

# The Mustard Seed and the Yeast

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Preacher: Scott Hamilton

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thank you very much. Good evening everyone, it's a pleasure to be with you this evening. Please keep Luke chapter 13 open in front of you as we study it together. That will be a huge help for all of us as we consider what the implications are of Jesus' words for us, not only as individuals but as a church family.

Let me pray for us before we go any further. Father, we thank you for your word to us. And we thank you that when you speak, you shape our hearts to look more like that of Jesus.

And so we pray that you would help us this evening to understand what it is that you have to say, that you would help us to respond in gratitude and in obedience to you.

Please, Father, would you give us everything that we need this evening to hear your word and to live it out in our lives so that you may be glorified.

Please, we pray, would you show us Christ. And it's in his name that we ask for all these things. Amen. Well, it's a beautifully sunny day. It's the end of what I'm sure has been an academic year full of highs and lows for you as a church family.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] The summer holidays often give us a chance, I think, to reflect back on what the previous 12 months have held for us and then also to look ahead at what is coming up next over the academic year that faces us.

And so my question to us all this evening is this. What should our gospel expectations be over the next academic year?

What should our gospel expectations be until the summer of 2023? What should the gospel expectations be for a church family like Bruntsfield Evangelical as you look to the next five or maybe even ten years of your life here as a church in Edinburgh?

Now, there's a whole variety of possible answers to that question. I'm sure so many of us would love to see men, women, children, those who are elderly around our part of Edinburgh, in our social circles, who don't yet know Jesus, to hear the gospel, to ask Jesus for forgiveness and for eternal life.

I know that I would love that myself. I'm sure we'd love to grow together as a church family in unity and in holiness as we study God's word on a Sunday and during the week.

[ 2 : 4 3 ] I would love that too. Having said that, I'm sure so many of us know that things are actually often in reality much tougher for us as a church family.

People who we would love to know Jesus just don't seem all that interested. Friends around us who we would love to grow in godliness aren't making progress like we would want them to.

Even when we think about ourselves, when we reflect on the past 12 months, how we have grown as Christians, we feel frustrated, I'm sure, thinking about how slow our own progress can be.

As we look at our world, we just think, where is God's kingdom? Where is the reign of Christ? And so for some of us, I imagine our expectations might be really optimistic, positive, bright, as we think about what God might do in our lives and in the lives of others.

But for some of us, our expectations might be more pessimistic or perhaps realistic as we think about the sin that permeates our hearts and the evil that permeates our world.

[ 4 : 04 ] Well, wonderfully, in our parables this evening, Jesus sets really, really clear gospel expectations as to what a church family like Brunsfield Evangelical can expect and should expect over the academic year ahead.

And it's a really, really important lesson for us to learn because Jesus' words are going to transform and change our expectations to look more like the genuine gospel expectations of his kingdom.

And that in turn will stop us as Christians from having an outlook that is either too high or too low. Overly optimistic or overly pessimistic.

See, if our expectations match Jesus' kingdom expectations, then we'll make much better sense of what is happening around about us in our lives and in our world.

In fact, that is exactly what Jesus is teaching his disciples in Luke chapter 13. We're following Jesus on his way to the cross. We're following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem.

[ 5 : 11 ] And he is showing his followers what it means to understand and correctly interpret the days in which they are living. As Jesus teaches, as Jesus heals, as Jesus drives out demons on his way to Jerusalem, how are the disciples to make sense of it all?

Should daily healings and the driving out of demons be the norm going forwards for anyone who follows Jesus? How does a disciple correctly understand what Jesus is saying and what Jesus is doing as he heads towards Jerusalem?

And you'll see what I mean if you scan chapter 13. Just before these parables in chapter 13, we read of Jesus freeing a woman on the Sabbath from this crippling spirit that has had her bent over for 18 years.

So if you glance with me at verse 10, we read, On the Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and the woman who was there had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years.

She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, Women, you are set free from your infirmity.

[ 6 : 39 ] Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Now Luke records this for us because it is miraculous in the truest sense of the word.

This poor woman has suffered for 18 years, and Jesus in his kindness and in his mercy cures her. But there's much more going on here in Luke chapter 13.

See, this is the long-awaited kingdom of God breaking into our world, breaking into this woman's life to set her free from the grip of Satan.

And Luke invites us to watch as Jesus, the king of God's people, frees this woman from the grip, from the grasp of the evil one.

Someone stronger than Satan has arrived. His kingdom has broken into our fallen world. So listen to Jesus' words in verse 16.

[ 7 : 45 ] Hear the authority, hear the compassion in the words that he speaks. Should not this woman, he says, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?

And when he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. All the people see what Jesus does, and they rightly rejoice.

Finally, here is someone who can fully fix the world in which we live. After years of oppressive Roman rule, after years of oppressive religious tyranny, after years of disease and death, there is finally a light at the end of the long, dark tunnel.

And yet, as Jesus' kingdom breaks into our world, he needs to make sure that his disciples understand what things will look like going forward. They've just witnessed something wonderful, their right to rejoice, but Jesus will tell his disciples in these parables that his kingdom will not always look as powerful as it does in verses 10 to 18 of chapter 13.

In fact, Jesus' kingdom will grow spectacularly, but it will grow from small, unseen beginnings.

[ 9 : 21 ] Jesus' kingdom will grow spectacularly, but it will grow from small, unseen beginnings. The two parables are very similar to one another. There's a slightly different emphasis each time.

They're not especially tricky or hard for us to understand. The word at the start of verse 18 that was read out for us there is, actually, therefore, therefore, Jesus asked, what is the kingdom of God like?

This is Jesus' direct response to the rejoicing of the disciples around him. He doesn't want to spoil their fun. He's not telling them to tone down their rejoicing, but he is clarifying and adjusting their understanding of what is to come.

As Jesus compares the kingdom of God, he speaks firstly, in verse 19, of a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden.

And then he speaks in verse 21, of yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 30 kilograms of flour. See, as Jesus describes the kingdom of God, he speaks here in Luke of very ordinary, everyday things.

[ 10 : 38 ] We would walk right past mustard seeds and yeast if we were at the local market there 2,000 years ago. We wouldn't even notice they were there.

And yet listen to what happens to both of these things in these verses. In verse 19, the mustard seed grew and became a tree and the birds perched in its branches.

That small, weak, ordinary, unimpressive mustard seed grows into something that offers shelter and provision for the birds that come and perch in its branches.

And then again, verse 21, the yeast that a woman took and mixed, that word there is literally hid, the yeast that a woman took and hid in about 30 kilograms of flour works its way through all the dough.

That tiny amount of yeast grows into the rest of the flour, which I'm told would be able to provide enough bread to feed over 100 people.

[ 11 : 49 ] Now we might have walked past the yeast and we might have walked past the mustard seed, but we would not walk past that tree nor that amount of bread without noticing them.

We would see them very, very clearly. Jesus' kingdom will grow spectacularly from small, unseen beginnings.

And you can understand why Jesus would want his disciples to understand this in light of what's just happened in chapter 13. You can understand why Jesus would want his disciples to know this, given where he is heading.

If you glance down at verse 32 of chapter 13, Jesus is responding to very, very false concern from the Pharisees.

They don't want Jesus anywhere near Jerusalem. And so they attempt to ward him away from Jerusalem by trying to explain that Herod is out to get him.

[ 12 : 52 ] And Jesus responds by saying, verse 32, I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow.

And on the third day, I will reach my goal. In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day, for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

See, in Jesus, the kingdom of God has broken into the world with all of its power. We've seen that in the healing of the women on the Sabbath.

But healing people physically before going to the cross is not Jesus' ultimate goal. He says that he will keep on driving out demons.

He says that he will keep on healing people, but he will only do it until he reaches, on day three, his goal, which is the cross of Calvary. Now that is when the kingdom of God will look at its least impressive.

[ 14 : 03 ] That is when the kingdom of God will look at its most hidden. That is when the disciples will need to hang on to Jesus' words here in chapter 13.

See, as Jesus hangs on the cross, he looks weak and he looks frail. As Jesus hangs on the cross, the glory of the kingdom will be small, just like the mustard seed.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, the glory of the kingdom will be hidden, just like the yeast. And yet, just as Jesus teaches his followers in these parables, it will grow.

See, the cross, if you like, is the moment where the gospel seed is planted in the garden. The cross, if you like, is the moment where the gospel yeast is hidden in the flower. But Jesus' promise to his followers is that slowly, surely, over the months, over the years to come, his kingdom will grow.

From the small to the great. From the hidden to the visible. And as we look back at Jesus' promise to his followers 2,000 years ago, wasn't he telling us the truth?

[ 15 : 25 ] From the 11 apostles and the handful of others left after Jesus died and rose again, right the way through the centuries, where millions and millions of people have come to place their faith and trust in the cross of Christ.

So you can go and see what remains of the Roman Empire sitting in the British Museum. And whilst you're there, you can have a look at what remains of the Babylonian Empire as well.

A lot of it has been very well, very carefully preserved for us to go and see. Even more carefully preserved is the kingdom of Christ.

preserved by him. And if you want to go and see it, you just need to look around about you at church on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening.

The kingdoms of the world crumble. The kingdom of Christ continues. Carries on. And so as I draw things to a close this evening, let me suggest just two ways in which this parable should shape, should adjust our gospel expectations as a church family.

[ 16 : 43 ] The first one is this. When we feel tempted to think that the kingdom of Christ looks defeated, it looks beaten, these parables show and remind us that Jesus' kingdom is actually in reality growing unstoppably.

I know the frustration of meeting up with somebody who is struggling with a particular issue, who needs generous applications of the gospel.

They listen and then they go right back to doing what they were doing before. I know the frustration of looking at sin in my own life and thinking, I will never ever do that thing again.

And then I do it within the hour. I know the frustration of trying to reach out with the good news of Jesus towards those who just aren't interested and every single time feeling the pain that comes with that.

When we look at the life of an individual, when we look at the church in this country, when we think of a mission partner overseas, we think to ourselves, this just looks so weak, so small, so hidden.

[ 18 : 01 ] Jesus' response is, just wait until what you see in eternity. Jesus' kingdom is growing spectacularly into an eternal kingdom that will offer shelter and provision for anyone who would seek to enter.

In that sense, we need to be very, very careful that we don't listen to our senses too much. Or rather, that we listen to God's word and what Jesus has said over what we often see and hear and perceive around about us.

That's the first thing. The second thing is this. When we feel tempted to think that the kingdom of Christ should actually be moving quicker or faster than it currently is, these parables show and remind us that the growth of Jesus' kingdom will not always look impressive or sudden.

That's such a big encouragement for me and for any one of us who are trying to press the truth of the gospel either onto our own hearts or onto the hearts of those that we know and love.

And I think at times it's easy to be tempted to think, should we be doing things quicker? Should this be moving faster than it is?

[ 19 : 28 ] I've been reading through a gospel with this friend of mine, with this brother or sister from the church family for the best part of two years and it just doesn't look like anything is happening.

Should we be trying something else to maybe just speed things up? Is there something that we're missing out on that other churches are doing and enjoying the fruit of that but we're missing out?

Well, Jesus would say that if you are doing his kingdom work, then growth will not always be quick. His kingdom has broken in. He has defeated Satan.

He has liberated us from sin and sickness and will do for eternity in the future but kingdom growth is gradual in our lives, in our world.

So my encouragement from these parables is not to lose heart. His power is undeniable. He will reign forever and his eternal kingdom will grow.

[ 20 : 37 ] It will grow spectacularly but it will grow slowly from our perspective at least. And with all that being said, let me stop there and let me pray and pray that God will give us these gospel expectations that Christ would want us to have for his kingdom.

Father, we thank you for Jesus' honesty here and we thank you, Father, for Jesus adjusting our expectations so that they are in line with his. And we thank you, Father, that we can know with certainty that Jesus' kingdom will grow from that which often looks small and unimpressive and weak but it will grow into something that provides and nourishes everyone who belongs to it.

Thank you, Father, for the guarantee that despite what we often see around about us in our world, your kingdom will grow and will reign forever. So please help us to keep going, help us to keep growing in you and please help us, Father, not to be distracted or to be persuaded by the world around about us but instead to trust in you and to trust in Jesus' kingdom.

Thank you that you have saved us for an eternity with you where we will know all of this forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.