

Explosive: A World Dominator

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- [0 : 00] We're going to continue this morning in our series looking at the kingdom of God is like in Matthew 13. This is the third in our series we kicked off three weeks ago looking at the parable of the sower, a variegated soil.
- And it told us to not be discouraged by hard hearts because the word of God grows. The word of God grows in life and bears fruit. And then last week we looked at a sabotage field as we looked at the wheat and the weeds and how an enemy had come.
- And sown weeds amongst the good seed that Jesus had planted. Today we come to two parables side by side.
- They're kind of his and hers parables. One is about a man who planted a mustard seed. The other is about a woman who was making some bread.
- So we come to Matthew 13, 31 to 35. An explosive, a world dominator. And the big message is don't be discouraged by slow growth and slow change.
- [1 : 12] Because Jesus' kingdom will come and it will fill the whole earth. And what we read in Revelation at the start will be a reality. That people from every tribe and tongue and nation will be gathered before God's throne.
- So let's pray. And then we'll read and look at this together. Father God, what we know not would you teach us. Father, what we have not would you give us.
- And Father, what we are not would you make us. For the glory of your son Jesus we pray. Amen. So I want to read the first two verses.
- It would help if you follow along. Matthew 13, verse 31. He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field.
- Though it was the smallest of all seeds. Yet when it grows. It is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree.
- [2 : 22] So that the birds come and perch in its branches. And so this is Ronald Wayne.
- This guy is Ronald Wayne and Wayne was a co-founder of Apple Computing with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak.
- When Apple was founded on the 1st of April 1976, Wayne had a 10% share in the company. But less than two weeks after they started their company, Wayne sold his shares back to Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak for \$800.
- 10% share in Apple, \$800. And the reason given was that Wayne didn't think Apple would go anywhere. And could never compete with computing giants like Hewlett-Packard, IBM and Microsoft.
- 10% share, \$800. Last year alone, Apple made \$187 billion.
- [3 : 37] It really seems to have gone somewhere. As the fact I have every single Apple device somewhere on this stage, hidden. Something so small, started in a garage in California, has now grown to be the largest, most influential company in the world.

Overlooked by Wayne as a pathetic attempt, an insignificant idea, a stupid investment. And if that is true for Robert Wayne, Ronald Wayne and Apple, I wonder if that's how many of us come to look at Jesus Christ and his gospel.

That we know things about him and we think, well that's just a myth, that's just a fairy tale, that is insignificant. But what we see in this parable of the mustard seed, is that the good news about Jesus Christ, his coming to us, living for us, dying in place of us and rising to give us hope.

Is that it is an unstoppable word, that it will dominate the whole world. See how Jesus describes it. He says, the kingdom of heaven, my kingdom is like a mustard seed.

A microscopic dot, that if I dropped it on the floor here and we all got down on our hands and knees, we probably wouldn't find out. I have trouble locating my keys most mornings, so a mustard seed is going to cause me real difficulty.

[5 : 16] And a mustard seed was an Aramaic idiom to talk about something so tiny. Maybe like the way we use the skin of your teeth or a hair's breadth.

There was many things smaller than a mustard seed, but they used mustard seed to say this is so tiny. And Jesus says, my kingdom is like that. It starts so small.

It's so minute and seemingly pathetic. But over time it grows and boy, does it grow. It starts from something so small and yet it becomes the largest plant in the garden, dominating everything.

Hard to be seen by the naked eye, but in the end unmissable by absolutely everyone. It is an unstoppable, relentless gospel that extends the rule and reign of Christ everywhere.

Absolutely everywhere. Today, millions upon millions of people will gather together under the rule and reign of Christ. And his kingdom will expand as this word goes out and grows in people's lives.

[6 : 34] One day, Christ will fill all. He will be everything that is important and lasting in the world. Let me show you this biblically in the book of Acts.

Around 33 AD, Jesus dies on a cross alone, having been deserted by all his disciples. Three days later, he rises out of the grave.

And then we start the book of Acts, which is about the expansion of this kingdom. First in Jerusalem and then Judea and then Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. And so Luke gives us a gospel progress report throughout the book.

So in Acts 2 verse 41, those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day. 150 becomes 3,000 after one sermon.

How we'd love to preach sermons like that. 2, 47, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Just gross.

[7 : 36] So small. And yet gathering momentum and growing. 4 verse 4, but many who heard the message believed so that the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000.

Less than four chapters we've gone from tiny mustard seed to now maybe a shrub. Maybe a bush. And it just keeps on going and keeps on going.

So the word of the Lord spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. And a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Even the priests are involved.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened, living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It increased in numbers. It started in Jerusalem and now we're out all the way to Samaria.

The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord as it starts pressing beyond the fringe of Israel.

- [8 : 36] But the word of the Lord continued to spread and flourish. On this next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. Do you see how it's growing?
- Now whole cities are swept up in its amazing, unstoppable growth. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. It's just growing like a snowball.
- They preached the gospel in that city and what a large number of disciples. It is unstoppable. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.
- And it just goes on. After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. After I have been there, he said, I must visit Rome also.
- Going to the most influential city in all the world because the gospel cannot be stopped. Towards the very end of the book, they arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying.
- [9 : 39] He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God. And from the law of Moses and all the prophets, he tried to persuade them about Jesus.
- Here's the last words of the book of Acts. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus with all boldness and without hindrance.
- That word literally unhinderedly. The gospel cannot be stopped. It starts so small. By the book of Acts, it's invaded all of Europe.
- It's taken over Asia Minor. The whole Roman Empire is being influenced by the gospel. And so even in the modern era, there's a guy, Peter Cameron Scott, and he founded the Africa Inland Mission in 1895.
- Sixteen missionaries arrived in Kenya, landing at Mombasa. And Peter Cameron Scott, in those first days, as he saw a lot of Kenyans sacrifice a goat, he wrote this in his diary.
- [10 : 46] They have very hazy ideas about God that are so far from the truth of the gospel. Could be about Edinburgh today, couldn't it?
- That they have many hazy ideas about God. By 1898, less than three years later, all but one of the missionaries had gone.
- Many had died or returned home plagued with illness. The work was so hard and so slow. And even after three years, there was but a handful of people knowing and loving the Lord Jesus.
- In 1995, just 20 years ago, in the main square in Mombasa, Kenya, 25,000 local Kenyan missionaries who worked for the Africa Inland Mission gathered to celebrate, after 100 years, a million lives reached for the gospel in Kenya.
- A country that is now 82% Christian in 120 years. And as they gathered, they joined as one voice to God be the glory, great things he has done.
- [12 : 04] So loved he the world that he gave us. His son so small, so slow, so seemingly insignificant. But the gospel takes root and bears fruit and a glorious harvest is reaped.
- And the kingdom of Jesus Christ is expanded and salvation is given freely to anyone who will turn and trust in him. Two more examples.
- The gospel arrived in China in the late 18th century, carried by James Hudson Taylor and his colleagues. By the time of the Cultural Revolution in 1949, there were around a million Chinese Christians.
- During the Cultural Revolution, all foreign missionaries and all missionary activity were ceased and all Westerners were kicked out. With the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended.
- Today in China, conservative estimates say that there are 53 million Chinese Christians. Citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 19] By his grace. And such is the exponential growth that Economist magazine estimates that the number will rise to 160 million by 2025.

A tiny seed that's grown to 53 million and will grow to 160 million.

Also think about the way that the gospel grew in your own life. Maybe you were brought to church and it was sprinkled in and it just sat there dormant and you thought it's part of my life, but it's not my life.

But one day that seed began to grow. And it was very slow. We do hear about the miraculous conversion, but it's definitely the exception, not the rule.

And as this gospel takes root. It starts to grow and the Bible ceases to be a dry and dusty book.

[14 : 20] It starts to become meaty and thrilling and you can't stop devouring it. Jesus ceases to be a historical boring figure of the past. But becomes a satisfying living reality in life each and every day.

And church ceased to be a chore where you were dragged along for things like baby dedications. But it starts to become the highlight of the week.

The one that you spring out of bed for even though you were in bed. Ridiculously late. I never forget a woman, Wendy. She was part of the first Christianity Explorer I ever ran through in the West.

She came to the course every week and she never said anything. And at week seven, at the very end at the coffee time, she said, I need to tell you one thing.

She said, the more I read about Jesus, the more unbelievable I find him. The more I find myself wanting to trust him with every area of my life. It was just a little seed that was sown.

[15 : 25] And yet it grew and started to dominate her life and grew into eternal life. She said, I came to know things.

I came to this course to find out things about Jesus. But I'm leaving now the feeling that I know him. Myself. The gospel grows exponentially.

And it dominates absolutely everything. Entire lives. Entire communities. Entire countries. And in the end it will fill the whole earth. As Jesus rules and reigns over everything.

And so Jesus finishes by saying it becomes a tree. And he's not plugged that idea out of anywhere. He's plugged it out of the Old Testament. That there are two kingdoms in the Old Testament described as trees.

One is Assyria in Ezekiel 31. It's a place that all the birds of the air come to rest. And the place where the animals and the wild beasts give birth under its branches.

[16 : 28] But it's also a tree that God cut down because it became proud. And so the kingdom of man that seemed to be such an unmovable object is felled in its prime.

And in Daniel 4 speaking about Babylon. This same tree imagery is conjured up in the imagination as Daniel interprets the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar.

But again this tree is felled. Because God will not have anyone competing with his kingdom or deflecting his glory.

And so Jesus says my kingdom is like a tree. But not a tree that will be felled. A tree that will last forever. A kingdom that will last forever. As I rule and reign in perfect righteousness and justice.

For all eternity over my people. Him I will satisfy forever. Paul writing in Philippians about this tree. This kingdom as it's finally realized.

[17 : 30] Therefore God has highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Says that on that day every knee will bow. Every knee will bow. Now everyone will circumflex before the Lord Jesus.

Many in humble, joyful, loving adoration of Jesus Christ. Whom they have known in life and trusted with everything.

But many others will be compelled and terrified. As they fall before the one whom they've rejected, spurned and ignored. I wonder if this gospel grows into this tree and it will be the last tree left.

I wonder how you will bow. If that happened right now. How would you bow? In loving adoration. For the one that you love and know and have trusted.

[18 : 35] Or in fear filled terror. For the one that you've rejected and spurned. Ronald Wayne missed the opportunity of a lifetime shunning his stake in Apple.

Please hear me clearly. There is available for each of us today. In Christ Jesus a far more valuable investment.

That will pay a dividend of glorious satisfaction for all eternity. Starts as a mustard seed and you may be overlooking it even now.

But it grows unstoppably. And will dominate entirely. That was the his parable.

Now look at the her, verse 33. He told them still another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast.

[19 : 38] And a woman took and mixed into it about 30 kilograms of flour. Until it worked all the way through the dough. Jesus again is saying that the kingdom is like something very small.

It's like yeast. It's like leaven. Leaven. And in the gospels yeast and leaven is usually negative. Talking about the yeast of the Pharisees.

But context sets everything. Because there's the metaphor of the devil being a lion. Jesus being a lion. God being a lion. So it's not hard and fast rules. But the context is everything.

And I used to think that these two parables were the same. That the mustard seed grows and the yeast grows. But I don't think they are. I think the mustard seed is about exponential growth.

But I think the yeast is about extraordinary transformation. And so when I lived through in Airdrie for a wedding present, we got a bread maker. And I really liked the idea of putting the ingredients in the bread maker and waking up to the smell of fresh bread with some lovely thick shredded marmalade.

[20 : 50] It was idyllic. It was like the icing on top of the cake of marrying the woman that you never thought you could love that much to then have breakfast with her with a slice of fresh bread.

But there was only one problem. For days and days in a row, I would wake up to the smell of fresh bread. But when I opened the thing, there was a loaf about that big that was heavier than anything you could ever imagine.

It was inedible. So I used to throw it on the lawn. And not even the Airdrie pigeons would eat it. It was so indigestible. And what was the reason? I've always missed out one little ingredient.

And the reason I missed it is because you had to put it in a different place and I couldn't cope with that. Multitasking has never been my thing. And so we got this lump of lead instead of beautiful spongy bread.

And yeast makes all the difference in bread. The woman takes a little bit of yeast and eats it. She mixes it into every area of the dough. And what does that yeast do?

[21 : 58] It transforms the dough. It means that it's radically transformed from a lump of nothing to a tasty, satisfying bread.

And so I think as the gospel works into every area of our life, it brings incredible transformation. Let me show you this. This is the painting Gin Lane by William Hogarth.

And it's a caricature of life in Britain in the early 18th century. As the gin craze takes root in all of society in Britain because they ban the import of French wine and spirits.

The government legalised the distilling of gin and everyone got on the sauce in the way that no one ever has in history. It's literally, as people became addicted to gin, dissolved the very fabric of society.

You thought going out in Edinburgh on Saturday night was bad. This was Monday to Friday. Monday to Sunday. 24 hours a day.

[23 : 04] And this picture starts to illustrate the moral wrongs of society. Down in this bottom corner is the gin royal. And it says on the outside, drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pennies, clean straw for nothing.

The woman in the middle throwing her child was an infamous story. Who became so drunk, became such a drunkard that she gave her child to the workhouse.

And a charity came and gave the child new clothes. At which point she took the child out of the workhouse, strangled the child to death, sold the clothes just so she could buy some gin.

Such was the gin craze that had swept through the nation. However, by the mid-18th century, preachers like Whitfield, Wesley and Edwards were gathering huge crowds.

And the gospel swept through and was worked into every area of society. And the gin-addled streets, through the gin-addled streets, swept the great awakening.

[24 : 20] With hundreds of thousands of people becoming citizens of Jesus' kingdom. Through trusting him and his good news. Radical transformation. Extraordinary transformation.

Total transformation. The gospel, this message, works its way into every area of life. Just imagine if the gospel worked its way into every area of my life and your life and our lives together.

That we would relate to one another in a gospel-saturated, grace-centered way. That we're always initiating the way God initiates and we're always walking towards others in love.

That they would be built up. When I do Basics Bank on Friday, I never want to do Basics Bank. Some of the people who come are a nightmare. But then as I think about the gospel and how in relation to God I am a nightmare.

I've not loved him as I should. I've rebelled against him constantly. He's been nothing but unchangingly loving to me. I think I can put up with your nightmare today. What if it was in our marriages and we really did love our wives as Christ loved the church?

[25 : 34] In that sacrificial, unchanging, unending way. What if we were truly loving towards each other in a gospel way? That was so tangible to those outside.

What if we worked the gospel into every area of our lives that it just oozed out of us? So as we witness at work and at home and among our friends. They go, that's really different.

They're totally transformed. Do you know if you make bread you need to give it a good kneading. It's a real workout. What if we kneaded the gospel into every area of our lives?

So that it was the foundation of everything that we are. Martin Luther wrote this. The gospel is the central article of the Christian faith. Most necessary is it that we learn it well, teach it to others and beat it into our heads continuously.

Wouldn't that be great if that was true for us? The gospel brings exponential growth. It'll be the only thing standing. So it's so important that we trust Jesus and the citizens of his kingdom.

[26 : 41] Because in the end it's the only kingdom that will last. And the gospel brings transformation. So let's knead it into every area of our lives that it might transform us completely.

Into the image of Jesus Christ. Let me finish by quoting Napoleon. He said this at the end of his life. I know men. And I tell you Jesus Christ is no mere man.

Between him and every other person in the world. There is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have founded kingdoms.

But on what did we rest the creation of their genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his kingdom upon love. And this hour millions of men would die for him.

The kingdoms of men rise and fall. Jesus' kingdom though is the only one that remains. And even this day grows.

[27 : 43] Let's pray. Father God thank you that the gospel grows unstoppably.

Father though it seems so small and insignificant. Thank you that it is the power of God. For the salvation of everyone who believes. And so Lord I pray we would be leaving in the good news of your son today.

Father maybe for the first time. Lord maybe trusting him for the millionth time. But Lord may we be willing and worthy citizens of his kingdom. That he's recruited us into through his love for us.

And his death on the cross in our place. And Father I pray that as citizens of that kingdom. We would work this gospel into every iota of our lives. And Lord that it would transform us into the people that you would have us be.

Father come and glorify your son in this place. In our lives and through our lives. Father may Jesus rule and reign over it all.

[28 : 50] And we pray it in his all powerful name. Amen.