup> See the discussion in John MacArthur's commentary for further discussion on this.

<sup>vi</sup> John MacArthur, page 369.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid, page 370.

<sup>viii</sup> <https://gracequotes.org/quote/a-little-thing-is-a-little-thing-but-faithfulness-in-the-little-things-is-a-great-thing/>.

<sup>ix</sup> Examples modified from Brad Gray's sermon.