

## Upside-Down Kingdom (5): Like a Mustard Seed

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(Luke 13:18-21)

### I. Introduction

- A. In *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray has the worst day of his life... over and over
1. He plays a weatherman who goes to Punxsutawney for Groundhog Day
    - a. He is snowed in and stays, and he wakes up to Groundhog Day again
    - b. He relives that same day with all the same people doing the same things
    - c. Kid falls out of the same tree, a guy chokes at same restaurant, etc.
  2. I wonder if Jesus felt He was trapped in Punxsutawney Groundhog Day?
    - a. In **Mark 3**, Jesus heals a man with a shriveled hand on Sabbath
      - 1) In **Luke 14**, he heals a man who suffered from dropsy (or edema)
      - 2) In **John 5**, it is a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda on Sabbath
      - 3) In **Luke 13**, our text, it was a woman crippled by a spirit
    - b. In each of these cases, Jesus is criticized because he healed on Sabbath
      - 1) You can't work on Sabbath, and the work of a healer is healing!
      - 2) They even criticized healed man for carrying his mat! (**John 5:10**)
    - c. Notice this exchange between Jesus and Jewish leaders (**John 5:16-18**)
      - 1) They persecuted him because he was working on the Sabbath
      - 2) He admits it's work (Father's), so they want to kill Him more!
- B. This is background for the parables we study today from **Luke 13:18ff**.
1. Luke begins with, "*Then Jesus asked*" or "*Therefore*" (ESV) or "*Thus*" (NET)
    - a. So there's a transition; the parables follow/explain what just happened
    - b. And what just happened was that Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath
      - 1) This made Jewish leaders "*indignant*" (lit. "*much grief*") (**13:14**)
      - 2) His answer further infuriates them, but not the crowd (**13:15-17**)
  2. **Question:** "*If Jesus is Messiah, why would the leaders oppose him?*"
    - a. He announced the kingdom of God and demonstrated it with miracles
    - b. So why then did so many Jewish leaders reject Him and His message?
      - 1) The kingdom of God starts small and secretly... and then grows
      - 2) That's true in our world and in our lives; point of our two parables

## II. Like a Mustard Seed (Reading- [Luke 13:18-21](#))

- A. The first parable compares the kingdom of God to a **mustard seed**
1. This is likely black mustard which both grew wild and was cultivated
    - a. It was planted in a large field; tho' considered an herb, it grew 5-12 ft
    - b. In a region where trees don't grow that tall, that was a really big herb!
  2. Several things about mustard-- **First**, the seed is very small (grain of sand)
    - a. **Second**, it grows very large, especially compared to its seed (birds)
    - b. **Third**, this mustard plant grows rapidly, so its growth can be seen
  3. Jesus will reuse this metaphor in a slightly different way in [Luke 17:6](#).
    - a. In [Luke 17](#), mustard seed represents the faith of the apostles
      - 1) They ask, "*Increase our faith*" in the context of forgiveness. ([17:5](#))
      - 2) Jesus said even a small faith like mustard seed could uproot a tree!
      - 3) Real miracle isn't seen in uprooting trees but in forgiving others
    - b. But in our parable, the mustard seed represents the kingdom of God
    - c. God's kingdom rule starts small, but pretty soon great things happen
- B. Next parable drives home the same message—**parable of yeast** ([13:20-21](#))
1. This is one of the few times that the metaphor of yeast is a positive one
    - a. Usually yeasts is evil influence, "*the yeast of Pharisees*" ([Matt 16:6](#))
    - b. Grain offerings made in the OT were to be without yeast ([Lev 2:11](#))
    - c. Yeast was to be removed from one's home before Passover ([Dt 16:4](#))
    - d. Paul uses throwing out of yeast as metaphor of holy life ([1 Cor 5:7](#))
    - e. He uses the same metaphor to warn of a creeping legalism ([Gal 5:9](#))
  2. But here, yeast represents the gradual growth of the kingdom of God
    - a. Aunt Clauselle made best yeast rolls— light, fluffy, pure ambrosia!
      - 1) Another aunt violated scripture—ask for bread, she gave a stone!
      - 2) We called them "sinkers" (lived on lake and did lot of fishing)
  3. **Difference:** Those pans covered by dishcloths, waiting for the rolls to rise!
    - a. Small amount of yeast caused an important change in dough!
    - b. That's how the kingdom works in us—small beginning, big changes
    - c. God's rule isn't always dramatic, but God is always at work!

- C. Keep in mind the background of the people who first heard this parable.
  - 1. First century Jews lived in anticipation of the coming of God’s kingdom
    - a. There was a huge “*Messianic expectation*” during the time of Christ.
      - 1) That was the reason for the dramatic triumphant entry (**Matt 21**)
      - 2) Jesus often tries to keep people quiet about his identity (**Mk 9:6**)
    - b. If people saw Him as Messianic king, Jesus could not do his teaching
      - 1) John says that they once tried to make him king by force! (**Jn 6:15**)
      - 2) Point: They were ready for the kingdom to come... dramatically
  - 2. These parables prepares them for the truth that God’s kingdom starts small
    - a. Jesus was not the kind of king that the Jews were anticipating.
      - 1) There would be no dramatic victories over the Roman Empire.
      - 2) The kingdom would not begin amid visible fanfare and hoopla.
      - 3) There’d be no dancing in streets (*tho’ they tried in triumphant entry*)
    - b. The kingdom would start small—like a tiny seed or a lump of yeast
    - c. But God’s rule and over us would grow and impact our entire lives
  - 3. The kingdom rule of God would take place inside of them (**Luke 17:20-21**)

### **III. Conclusion**

- A. God’s rule, power and kingdom don’t always come dramatically
  - 1. Even those dramatic stories in scripture often revolve around small things
    - a. God used Moses’ rod to deliver His people from bondage (**Exo 4**)
    - b. For Gideon, “*An Army of One*” (or 300) was more than slogan! (**Judg 7**)
    - c. The jawbone of donkey was a tool of liberation for Samson (**Judg 15**)
    - d. God used a sling and stone in David’s hand to defeat a giant (**1 Sam 17**)
    - e. It took a sack lunch and a willing boy to feed a multitude (**Matt 14**)
  - 2. But Moses’ rod and David’s sling aren’t the story here—*it’s about God!*
    - a. God chose to use small things to accomplish his will in great ways.
    - b. Parable of the mustard seed and yeast points us to that same truth
      - 1) That truth would be lived out in the lives of those listening to parable
      - 2) Simple fisherman would take gospel of grace to the whole world!
      - 3) Peasants would see the kingdom; many religious leaders would not

- B. There's this Biblical tradition of following God not knowing **where** or **how**
1. Classic story in that tradition is Abraham's journey of faith (**Heb 11:8-10**)
    - a. Abraham had no idea where he was going or how he would get there
      - 1) Good thing he had no kids; couldn't answer, "Are we there yet?"
      - 2) Do you think maybe Abraham ever asked that question of God?
    - b. All he knew that God was leading him closer and closer to his goal.
    - c. It was like a mustard seed growing or like leaven moving thru dough.
  2. We don't have to understand how God is going to work in our lives
    - a. We don't have to understand exactly how God will get us there
      - 1) Lynn Anderson-- Abraham's faith was "*one foot in front of another*"
      - 2) He kept moving toward God and looking for that city of God
    - b. And all the while God was busy in him, quietly building a kingdom
    - c. And God is working in you building His kingdom, power and domain
- C. How are we going to get from where we are to where God wants us to be?
1. Like Abraham, we have to put one foot in front of the other seeking God
    - a. How will we learn the information we need to learn about God?
    - b. How are we going to be as faithful in prayer as we would like?
    - c. How are we ever going to resist temptation and live faithfully?
  2. Like a mustard seed, the kingdom starts small and grows large
    - a. Like leaven, God's kingdom of works thru our whole being
    - b. If we will move toward God, then God will move within us!
  3. But there is a note of urgency here—notice Jesus' next words (**Luke 13:24**)
 

<sup>24</sup> *"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.*

    - a. The word "*every effort*" or "*strive*" (NASB) is the Greek word ἀγωνίζομαι
    - b. It's the word from which we get "*agony*." Literally- "*strain every nerve*"
  4. We must take this Kingdom Quest of ours very seriously. Are you?