

**It Is Like a Grain of Mustard Seed; Mark 4:30-34**  
0372-0374

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And he said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade with many such parables.

He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples. He explained everything. I wonder if you might imagine with me that we travel back in time somewhere around maybe 1965-70 years, something like that, back to a time in which.

The setting would be Rome, the city of Rome, the most glamorous, gorgeous, largest, powerful city that was on the earth at that time. Capital of the empire of Rome, the most powerful empire. Empire the world had seen to date, an empire that ruled all of the civilized world. The empire. Empire of Rome had no allies.

It didn't need any allies. It only had subjects because it had conquered all of the civilized world. All of the known world. So imagine that we're back in Rome, and imagine the setting is maybe the quarters or, , the meeting room of a man by the name of Tiberius, Augustus, Caesar Tiberius. Augustus Caesar was the emperor of Rome at this time, and he being the emperor of Rome, was the most powerful man in all the planet.

He ruled over the most powerful kingdom the world had seen up until that time. And his every desire was the, , duty of a thousand or more people, servant. That's that. Waited on him for his food, for his clothes. They built his furniture. Every need that he had, every desire that he had was their command.

And this man who rules the most powerful kingdom on the planet, who is weighted on hand in foot, he's here meeting with some of his advisors from different parts of his empire, and they're reporting to him different things and different issues and problems that might be taking place in different corners of his empire.

And then comes this one advisor and comes up with this really disconcerted look on his face, really concerned. And he comes in and he says, almighty Caesar, we have a problem. What is the problem? Well, the problem is that there are some people that are meeting, oh, where are these people meeting? They're meeting in a place called Jerusalem, which is the capital of part of your empire known as Israel.

Oh, don't know much about that. But what are these be? What is, who are these people that are meeting? Are these some sorts of politicians or leaders or, community leaders or mighty warriors or generals of the Army? Who are these people that are meeting? Oh, they're just regular people. Some are fishermen, some are farmers, some are housewives.

They're just regular ordinary people. But they're meeting together. Well, what are they meeting about? Well, old Caesar, they are praying, they're meeting together to pray. And that's a problem. Yes, that's a problem. Well, who are they praying to? Who is this mighty God that they're praying to? Who is this warrior king of a God that they're praying to?

Well, they're praying to a man whom we crucified. Oh, they're praying to someone who we crucified. Was it some sort of rebel, some insurrectionist, some great leader? No, he was the son of a Jewish carpenter. In fact, some say that he was the illegitimate son of a Jewish carpenter. Oh. And we crucified him. And they're praying to him.

Yes. And that's a problem. Yes. That's a big problem. Well, what's going to happen? What are they praying for? Or they're praying for a spirit. The spirit of this man whom we killed to come to them. Well, why are they praying for this? Well, they believe that he is still alive. And this is a problem. Yes, this is a big problem.

So you can see in that just the contrast between this man, Tiberius Caesar, the most powerful man on the planet, at the helm of the most powerful kingdom that the world knew. And this person who comes to him to say there is this small band of ordinary, regular people who are meeting together to pray, and this is something that we should be greatly concerned about.

You can see the contrast between those and especially if you fast forward maybe two centuries and you see that the Caesar, who is now in control of that same empire, about two centuries later, a man by the name of Constantine would openly and publicly worship the same man that this man Tiberius Caesar, in our fictional story there was so concerned about this group of, , or rather unconcerned about this group of people gathering together to pray to him.

So that is a story that illustrates for us something of the parable before us, because the parable before us, this parable of the mustard seed. And the bush that grows from it. We'll just cut to the chase and say that the point of this parable is simple. It's straightforward, it's easy to see. The point of the parable is humble, small, frail beginnings contrasted with great, mighty outcomes.

That's the point of the parable, and Jesus illustrates it once again with yet another agricultural parable, which is his favorite type of parable. He tells parables about seeds and soils and plants and vineyards and crops. It's his favorite subject. But in this parable, we once again have now again, a seed.

We have soil, we have a crop coming up, we have a harvest. But the point of this parable is not to tell us something about the soil of our heart or, even the necessity to pay attention to the soil of our heart, as we've learned before. But the point of this parable is to contrast small beginnings with mighty, grandiose endings.

So with that being said, let's turn to the parable now, and let's just begin looking at this from verse 30. And Jesus said to them, with what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it? So Jesus starts this parable with a rhetorical question, a rhetorical question to his listeners.

And we know the point of a rhetorical question when a speaker asks a rhetorical question. He's not necessarily wanting an answer. He's asking a question to invoke thought, to engage his listeners to, to invite his listeners to engage with D the direction that he or she may be going. The

rhetorical question is Jesus isn't looking for an answer, but he's asking this in order to engage his listeners.

You see, Jesus once again was not telling these parables just as a way of heaping judgment upon those who didn't believe and didn't yield. Jesus genuinely wants to reveal the Father. He genuinely wants to show the Father as best he can. So he is teaching in parables and he's engaging his audience, saying.

What shall we compare the kingdom of God? So notice here the comparison. What shall we compare the kingdom of God? Remember our understanding of parables. What a parable is. A parable once again is a, laying alongside an earthly reality, beside a spiritual reality. We see the earthly reality. We understand the earthly reality.

And a parable—think parallel. It lays alongside the spiritual reality, this earthly reality that we do see. And by comparison there, we understand something about the spiritual reality that we don't see. It's like a a, something that says something like this, like this is that this is like that in this particular way.

And so as we've noticed in the parable so far, that the best way to understand parables is to focus on the one. Clear, straightforward, meaning other details in the parable can often lead us astray. Not always. The, the details of the parables sometimes are important, but the main importance is to stay focused on the main point because the parable is laying alongside a spiritual reality, an earthly reality.

And by nature, the earthly reality cannot explain in depth the spiritual reality that it's related to, but instead it explains one aspect. This is why Jesus' teaching in parables involved so many parables. Many parables will be told in order to to teach the point. So he says, he makes his comparison to us.

What shall we compare the kingdom of God? Notice they're the divine authority of Jesus. Jesus takes upon himself the divine authority to teach us what the kingdom of God is like. That is saying to us that this man has the authority to tell us this is what the kingdom of God is like. To what shall we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it?

Verse 31. Here's the parable. It is like a grain of mustard seed, which when sewn on the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on Earth. Yet when it is sewn, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

And so there you go. The parable of the mustard seed, we all are familiar with that parable, but in the telling of that parable, this has been quite the stumbling block for a great many people. A great number of people have found difficulty with this, particularly Bible scholars, Bible scholars, and there's more than one of them who were at one time what we would call inerrantist.

An inerrantist is just a word that means a person who believes that the Bible is divinely written and therefore without error. And so inerrantist believe that everything in scripture is true. That the Bible is free from errors or mistakes in its original writings. Now, sometimes we find translation issues, things that could have been translated better and different things, but the Bible, as it was written in the original scriptures, is without error.

That's what's called an inerrantist. And many inerrantists—more than one—have found a great deal of problem with this very parable. In fact, more than one biblical scholar who has at one time confessed to be an evangelical Christian and an inerrantist has cited this parable as the parable that caused them to cease believing that the scriptures were without error.

And the whole problem is the deal with the mustard seed. Jesus says plainly in the parable, consider the mustard seed. The mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. Well, the mustard seed, as you may be aware, is not the smallest seeds on smallest seed on all the earth. And so therefore, a lot of people have choked on this parable to say, how could Jesus, the son of God, who supposedly created all the seeds, how could he be wrong about the size of the mustard seed?

Mu, maybe some of us have mustard seeds at home in your cabinet and your spice racking body have mustard seeds at home. So what size are the mustard seeds? That size of a pen head? Yeah. About the size of a, of a pinhead. This is a rather small seed somewhere, rather small seed, maybe like a half the size of a BB maybe.

Something like that. It's a small seed, but it's by far not the smallest seed. So we would say, well, right there in our kitchen, right there in our same spice rack would be seeds that are smaller. Say for example, the poppy seed, which is visibly smaller than the mustard seed. So this shows us, doesn't it, that Jesus really wasn't God in the scriptures really aren't without error.

However, there's a couple things to consider. First of all, let's consider this. Number one, we don't know what species of mustard seed Jesus was talking about. There are numerous species of mustard seeds. Some of them I have seen pictures of, some of their seeds, and some of their seeds are as small as what I would call powder.

Some of them are extraordinarily small. We don't know which species Jesus was talking about, but let's, , set that aside for just a moment and just really at its face value, this whole idea that Jesus is wrong about the size of the mustard seed really just falls apart when we just simply. Refuse to and listen to this carefully, re refuse to hold the words of this parable to a standard of words that's different from the standard of any other way that we use words.

We don't use words like that. We don't use words in such a way that every word from our mouth must be universally true. For example, had Jesus said to his listeners, let me tell you a parable about the kingdom of heaven. Now the kingdom of heaven is like the poppy seed. You don't know what poppy seeds are.

You, you've never heard of a poppy seed, but the kingdom of heaven is like that. How ridiculous the mustard seed was, the smallest garden seed that the people that he was speaking to knew of, and that's the whole point. For Jesus to have said, the kingdom of Heaven is like this tiny, mini, minuscule seed that grows in Asia.

You've never heard of it, but that's what it's like. That would be absurd. Jesus is relating to people in a way that they will understand and is referencing the smallest seed that they know of. Furthermore, the mustard seed was a well-known axiomatic parable. The rabbis used it to describe something that's small and then smaller, and then the smallest would, it would be a common phrase to say it was mustard seed, small.

That was common in the culture, common in Jesus's day. Jesus is using a common saying to describe the smallness of something, so it's utterly ridiculous for someone to say that. Causes me to no longer believe that Jesus could be God, or that the scriptures are free from error. Jesus is using words just like we use words, which is to say, to communicate a meaning in a way that somebody will understand.

If I want to drive from here to the north side of Elkin and I hit a whole lot of red lights, I might say, you know, every single light between here and there was red. I don't mean, and you don't understand me, to mean every single stoplight in the whole town was red. What I mean is they all seem to be red, and that's just the way that we use words and phrases.

Jesus is communicating in a way that they'll understand The smallest seed he says, is the seed of the mustard plant, verse 32. Yet when it is sewn, it grows up and becomes larger than all the notice there. Garden plants. Jesus is not comparing it to a tree. He's not comparing it to a cedar tree or a cedar of Lebanon or something like that.

He's comparing it to the garden plants, and in fact, the mustard, , bush is the largest of the garden plants that would've been native to that area, A garden plant. The mustard seed would have grown to a normal size of about the height of a man. Sometimes they would grow, or, , were told to the height of maybe 10 feet or a little bit more.

So that would clearly make it the largest of garden plants. We all know the size of typical garden plants. Garden plants don't usually grow taller than a person, but a mustard seed can't. So he says, this is the, it's the smallest seed that grows into the largest of the garden plants, and it puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

Shade. So Jesus' point is, The, the difference in size, the transformation that takes place from this tiny seed to this large plant, and is using descriptive phrases to describe the largeness of the bush that it grows into. He describes the, the, , branches that are put out and the birds that nest in the branches and everything.

And so his point here is this transformation that takes place from the seed to the bush. It's much like we might describe a radical transformation. In terms of the caterpillar, caterpillar to a butterfly sort of thing. Jesus is not using a caterpillar to a butterfly, but is using something that his heroes would be well aware of the size of this mustard sea compared to the size of the bush that results from it.

So he says that it grows so large that it's big enough, it puts out these branches and the birds of the air make nest in its shade. So he's referencing here, as we already know, he's talking about the kingdom of God because he says he is the kingdom of God is like, A mustard seed that grows into this big bush, so the Kingdom of God grows large enough, these birds nest in its branches and find shade under its branches.

Some people read that and they find a connection there. To some instances in the Old Testament, when some Old Testament prophets would use the metaphor or the imagery of birds, particular birds, making a nest in a large tree, and that was used to communicate the idea of the Gentiles coming into the people of God.

Ezekiel uses this. Daniel uses this. If you want to look down in your, sermon notes to Ezekiel 17, we see one of the references here, verse 23. On the mountain height of Israel, I God will plant it. That it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar and under it will dwell every kind of bird in the shade of its branches.

Birds of every sort will nest. Happens again in Ezekiel 31. Happens also in, you remember Nene's Dream? We, we studied the first six chapters of Daniel and we talked about Nene's dream. You remember his? His vision of the big tree and the birds that nest in the tree. So oftentimes it's an imagery that's used in the Old Testament to describe the coming in of Gentiles into the people of God.

So some people see a connection there and they see that Jesus is describing this kingdom of God that grows to such a, a degree that even the gentiles now are coming and finding shade and nesting in its branches. And that may be what Jesus was thinking of. However, if it is, it's at best a side point, the main point, the main focus, the main thing that Jesus is trying to say is this transformation between a tiny seed to the largeness of the bush that it grows into.

And so the, the birds come and they, they make these nest it shade. And then verse 33, and with many such parables, he spoke the word to them as we, as we've said before, Jesus, in order to teach with parables, he used many, many parables in sequence. As we've seen even in chapter four here, there's been some five or six parables in a row, depending on how you divide 'em up.

These parables that they come along beside one another and one parable works in conjunction with another parable works in conjunction with another parable. As we reminded ourself in the introduction there, how all these parables work together to help the listener to understand Jesus's spiritual point.

And so Mark says here, with many such parables, Jesus taught with many, many parables probably in his ministry. He told hundreds of parables in such a way that in order to understand Jesus teaching this, this wasn't the kind of thing that you could just sort of drop in. You would, you would see Jesus. With some people gathered around him in the temple courtyard, you drop in and listen for 10 or 15 minutes, catch a couple parables, and then go on your way.

Having thought that you understood what Jesus was saying, it didn't work like that. In order to follow Jesus, you needed to listen to all of his parables, how they all worked together, and how they taught against one another. And so with many such parables, he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.

Once again, there we are given this idea of ability and hearing as you are able to hear it. So the theme of chapter four, as we've seen before, is those who have ears, let them hear. If you have ears to hear, then hear this. That, by the way, is the 10th time in Mark chapter four that we have seen an emphasis on hearing.

So I think that Mark wants us to get the point. Jesus is serious about hearing what he says. So for the 10th time, as they were able to hear it, if you were given the spiritual ability to hear this, as they were able to hear it, they heard it. Verse 34, he did not speak to them without parable a parable, but privately to his own disciples, he explained everything.

So here we see that Jesus is teaching. He didn't take anything from the larger crowds. The larger crowds got all the teaching they wanted, but those who came to Jesus for these further explanations got even more. So we see here. This now finishes up this section of the parables. Let's now return back to the parable itself and spend just a little bit of time in understanding the parable.

The details of the parable are simple enough to see the smallness of the seed, how it's planted, goes into the ground, and then it grows into this large, large, tremendous bush. And that's the whole point that Jesus wants to get across. The kingdom of God is like that. The kingdom of God is such a kingdom that starts in the most small, humble fashion, but then grows into the largest bush imaginable.

So this reminds us of a theme that the scriptures have consistently throughout the entirety of the scriptures, and that's the theme of the small beginnings, the humble beginnings of the Kingdom of God. In your sermon notes, there's a number of references here. We won't go through each of them. You can read them on your own, but just make note of the first one there.

Psalms 118, the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. That's a verse that's repeated numerous times in the New Testament. You can see some other references there as well. There's many other places that the Old Testament just communicates to us this idea of the small, humble, almost frail and appearance.

Subject to failure. It might seem like just a small, humble beginnings. The stone, the builders rejected. That's what God has chosen to have as the chief cornerstone. So we see the biblical narrative is one that teaches us of the smallness of the beginning of the kingdom. But in, , in addition to that, we also see just this overarching narrative that takes place throughout the Old Testament.

And that is the narrative that we find beginning from literally the first chapters of the Old Testament, continuing all the way through the old, through the end of the Old Testament. And that's the narrative of a Messiah that must come through his people. He comes to his people by way of his people, but he comes to his people through his own people.

And those people that he must come through always are on the verge of seeming extinction. Of almost being stamped out at every turn. The Old Testament makes. We're just right on the cusp of the people of God being wiped out. It begins from the very beginning when we have, of course, Adam and Eve, and then the two sons that they have Abel and Kane.

One is the godly line, one is the ungodly line, and what's the first thing that happens? The ungodly line kills the godly line. And so they're right out of the gate. We're faced with this seeming disaster that the godly line of God's people has been murdered by the ungodly line, where then God raises upset.

And then of course we have the flood narrative where there's just one family among all the evil families of the earth that God saves. And then from that, we go to the Abraham story. God promises that his Messiah will come through the child of Abraham and Sarah, and yet they are elderly, far beyond childbearing age.

And then there's the promised Son of Isaac. God comes to the rescue and saves with the promised Son of Isaac. Well then God says to take this promised son. And kill him as a sacrifice. And so over and over there's the, the problem that, well, the Messiah must come through this line, but the line is on the verge of being stamped out.

Then the story of the judges and how every turn, if you read through the book of judges, it almost, almost like every chapter, God's people are on the verge of being stamped out. Or then you come to, well, maybe the narratives of, of David King David, how the Messiah must come from the line of King David.

But then David is being hunted down by Saul and on the, , in danger of being killed. Then there's the whole interaction, the, the battle between David and Goliath, and remember how that was all portrayed for us. David says, far be it for this uncircumcised Philistine to curse the army of the living God.

Who does he think he is? And then David says, tell you what, we'll fight one-on-one and the if you win, we're your slaves. And there you go, right there. If David loses that battle, the people of God are enslaved to the Philistines over and over again. You can hardly turn three or four pages of your Old Testament without coming across this narrative, the storyline that the people of God must be the way that Messiah comes.

Yet the people of God are always on the brink of being stamped out, but God saves them every time. But then we turn to the New Testament and we see that the New Testament picks up this theme and even accelerates this theme because in the New Testament, we see the beginnings of the kingdom of God. Also, to have just such small, humble type beginnings, think with me of, well, you might know the first disciple that Jesus called to follow.

You might know who the first one was, his little Bible tri for you. Andrew. Andrew, and then his brother John. So imagine being Andrew. Imagine, did you get it wrong? Imagine being the first one that's called to follow Jesus, and just the smallness of that. Here's one man and then his brother, and then Peter and his, brother.

And so this small, tiny beginnings from how it begins, and then we see that even throughout the ministry of Jesus, we, we just have this impression that although the crowds are so large that the true followers of Jesus are always so small. Don't you really get that impression? Think of John the Baptizer as he's in prison and you can just hear the discouragement in his voice when he says, send a message and say, are you really the one that we've been waiting for?

Can you just hear the, the almost despair to say, you know, this kingdom of God thing, it just doesn't seem to be taken off. Here I am in prison and it just doesn't, are you really the one or think in Luke chapter 12, when they ask Jesus, are those who will be saved to be few? Can you hear in that question the implication that you know Jesus?

There's really very few of us, or John six when we're told that many who are following him stopped following him. There, you see, there's this paradox, and the paradox is plain and loud and clear in Mark's gospel. And the paradox is this, though Jesus is constantly flocked by mobs of people, the people who truly believe in him, not as a miracle worker, not as a demon caster out, but as Messiah, the people who truly believe in him are so few, so small, just almost on the verge of being no one at all.

And that's the theme that continues throughout. And this is what Jesus is describing in his parable. So in seeing this, let's now think of the applications of the parable. And there's really two applications of this parable. If we rightly understand the parable and rightly apply it, this parable has one application for us that is one of the most challenging applications, and it has another that's one of the most encouraging.

So a very challenging application and a very encouraging one if we understand rightly what the parable is about. So let's look at the first one. Let's look first of all at, in your notes here, it says, Jesus is the mustard seed and we are the mustard seed. So the question would be, of course, well, who is this mustard seed?

Jesus describes this parable of a mustard seed going into the ground. Who is he talking about? What is who? He's talking about going into the ground and going into the ground. This mustard seed. Jesus is of course talking about himself. He is the mustard seed. He is the one that will go into the ground and die, and because he goes into the ground to die.

There will result this enormous kingdom, this enormous bush that comes from that. So Jesus is saying to us, first of all, that he is the mustard seed that must go. And though he be so small and there'll, there'll be so few followers, and the kingdom just seems to be almost nothing at all numerically, or from a human strength standpoint.

Though all that may be true, he is the seed that goes into the ground to die. And the result of that is going to be this bush that even if it be true that the birds represent the gentiles, even the Gentiles come and nest under the shade and the protection of this bush. And so he's saying to us that he is the mustard seed.

But what we see in Jesus' parables, in Jesus sayings, we also see a pattern. And that pattern in many instances goes like this. I'm the first and you are to come after me like me. So we saw that first of all, in the parable of, , well, if we think about the parable of the sower, we saw that Jesus was the sower.

But then we also see that we are to be sowers as well. Jesus was the first. Jesus was the, the primary sower, so to speak, the first. But those who come after him, we too, are also sowers of the seed. We also see it with the lamp. Jesus says the lamp has come into the world. He's talking about himself. In Mark chapter four there, the lamp, he himself has come into the world.

He says in John eight, verse 12, I am the light of the world. But then we also see in places like Matthew five 14 through 16, we also see that Jesus says, you are the light of the world. So Jesus is the light. But if we're in Jesus, we now are the light too. Or we also see it in other things. Like for example, , when Jesus says, follow me and I'll make you to become fishers of men.

Jesus was the first fisher of man. But then he also made others to be the fisher of men too. So we see this pattern, and the pattern is Jesus is the first, but then those who are in Jesus, those who are in Christ, we also become as he is, not in an equal way, but in another way. We are also the lamps and the lights.

We are also the sowers. We are also the fishers of men. And we are also like Jesus, the mustard seed. Look with me in your sermon notes, John chapter 12. Jesus says here, verse 24, truly, truly, I

say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

So we see there how Jesus is making a connection, a relation to the parable of the mustard seed, and so the mustard seed goes into the ground alone, so to speak, but it must go into the ground alone and it must die. If it does that, then it will result in this bountiful harvest. Jesus likewise must go to the cross alone and he must die, and he must go to the tomb alone.

And if he does that, then there will be this bountiful harvest. But also look at how Jesus continues after that. Verse 25, whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am there will my servant be.

Also, if anyone serves me, the father will honor him. So you see the thrust of Jesus's thought there. Jesus is clearly taking this idea of a seed that goes into the ground to die, and from it comes a bountiful harvest. Jesus is clearly taking that and also saying, you too are to go into the ground and die, specifically die to yourself.

Look at what he says in Luke chapter nine. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. So Jesus is the mustard seed, and from the mustard seed comes this kingdom of God. But in another way, we too. Are called to be mustard seeds which go into the ground to die, meaning to die to self.

Last week we talked about the parable of the seeds, and in that parable we talked about how we too, we are the scatterers. Now, last week we talked about scattering the seed and, and the, the takeaway from that was that we are among other things to be profusely seed scatterers. We are to scatter more seed.

But one thing that we didn't talk about is we didn't talk about the difficulty of what's required to scatter that seed, because we don't scatter the seed of the word, just hop skipping along through the fields like Johnny Apples, Appleseed, just throwing the seeds of the word around. When we scatter the seed, we are, as Jesus says in Luke nine, to do that in such a way that denies ourself that dies to ourself.

What does it mean to die to self? What does that mean? We don't live in a culture that puts Christians to death. What does it mean to die to self for the sake of Christ? What is the one thing that every fallen human wants? Above everything? What is the one love of every human heart? Above all else self, all of you, every fallen heart loves yourself more than you love anything else.

That's our natural state and our fallen condition to love ourself more than anything else. And that primarily is the dying that we're called to do.

That's primarily the dying that we're called to do. This, dying to self, this, dying to loving me above everyone else. As Paul will say to the to the Philippians, let each of you not look to only to your own interests but the interest of others. Let each one consider others more significant than yourself.

So this seed scattering thing is not just throwing seeds around. It's doing so in a way that's also dying to self to say, well, for example, you know, it's maybe it's just not like me to go and say

something like that to someone like that. It's just not like me to go and speak words of scripture or words about Jesus.

Well, we're called to die to that. We're called to die to self. It's just not like me to be that forgiving. It's just not like me to not hold a grudge. We're called to die to that, to die to self. And many other examples. The scattering a seed, the seed that goes into the ground to die includes a dying to self.

And that's one of the things that the parable is calling us to Jesus, who is our example mustard seed. The one who literally died but also died. My death for me calls me to join him in that and dying to self. And by that scattering of the seed, that is how this tremendous kingdom bush will come. So that's the first application.

But the second application, which is what I think is really the meat of the parable, which is I think is going to be the, the biggest takeaway for us this morning. The second application comes, well, let's just ask yourself this. Anytime we come to scripture, we should first ask ourselves, how did the original readers, how did they understand this?

How did Mark's readers take this parable? What did this parable mean to Mark's readers? So you remember, Mark's readers were Roman Christians and they were Roman Christians at a time in which persecution was really beginning to ramp up. It would get more intense. It would get more real, but it was at the point of the writing of Mark's gospel at a point at which it was already getting intense.

And so you can imagine this small church there in Rome, this small group of believers, and just how they feel so vulnerable and so insignificant and so in danger. And you can imagine Jesus' parable of the small mustard seed and how the promise is that this seed will result in the grandest bush of all, how that would've been encouraging for a Christian who felt marginalized, who felt in danger, maybe physical danger, actual danger, or maybe danger from social ostracization or, or losing their job or, or being ostracized from their family or whatnot.

You can imagine how encouraging it would've been for them. But I think the danger for us comes in regards to this parable. When we read the parable and we think of the parable, this parable of the, of the seed growing into the bush. We think of ourselves in some sort of triumphal, triumphant sort of way, looking back upon the seed as though we're now the bush.

I think that's the typical way of understanding the parable. That the kingdom of God began so small back in the day when Jesus called Andrew and John and James and Peter to follow him. And then there's this group of 120, and then there's the early church under such persecution. We think that that was the seed.

And look at what the seed has now grown into such a bush is this, which is why, by the way, I started with the little parable illustration that I started with because we resonate with that. We resonate with the idea that back then the kingdom of God was this tiny seed. But then look, 200 years later, the Emperor Constantine was worshiping Jesus.

Look at how it's grown into the bush. And so we tend to look at this parable as though we are now living under the bush, and here is the most important interpretation factor of the parable. We are not the bush. The bush doesn't come until the next age, and that's the understanding of the parable. If you get that, you understand the application of the parable.

The bush is not yet, we're still the seed. The bush comes when the mustard seed comes back. When Jesus returns in his glory, that is when the glorious bush will be seen and be perceived, and that is the culmination of the parable. You see, we so much want to look at the advancing of the kingdom of God through human eyes, and we so much want to see the.

Things that has happened to the church, the growth of the church, the, the influence of the church, all these different things. We want to see those as the advancing of the kingdom of God. But the thing to see, the thing to grasp here is this, that this is a tremendously encouraging parable because this parable reminds us that the kingdom of God in this age is, and listen closely, entirely spiritual.

The kingdom of God in this age is entirely a spiritual kingdom. And any sort of advancement that we might see in the physical realm is not the advancement of the kingdom that Jesus is talking about In the parable. In the parable, he's talking about the spiritual advancement of a spiritual kingdom.

Remember the purpose of parables, the parable is to illumine or to show to us something about a spiritual kingdom that we don't see. We can see the physical, we can't see the spiritual, but this is what the parable does. It shows us something about the spiritual reality that we don't see. So in your notes here, I've got a few points for us to see that'll help us, I think, understand the parable properly.

Number one, the advancement of the kingdom in this age can only be seen by faith. The advancement of the kingdom of God in this age can only be perceived with eyes of faith. Look with me at Hebrews chapter two, verses eight and nine. Speaking here, the writer says, putting everything in subjection under his feet.

Now verse , now the next verse. Now putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. But at present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death.

So you see there the theme there. The theme is that Jesus sits in rulership of all things, but that's not seen, that's not perceived by most. It's only perceived by those who have eyes of faith. We see Jesus. We see that he's the ruler. We see that he's the king, but most don't see that the advancing of the kingdom of God can only be seen with eyes of faith.

Look , at , one Corinthians chapter 16 in verse nine, for a wide door of effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries. So Paul says, you know what? You know what I see with my eyes? What I see with my eyes is the same thing everybody else sees with their eyes, adversaries. But I see something else.

I see an open door of opportunity. Or think of two King six and verse 17. Remember, remember the story where Elisha's servant is fearful because the army that's coming against him and Elisha praise open his eyes, Lord, that he may see that there are more with us than against us. And so the Lord opens his eyes.

So the, the advancing of the kingdom of God can only be perceived by eyes of faith because it is a kingdom of faith. It is a spiritual kingdom. So we all probably, I would hope all of us have read at least one or more missionary biographies or some sort of biography of some church leader, some great well-known preacher or pastor or some missionary.

Do you know a common theme that is in every single biography of every Christian I've ever read? A common theme in every single one is a time of deep. Dark discouragement over no visible results. I cannot think of a single biography of a missionary or a minister of God's word or anything that did not have the element of a significant time of discouragement that came from a long extended period in which no results were being seen.

And what that does is emphasize for us that this is normal. This is by God's design. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom in this age, and the advancing of that kingdom is not something that's seen with the eyes, is not something that's measured on paper. It's not something that's counted. It's not something that's measured by baptisms or church growth or the number of churches or anything.

It's a spiritual kingdom that is only perceived with spiritual eyes. Number two, those who do those who mistake the advancing of the kingdom of God. To be a physical kingdom. Those who make that mistake, scripture shows us very plainly that they stand in need of correction. When we make the common mistake of assessing the progress of the kingdom of God in physical terms, scripture shows us that that stands in need of correction.

Think of the disciples in Acts chapter one. Of course, Jesus now is the risen Christ and he's just about to ascend to heaven, and they ask him that fateful question, Jesus, is it at this time that you will restore? What is it? This physical measurement, this physical thing of the kingdom being restored to Israel, Jesus rebukes him.

That's not for you to know. That'll happen when I return, and that's not for you to know. Or look with me at Psalm 20 verse seven. Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God, or even more plainly in Isaiah 31, wo to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on H horses who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen, because they are very strong, but do not look to the holy one of Israel or consult the Lord.

Those who make the mistake of assessing the advancing of the kingdom of God in anything physical. The message scripture has for us is stop because the kingdom of God in this age can only be measured in spiritual terms. In terms of faith. We are so prone to want to assess the kingdom of God in human terms.

Number of churches, number of people attending churches, you, we all hear those Barna research polls that say, church attendance is down, or church attendance is up among this group, or down among that group. Or we want to talk about the number of baptisms, or we want to talk about the number of missionaries on foreign missionary fields.

Or we want to talk about the number of Bibles that have been printed. Or we want to talk about the number of, of Christian events taking place. Or we want to talk about things like social media exposure, social media, ex success, likes, downloads, listens, all those sorts of things. Or we want to talk about things like successful boycotts of target or successful boycotts of Bud Light.

Okay. Or maybe we want to talk about some sort of law that got signed into law, this protecting female high school athletes or something. And we want to take all those things and we want to look at those things and we want to say, that's the kingdom of God. It is not the kingdom of God. Now, God in his mercy may often bless us, and he may often be merciful to us by restraining evil, but that's not to be confused with the advancing of the kingdom of God.

Because when you make that mistake of, of equating those things, whatever they may be, anything in the physical realm, when you make the mistake of equating that with the kingdom of God, do you know what? I'm sure that we all kind of know the score, don't we? We all kind of know that we're outnumbered. And the disparity in numbers isn't getting closer.

It's getting further apart, and there may be some sort of moral victory over here, or there may be some sort of ministry over there that's doing good work and making advances. But you know what? If you make that the measurement of the kingdom of God, then you are setting yourself up for extreme spiritual disappointment, because God never promises the physical advancement of anything.

Not in this age, just like we talked about not too long ago, the promises of God, how the promises of God in this life are all spiritual. All the promises of God are ours in Christ. Ephesians one, three, and four, but all those promises in this life are spiritual. The physical promises start at the resurrection in the same way the physical kingdom of God starts at his return.

Not now. And so discouragement awaits those who confuse anything physical, any advancing of the gospel, any number of converts, any number of church attenders, any number of churches, any, any, anything with the kingdom of God. To confuse that with the kingdom of God is to misunderstand the kingdom of God in this age and to set yourself up for great spiritual disappointment.

Because you know what? This age will continue along the same path that it's been continuing on now for millennia, which is the path of increasing evil, increasing blasphemy against God, folks, it's not going to get better. It's not going to get any better. It's going to get far, far worse. And if any tiny corner of the kingdom of God in your mind is the restraining of that, then you better hold onto your seat.

Because you're more than likely to see all of that restraining, being let loose. The kingdom of God in this age is a spiritual kingdom, and we are not yet at the bush. If those who are really impressed by these show-stopping physical things, big crowds, large churches, full parking lots for, , churches on Sunday morning, if those kind of things impress you, then the kingdom of God is not very impressive for you.

Not in this age. So that's number two. Those who mistake the advancing of the kingdom of God and to be in physical terms, they stand in need of correction. Number three, God declares that his power is manifested in weakness and he's not changed. That's what he said to Paul. Remember of two Corinthians 12 verse nine, my grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in weakness. If God's power was made perfect for Paul in physical weakness, why would he have changed? Why would suddenly in, , 2023, would God now say, oh, my power is now manifested in physical strength. My power is now manifested in big churches. My power is now manifested in a whole lot of people going on to, to whatever ministry's website and listening and watching videos.

That's how my power has now manifested. No, he's the same God. He's the same God who manifested his power in Paul through great weakness and frailty and vulnerability. He manifested his power through Paul in that way. He manifests his power in the church today the same way. In fact, that's the whole theme of second Corinthians, the theme of second Corinthians.

Is, well, I'll put it in a nutshell. Paul shows or Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians and say, Hey, you guys remember when I came, I didn't come with a whole bunch of eloquent words. I didn't come as this powerful speaker. I came in weakness. Those false apostles, they came in power, not me. That's kind of the theme.

And so the same God who says to Paul, that's how my power is shown through human frailty and weakness. He's the same God today. So you should train your heart, and this is hard to do. Nobody in the room understands how hard this is to do more than me. But you should train your heart to look around at such a small group of devoted people and not see weakness, but see strength that is hard to do, that is hard to do because we are physical creatures.

We live in a physical world and everything else in our life, we measure by physical measurements. But we must train our soul to stop measuring the kingdom of God by any physical measurements, but instead to look around and see apparent weakness as strength. The strength of God. The power of God is not measured in big, large, full church gatherings.

The power of God is not measured in any human measurement. It's measured in spiritual measurements. And God tells us in his word that how he likes to manifest his power is through human frailty, human smallness, human dependency, human need, and human witness weakness. So that's number three. God declares that his power is manifested in weakness.

And he's never changed that. Now, number four, the church has never received the fullness of the promises of God in this life. The church has never received the fullness. God's people have never received the fullness, the entirety of God's promises in this life. We have the fullness of all of his spiritual promises, but there are a great many more promises that none of God's people have ever received in this life.

Look with me at Hebrews chapter 10, beginning from verse 38, and now crossing over that chapter division into chapter one. Look how the two connect together. But my righteous one, but my righteous one, I'm sorry. My righteous ones shall live by faith and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things, not same. The kingdom of God in this age is a kingdom that is not seen and the people of God, the nature of faith, the, the essence of faith necessarily includes a belief that what is to come after this life is far better than what we've received in this life.

That that is a indispensable aspect of faith. Biblical faith requires that you believe that what is to come after this life is necessarily far greater than what you've experienced in this life. But that thing that is coming after this life is as the writer says something that's hoped for that's not seen.

The conviction of that which you have not seen. Look at what he says a few verses later. Speaking of these heroes of the faith, so to speak, really there's one hero of the faith. And that's Jesus, right? But in Hebrews chapter 11 is talking about all these humans who were followers of Christ believers in Christ, and how all of them live their lives by faith.

Here's how he summarizes it. These all died in faith not having received things promised. Instead, they have seen them and greeted them from afar and have acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak, thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. You see there biblical faith requires that we believe that what is coming after this life is far greater than what is in this life.

That is an important essence of biblical faith. The church has never received the fullness of God's promise in this life, and we won't until the next one. Now lastly, number five, the supernatural growth of the kingdom will be fully realized on the day that this age comes to an end. That's when the bush will be seen.

That's when the mustard tree will be seen. When this life comes to an end and not before. Look at how the Bible describes that day. Look at how it describes the extent of that bush that we will see. Philippians two, we, we read this earlier at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess.

And those aren't just the, the knees and the tongues that love him, their every knee that's ever been created, every human tongue that's ever been created will confess, will kneel before him and confess he is lured to the glory of God the father. Look at Isaiah chapter nine and verse seven, and just imagine with me the expanse of this bush, the expanse of this kingdom, of the increase of his government and of peace.

There will be no end. The increase of the bush, the increase of the kingdom will never end. Now, that doesn't mean that for eternity there will be people being born and souls added to the kingdom. What that means is for eternity, we will increasingly see and understand what Christ has done for us and increasingly glorify him more and more.

There will be no end to the expanse of that kingdom on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness. From this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Now look at Isaiah 49, verse six. He says, it is too light a thing that you, meaning Jesus.

You should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserve of Israel. I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. So the kingdom from Isaiah chapter nine, verse seven, the Kingdom knows no limit in time. From Isaiah 49, verse six, the Kingdom knows no limit in space to the ends of the earth.

That's an expression that's, that means there's no end to it. The expanse will not have a border, it won't reach the end of itself. Look at Revelation five, verses nine through 12, and they sang a new song saying, worthy of you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you or slain. And by your blood, you ransom people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You see that from every language and tribe and nation. Every people, every people will be part of this great bush. And you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God and they shall reign on

the earth. Then I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels, numbering, myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with the loud voice worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might, and honor and glory and blessing.

Now, we don't know this expression, myriads and myriads is, is a Greek way of saying without number that, that the number of creatures of beings who are worshiping the lamb is without number. We don't know. , brother and I were talking over breakfast about how many souls will be in the kingdom of God. We don't know.

Millions. Think of all the souls from righteous able. To the very last soul, the very last chosen one of God to be born. Think of all those hundreds of millions. What's the biggest crowd you've ever seen? For me, I think maybe the biggest crowd I've ever seen. Maybe football game at the Old Mile High Stadium in Denver.

60,000 people.

And I remember looking out at just the sea of humanity, the, the faceless, seemingly endless sea of people. 60, 70,000. What will it be like to see hundreds of millions and not just people, hundreds of millions? Wearing glowing robes of righteousness so white that they illumine all sinless, all without sin, all of them perfectly loving every other being, and all of them perfectly loving Christ, all of them having as the greatest, strongest desire of their heart to glory and honor Christ for eternity.

What will that be like? What will that bush be like? That is the end of the parable. We are still in the seed and we don't see this kingdom, at least not with physical eyes, but there's coming a day when the sight of that kingdom will be utterly overwhelming to see what. Christ has brought from one seed that went into the ground and died.