

A Mustard Seed Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. How lovely to see you. My name's Graham. I'm the pastor here at the church. So lovely to meet so many new faces this morning. You're so welcome with us. Probably thinking what I'm thinking. We know if the two in the baptism tank who were doing the baptisms, who has the better eyesight? Note to self for next time we do this bigger font on what we put at the front. Wonderful to see you this morning. If you have a Bible, please come with me to Mark chapter four. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry about it. You can get it on your phone. You can grab a Bible in the pew in front of you. It's just going to be really helpful. We're going to look at two verses this morning.

As we're doing that, let me just say to Stuart and Rachel, I don't know if they're back in yet. Not yet? Okay, let's say it in front of you. You can pass it on. Number one, know how dearly loved they are. Just love having them as part of this church family. And number two, know how encouraged we are to hear how the Lord has been at work in their life.

So you can all pass that on, on behalf of this church family to them when they come back through. So picture the scene. An older couple. Okay, they've been married. I'm trying not to look at anyone. They've been married for 40 years. They know each other inside out.

She is his yin to yang. He is to her, the aunt to deck. They know each other inside out. And they're getting ready for bed one evening. And the man walks into the bathroom and he lets out an almighty groan. And the voice comes from the bedroom. What's the problem, sweetheart?

To which the man replies, you remember those days when we were young and we were active? We used to go on adventures. We were full of energy. You remember those days? Well, now I look in the mirror and what I see, what do I see? My tummy's getting bigger. My face has wrinkles everywhere. My back is hunched. What's happened to us? And the lady shouts from next door. She says, well, look on the bright side, dear. At least nothing's wrong with your eyesight.

[2 : 0 4] Now, as we come to Mark chapter four, here's what I want to do for the next 15 or so minutes, 15, 20 minutes. One is to see in this passage that the disciples are struggling to get their head around a new reality. That's where we are in Mark chapter four. And Jesus is helping them understand what it is to be one of his disciples and what it means to live for him and what it is his kingdom is like. What is his kingdom like? He's helping them understand it in this passage.

It's a reality that if you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus, and we just love that you're here, you'll maybe find this hugely surprising as Jesus tells us what his kingdom is like. And a reality that if you are a Christian here today, hopefully you're going to find this hugely strengthening on this special Sunday as Jesus helps his disciples understand the reality of how his kingdom works. So here are the 12 disciples in this passage.

Now you have to say, what a bunch. This eclectic first century Middle Eastern dozen, right? We snapshot of the 12. You got in there, you get guys who've left behind the security of the family fishing business to come and follow Jesus. You've got a man in there who's left behind his cushy, lucrative, dishonest, because you're working for the Romans tax collector lifestyle in that 12. You've also got a man who's left behind his former life where he used to live for nothing else than to kill Romans.

And as a side, it's fascinating to think about those two individuals right at the end there. One guy who works for the Romans, he's a Jew who's began to work for the Romans. Other guy who is a Jew who lives to kill the Romans. And all of a sudden, Jesus has these two in his 12 followers. I'd love to be a fly on the wall when Jesus introduced those two for the first time. Would you not?

Enemy me, enemy? Nah, that's so pre-me. How about in me, we make it brother meet brother, as you were, and leaves the room. In our world that seems so to be ever daily more increasingly polarized and divided as time goes on. What Jesus does in not only getting these two individuals in the same room together, but getting these two individuals to love one another. Whoever you are here today, whatever you think about the Christian faith, I'd say that's something worth sitting up and taking notice of. How on earth has Jesus of Nazareth done that? And you look around at a church today, I do this every Sunday when I'm up here. I look out and I thought, what a random bunch of people.

[5 : 02] What would bring us together? It's not age, it's not geography, it's not interest. There's one person that's brought us together, not to play happy families, but he's made us one. And that person is Jesus of Nazareth. And he's done it with these 12, this eclectic bunch of people. And if you'd asked these men to give their stories as to why they've given it all up to follow this former carpenter and now penniless preacher from this backwater town of Nazareth, well, they would have started telling you about the healings they witnessed him do, the likes of which they'd never seen anything like that before. And he would have started telling you about the teaching that they listened to in Toucan, the likes of which them and the people from their community had never heard before.

And this man, Jesus, burst into their lives. And he said those four simple words, come and follow me. And they did. And they did. And that's all great so far. And yet here in the immediate context of Mark chapter 3, if you've got it, the disciples have begun to see that not everybody shares that same opinion of Jesus. Right? If you've got it there, track with me. The religious leaders of the day at verse 22, they think he's demon possessed. His own family think, verse 21, that he's out of his mind.

Chapter 3. Jesus himself has just told this parable, this heavenly story, about what people's reactions to his message and to this word will be like. And he's gone for what? He's gone for it's like a farmer sowing the seed. And that parable is all about percentages. 75% of the people who hear this word won't accept it and it won't grow in their lives. And so the reality, that is the reality, that the disciples are seeing in front of them. They think Jesus is incredible. And yet not everyone is sharing that opinion of him and they don't understand. Not everybody gets him. More than that, not everyone wants him. And now it would seem in Mark's gospel, a pretty good time for Jesus to teach them about how his kingdom grows, how his kingdom works. And so they must have been hugely relieved to hear Jesus say at verse 30. He says, the kingdom of heaven, what shall we compare it to? Do you see that? He's going for the simile. What shall we compare it to? You can imagine the disciples thinking to themselves, that a boy, Jesus, that's exactly what we kind of need right now because we're kind of flagging. We're tapping out here. That's exactly what we need, a comparison. Let's go for the power image. Let's go for the strong and mighty. Is it like, if we're talking similes, is it like a mighty mountain? Is that what your kingdom is like? Is it like an impenetrable advancing army? Is that what your kingdom is like? Remember in this day, the expectation is that when the Messiah came, he would blitz out the Romans. Go on, Jesus, give us it both barrels. What is your kingdom like? What can we compare it to? And see Jesus thunder in and say, well, my kingdom is like a mustard seed?

And no, I didn't see that one coming. You can hear them say, I didn't go for that one. You mean the smallest and most unimpressive looking thing that we can possibly imagine? That's what your kingdom's like?

A mustard seed. Now you can't see that pitch getting much traction on Dragon's Den, can you? Can you imagine Peter Jones' face when he hears that? But make no mistake, that's precisely the image Jesus uses. And in so doing, he delivers two timeless truths about how his kingdom works.

[9 : 13] Really quickly, first of all, it will be small and unnoticeable in this day. His is a kingdom where the success of it is less about pie charts and it's more about the transformation of your character. A kingdom where the shape of it is less about you and I asserting our rights and it's more about you and I loving our enemies. A kingdom where the foundation of it is less about our wisdom and ability to fathom our way through life and much more about leaning our life, trusting ourselves on the word of God, the Bible. And those things, if we're honest, are things that when we see them happen, the world is not going to even bat an eyelid at them.

Right? You ain't going to get the six o'clock news team sending around a camera crew to grab an exclusive interview with the young Christian worker who chose to stay sober on her night out.

Right? That's just not going to happen. Netflix aren't going to do their next biopic about the Christian who chose the path of forgiveness rather than the path of bitterness when it came to that friend to deeply hurt them. It's just not going to happen. And yet, make no mistake, those with eyes to see it and see what's going on there, that is the unmistakable mark of King Jesus climbing into the driver's seat of someone's life and taking full control of the wheel. He's like the new owner who's just bought himself a doer-upper that is our lives and he's gone in there committed to transforming it from the inside out. And now that Stuart and Rachel are back in the building, guys, can I encourage you that we see this in you? We see the kingdom growing in unspectacular yet undeniable ways.

It might not make the headlines on the national news, but make no mistake, it's the cause of much celebration on the news feed of heaven. Because this is how his kingdom works. It is small and unnoticeable, almost undetectable in this day. And yet, mark my words, says Jesus, as he carries on this parable, it will be large and unmissable in that day. Because what happens to that mustard seed, you see verse 32, over time it grows. Think about it, as Jesus delivers this thought, it's just him and the 12. Right? That's barely enough for a start and a living, but not enough even to fill the subs bench.

And yet, some 2,000 years later, well, there's a few more followers of Jesus than that. Right? You look up, you Google it, you'll find that almost a third of the world follow this man now.

[12 : 09] And you've got to say, that's rather impressive. To quote Christian writer Glenn Scrivener, who provocatively and invitingly puts it like this about Jesus, he was butchered as a blasphemer in his 30s, yet today he commands more allegiance than any human has or could. Billions call him Lord. Not bad for a kid born in a shed.

And that is what we are seeing and celebrating today, is a snapshot of the truth of that growth. As two people have publicly put up their hands and said, we're all in with this crucified man.

And as they do that, we've got to understand, the seed's growing. It's growing. To something larger, to see Jesus describe it, than all the garden plants with branches everywhere and all sorts of birds coming to make their nest there.

Just take that, that's the peoples of the world flooding in and saying, we're with him. And one day, what was unnoticeable, well now, on that day, you cannot miss it.

Which is a big claim, really, when you think about it. I mean, if that came out of the contestant on The Apprentice, you wouldn't be surprised, would you?

[13 : 33] Oh, I'm going to be great in that day. Oh, I'm going to be great. And so you've got to ask yourself, what is Jesus saying here? How can he claim that? Well, it's because these are the words of the mustard seed king himself.

Right, his birth in Jesus, God takes on flesh. His birth in a stable. His birth born into poverty.

A refugee forced to flee from his country of birth at an early age with his parents. Nothing to see here. His life hanging out with tax collectors and sinners.

It was almost a label that Jesus in his life, you could never get away from. The people that you hang out with. Despised by the religious elites. Nowhere to lay his head.

Nothing to see here. His death unjust, unaccompanied, undignified on the cross as he dies. In our place, bearing in his body the anger of God against our sin.

[14 : 40] I cannot think of anything less impressive looking than that. And yet on the third day, his resurrection. And it's amazing hearing from Stuart this morning say that it was that that convinced him that Jesus was true.

If you want to look into that, come and we'll give you some books. You can look at it by yourself. We'd love to chat that one through. Because it's not blind faith. Christianity is trust based on evidence.

The third day he verifiably rose. Showing that the price had been paid for our sin. Witnessed. Undeniable.

And so what Jesus is talking about here is the day when he returns. The end of the age with every knee bowed to him. With the eternal destination of every human being.

Eternal life with him or eternal punishment away from him. Down to him. Depending on how we've responded to him. Jesus will be seen as the king of the cosmos.

[15 : 42] And on that day when God, as it were, he pulls back the curtain. To unveil a people from every single generation. A people from every single nation around the world.

Who he has made one. Who he has gathered together to worship him. And who love him. And so to the disciples looking out and struggling to come to terms with reality.

Jesus says, this is how my kingdom works. It's like a mustard seed. It's like a mustard seed. You know, just as we close, talking of realities.

Do you want to know what I almost decked it over this week? When I was out for a run. A Christmas tree. Okay. Mid to end January.

Not a good time for Christmas trees. As they line the side of our roads. Particularly when the storms have been raging over the last few weeks. And they're blowing all over the place, aren't they? But I often feel sorry for Christmas trees.

[16 : 45] Bought at the beginning of December. High hopes and ambitions for what this is going to be. By the middle of December. There you are. Decorated and looking classy.

People have given you some TLC. The days take over. And all of a sudden you've got more stuff around you. Come Christmas Day. It's your time to shine.

Right? Photos everywhere. Selfies with you. You've hit your peak. This is your moment. In the starlight. Everyone wants some action. And Boxing Day. You kind of hold some romantic appeal.

But by the 27th. People begin to notice that you're now shedding pine leaves everywhere. New year comes and goes. And people look at you when they come back from New Year.

And there's little left of your former glory. And come mid-January. Your time's up. In the words of Frank Sinatra. That's life. That's what all the people say. You're riding high in April.

[17 : 42] You're shot down in May. But I looked at that Christmas tree that almost caused me to fall. And it reminded me that that is the shape of our lives. Is it not?

That's the shape of our little kingdoms. Just like that. And it seems to me that what Jesus is saying here. And this is the great Christian hope.

Is that his kingdom is the opposite. It's the opposite. And so as we find our lives in him. Forgiven of our sin.

Trusting in him. And attached to the life-giving vine that is his life. That is the shape of our lives too. Jesus says to what will we compare the kingdom of God?

What shall we compare it? What simile will we use? He says it's like the mustard seed. Small and unimpressive. Almost unmissable beginnings.

[18 : 41] In this day. But in that day. Large and unmissable. And so the invitation that he makes to all of us today. Is to come and find your life in him.

The forgiveness of your sins. All the things that you've done wrong. And the promise that in him. Is found life. And life to the full. With the God who made us.

So let's pray. And then we'll stand to sing our last couple of songs. Heavenly Father.

We thank you so much for the words of Jesus. All those metaphors. Images. Truths that we find in the Bible. That he uses to describe what he is like.

He is the bread of life. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the light of the world. Father thank you for these wonderful images that Jesus gives us.

[19 : 44] And so Lord we pray today as we think about the one who said that his kingdom is like the mustard seed. Oh Lord help us to have eyes to see how you are at work in this world today.

And we thank you for this morning. And the encouragement of two people putting their hands up and saying. I want to give my life to this king. And so Father I pray that you would challenge us this morning.

You would encourage us. You would convict us. And Father you would greatly strengthen us. Because it's in the name of the mustard seed king that we pray. Amen.

Amen.