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Small Beginnings, Large Endings; Matt 13:31-35

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Introduction – In the parable of the soils and the parable of the weeds, Jesus is teaching about who makes up the kingdom of heaven. How can you tell who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven? The parable of the soils tells us that kingdom citizens truly receive the Word of God and therefore truly bear fruit in their lives. The parable of the weeds tells us that kingdom citizens are planted by the Son, they bear fruit for the Son, and at the end they are received by the Son.

In these next two parables Jesus is not teaching about the citizenry of the kingdom but rather on the nature of the kingdom itself. Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7. So we see there is a common theme throughout. Jesus' message picked up where John the Baptist left off, and Jesus instructs His disciples to proclaim the same message. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is here!

In one sense, Jesus Himself is the kingdom of heaven. He is the Messiah. He is the Promised One. He is salvation and life. In another sense, the coming of Jesus represents the coming of the kingdom. Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of heaven on earth at His first coming and will consummate the kingdom at His second coming. He has in a very real sense brought heaven to earth. He has initiated the incoming of the kingdom that will eventually reign over every other kingdom. The kingdom is at hand.

But many couldn't see it. It didn't look like the kingdom of heaven to them. Jesus didn't look like a king. He looked like a peasant. His following didn't look like a kingdom. It looked like a group of wanderers. Where was the grandeur, where was the fanfare, where was the glory, where was the conquering and overthrowing of Rome? This was no kingdom in the eyes of so many.

What Jesus is teaching in these two parables is that the fullness of the kingdom did not come at once, but rather in process, over time. In other words, don't miss the kingdom because you're looking for the end and therefore missing the beginning. The kingdom of heaven may begin in small, seemingly insignificant ways, but in the end, when it reaches its fullness, it will encompass all.

- I. Mustard and the Kingdom of Heaven (vv31-32)
  - a. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, but once it is planted, it grows and grows until it outgrows all other garden plants. Indeed, it grows so far beyond garden plants that it becomes more like a tree than a plant. Birds nest in a full-grown mustard plant. They don't nest in corn or tomato plants.
  - b. The kingdom of heaven, Jesus says is like that. It has a small beginning when compared to other kingdoms, but its growth will continue and continue until it overcomes all other kingdoms. The point is its extensive growth, from the tiniest to the largest.
  - c. Take Jesus for example, the very Person of the kingdom. Look at His beginnings. In fact, that's what this season is all about. We celebrate all month long, His beginning, His entrance into the earth, into humanity. It began with His conception in a little-known virgin girl named Mary. He was birthed in a stable and laid in a manger. He came into this world in the little town of Bethlehem. And only a few shepherds were there to witness the kingdom of heaven on earth in its beginning.
    - i. But that kingdom has experienced extensive growth since its beginning. There are nativity scenes set up all over this world today celebrating Christ. There are far more witnesses today than a handful of shepherds. In fact, on this very day, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is praised on every continent and in many languages. In cathedrals and in chapels and in churches and in homes and in storefronts and under trees and in secret underground locations. That little beginning in a manger in the Middle East has experienced such extensive growth that it now reaches Grassy Pond. All the way from Bethlehem to Gaffney.
  - d. Take the believer for example. Look how the kingdom of heaven grows extensively in each believer. Oh it begins with such a small, seemingly insignificant beginning. It's hidden. It's secret. It begins in the heart. The Word of God enters the heart by the Spirit of God and the grace of God brings new birth. How little it begins with a little prayer. A prayer of repentance. A prayer of faith.
    - i. But then the growth comes. That new heart issues forth into a new life. Attitudes begin to change. Mindsets begin to change.

Habits begin to change. Vocabulary begins to change. Lifestyle begins to change. And what began with such a little beginning, has experienced such extensive growth it is now nothing less than a new creation.

- e. Take the church for example. Why it began in Jerusalem after the resurrection. Just one city. Just one church. Just one group of followers. And it was met with heavy resistance. O the religious zealots pledged to stamp out this new religion called the Way, and the more they pressed, the faster it grew. And they persecuted the church so heavily that the believers were forced to flee to other towns and other lands, and behold they took Jesus with them. And the wildfire of the Christian church spread. And even to this very day, nations and tyrants and dictators have vowed to put an end to the Christian faith only to see it continue to grow. They can't stop it because it is the kingdom of heaven on earth!

## II. Leaven and the Kingdom of Heaven (v33)

- a. Leaven is yeast. Just a little yeast will transform the entire dough. It will make it into something different than it was before. It will cause it to do what it could not do before. The point of this parable is not extensive growth but rather radical transformation, change. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is just like that.
- b. It will slowly move into every sphere until it permeates and saturates and totally transforms. Just like a little yeast, it doesn't appear to be that powerful and that influential, but it spreads, it moves, and it brings radical change.
- c. Take Jesus for example, the very Person of the kingdom. What a small, seemingly inconsequential beginning. Who would have thought much would ever come from a Jewish homeless man preaching on the side of a mountain. Oh the Pharisees and Sadducees were convinced that once we get Him out of the picture, all of His teachings and all of His followers will eventually disappear.
  - i. Little did they know that killing Him was actually part of the grand plan of redemption. Surely, once He's dead He'll be forgotten. What they failed to consider was that if He was indeed the Son of God, death could never hold Him and the grave could never keep Him. If His followers believed Him

before, if they loved Him before, how much more would they believe Him and love Him when He rises from the dead!

- d. Take the believer for example. He's just one person. She's just one person. Just one radical follower of Christ can't make that big of a difference. And yet, entire families have come to Christ because one family member was radically saved. Entire villages and entire nations have been evangelized because just one believer was radically saved.
    - i. And that believer herself. Her friends thought that Jesus stuff would eventually go away, but it didn't. Rather it moved into every sphere of her life. Even her countenance has changed. She's been transformed by grace.
  - e. Take the church for example. As long as there is a Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, God-fearing local church in a community, the truth will always be present, grace will always be present, the gospel will always be present, and transformation will always be present. Dads will be transformed into caring fathers and loving husbands. Moms will be transformed into nurturing mothers and loving wives. Children and students will be transformed into lovers of God above self and beyond the approval of peers. Marriages will be rescued. Those deceived by our society will be delivered. It just takes a little leaven, it just takes a little church, to see a massive change!
- III. Parables and the Kingdom of Heaven (vv34-35)
- a. You see a parable is just a little thing. It's like the mustard seed. It's like the leaven. It's just a little story. These two parables only consist of 3 verses. And yet they contain massive truth.
  - b. The parable was not only a dynamic teaching method, explaining eternal truths with earthly illustrations, it was by prophetic, divine design. First layer - You see, even the fact that Jesus taught in little parables was telling a big truth – He is the One.
  - c. Second layer - But even more so, when Jesus told a parable, He was revealing truths that were overlooked, neglected, or unknown. The kingdom is not going to begin like you expect. It's going to begin like a mustard seed, like a little leaven.
  - d. Third layer - Even the parable is like the kingdom. It seems like a small story, but it is truly the grandest of all stories, for it is a story about the kingdom told by none other than the King Himself.