

The Parable Of The Mustard Seed

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[0 : 00] Let us worship God together by singing to his praise in Psalm 100.

Psalm 100 and the first version of the Psalm, All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice, and serve with mirth his praise forth tell.

Come ye before him and rejoice. Know that the Lord is God indeed. Without our aid he did us make. We at his flock he doth us feed, and for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise, approach with joy his courts unto. Praise Lord and bless his name always, for it is seemly so to do.

For why the Lord our God is good, his mercy is forever sure, his truth at all times firmly stood, and shall from age to age endure.

[0 : 57] The whole Psalm to God's praise, all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. And the first verse, all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

Come ye before him and rejoice.

Come ye before him and rejoice. O enter then his gates with praise, approach with joy his courts unto.

For why the Lord our God is good, his mercy is forever sure, his truth at all times firmly stood, and shall from age to age endure.

Let us now call upon the name of God in prayer.

[3 : 46] Gracious and ever blessed God, we come to present ourselves today in the presence of our most High God and King. We do so thankful for the opportunity to gather, remembering that this has been taken from us so very recently, that there were days when we were unable to gather as we wished to gather, and days when we were made to through the value and treasure, the fellowship of the saints, and the public worship of our God.

And so as we come and seek to draw near to our God today, help us to do so full of faith, full of thankfulness, and full of praise for the most High God.

We come confessing our sin, confessing that we are a people who come short, a people who stumble and who fall, people who are guilty, before a God who is holy and just.

That is by nature when we come into this world. But we do give thanks that there is BAM and GYTHYAT, that there is salvation for all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we are called to do so today, whoever we are, whatever we have done, to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so to be saved, and give us grace so to do.

We give thanks for the day of opportunity, that we are yet on mercy's ground, and in a day of grace, and that the Gospel still says to us, seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.

[5 : 27] Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the righteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

And we give thanks for the abundance of pardon, that there is in Jesus Christ, that where our sins have multiplied against thee, that thy grace is multiplied towards us.

We give thanks for the unbreakable covenant of grace, that the God who cannot lie has made promises to his people, and we pray that we might rest in these exceeding great and precious promises today, and that we would gain assurance from them, and hope, and confidence as we seek to live the Christian life, and to run the race with patience, looking unto Jesus, who, though we have not seen yet we love, and though now we see him not yet believing, we are able to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

We pray then for grace today, to worship with all of our hearts, for all that has been done for us, for all that is promised to us, for all that is laid before us today on the Gospel table.

Enable us to eat from the fatness of thy house, and to drink from the rivers of thy pleasure. Grant that thy word would be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path, that it might challenge us, that it might encourage us, that it might comfort us.

[7 : 09] We do give thanks that there is comfort in thy word, for everyone who will come to it, that here the Father of mercy, and the God of all comfort speaks.

Give us ears to hear, give us eyes to see, give us hearts to perceive, and grant that the Holy Spirit would apply the word to us, for it is the Spirit that quickens, the flesh that profits nothing.

Grant that the Holy Word would not be a dead letter to us, but that it would come alive in the pulpit and in the pew, in our experiences, we seek to hear it, and to apply it to our own situation.

We do pray Lord for the sake and for the suffering, and we pray for those who are cast down in their minds, and those who are struggling in difficult times.

Lord comfort them where they are. We know that this world is a veil of tears, and we are continually reminded that here we have no continuing city, but that we are called to look for that city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

[8 : 18] We are called to desire that heavenly country, the country which is better, the country which endures, the country where there shall be no sighing, nor sorrows, nor sin, nor death.

For there all things shall be made new, and the curse shall be reversed, and there the river of the water of life will flow freely, with the tree of life on its banks, the leaves were offered for the healing of the nations.

We give thanks that we are able to come to the Lord Jesus Christ today, who is our tree of life, and in him that we can find healing, in him that we can find life, that is more abundant.

O help us then, to make our own calling and election sure, to make sure that we are children of God, by examining ourselves, but especially by looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our salvation, who is our hope, who is our all and our in all, to him then be all the glory and the honour and the praise.

We pray for this congregation here in Cardaway as they prepare for an induction in their experience, be gracious to them, help them in their preparations, and bless Mr Davis and his family as they prepare to begin ministry here, and be gracious to him and give them an action from on high, and power from the Holy Spirit, so that what he declares from this pulpit it might be blessed, and that it might be used to the saving of souls and to the building up of saints.

[10 : 06] O we pray then for the community too, for thy people here unite them together in bands of love, and we pray for those who are outside of Christ.

We ask Lord that they would move in their midst and bring them to a knowledge of the truth, bring them into the courts of thy house, that they might hear the unsearchable riches of Christ declared, and that they might be drawn with their assistable grace, and with an effectual call, and that these things might be used to the saving of their souls.

Bless out, island and out nation, remember our leaders, our Queen and Royal Family, our Prime Minister and First Minister and all who serve us in Westminster and Holyrood, and in our own council here, as well as in Stornoway, be gracious to them, give them wisdom, help them to remember that the powers that be are ordained of God, and are therefore accountable to God.

Bless out ministers too, and our spiritual leadership throughout the country, and grant the Lord that we might see days of the man of thy right hand, days of power, when in wrath thou shalt remember mercy, and revive thy work in the midst of the year.

Go before us now and continue with those blessed thy word as we read it, and meditate upon it, and sing it, and forgive us graciously for sin, for Christ's sake amen.

[11 : 36] We are going to read God's word now as we find it in the Gospel according to Matthew, and reading from chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13 and reading from the beginning. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables saying, a sower went out to sow, and as he sowed some seeds fell up along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose they were scorched, and since they had no root they withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.

He who has ears let him hear. Then the disciples came and said to him, why do you speak to them in parables? Then he answered them, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given, for to the one who has more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not even what he has will be taken away.

[13 : 11] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Indeed in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, you will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear. Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Here then the parable of the sower, when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root on himself but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

[14 : 31] As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, he indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundred fold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

He put another parable before them, saying, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed seeds among the wheat and went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also, and the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

How then did you sow weeds? He said to them, an enemy has done this. Sow the servant and said to him, then do you want us to go and gather them?

[15 : 32] But he said, no, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them, let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

He put another parable before them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it is grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

He told him another parable, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and heard in three measures of flour till it was all leavened.

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables. Indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet.

I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. Amen. We pray that the Lord would bless his own word to us and to his name be all the praise and all the glory.

[16 : 51] We can take out a text today from verses 31 and 32, but let me just read maybe the second half of verse 31.

We will read that the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

The beginning of this chapter, Matthew chapter 13, it marks a different method of teaching in the ministry of Jesus.

Up until now he's spoken relatively plainly to the people. He's spoken in words and in language that they can understand. They've had the truth set before them quite plainly.

He's preached to them, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He's preached about his own role as the Messiah, as the King of kings, as the Lord of lords, as the Savior.

[17 : 58] In the previous chapter we've seen that he has been rejected by the Jews. There's a small band of followers who believe in him and who hold to what he's saying, but generally if you read through chapter 12, which is a context in which we have to read chapter 13, he is being rejected by the Pharisees, by the scribes and by the bulk of the Jews themselves.

And their people, of course, who are very much influenced by their own leadership. And so he comes to chapter 13 and he begins to teach in parables.

And the disciples ask him, why are you teaching in parables? We think of parables and you've heard perhaps the description of a parable before. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

And that is true. So we think, well, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So what Jesus is doing in teaching the parables is he's making things simple for people. He's putting things across in a way that they'll understand them.

He's using pictorial language. He's using metaphors, just almost like you would teach children. And that's what we think. Jesus is making it easy for the people. But actually he tells us that what he's doing is actually the exact opposite.

[19 : 15] He's teaching in parables in order to make it difficult for the people to hear. That is difficult for the people who don't want to hear. You'll notice that time and time again, the disciples, who are the ones who you would think would know what Jesus was on about, they have to come to him and they have to say to him, declare unto us this parable.

Teach us what it was that you were saying in this parable because we don't understand what you were saying. The parable of the sword, we don't know what you were on about. Tell us what it was that you were saying.

And so Jesus tells him, Jesus teaches him. But the Pharisees and the bulk of the Jews, they don't do this. They don't ask. They don't want to know.

So they don't understand. I'm sure they remembered the story about the sword or about the wheat and the tares. I'm sure they took the story away with them. Perhaps some of you here, you take away the stories with you when you sit in church, but you don't really grasp the deeper meaning of what these stories were alluding to.

And that was the case with the Pharisees and not just the Pharisees, but the bulk of the Jews themselves. So Jesus tells them here in verse 13, this is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear nor do they understand.

[20 : 36] I teach them so that they won't see, so they won't hear, so they won't understand. And what you have is he's teaching in parables as a judgment upon the people. It's a judgment to those who don't want to know because they're not going to ask.

And it's a blessing to those who do want to know, who do want to understand because they're going to ask and then because of the parables, their understanding is going to be opened.

Now what I want us to consider, and it's important that we consider it in that context, today is the parable of the mustard seed. And the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven are closely related, and so you might take them both together.

But I just want to look at the mustard seed today. Both of these parables are saying that the kingdom of heaven will have a small insignificant beginning, but it will have a great significant end and growth.

But the parables aren't the same. They're both saying that, but they're saying it in different ways. Because the parable of the mustard seed is saying that this, it's speaking about this growth in an extensive outward visible kind of way.

[21 : 45] But as the parable of the leaven is speaking about an intensive growth, an inward growth, an invisible growth, and I'm not really, I'll maybe make a small reference to that later on, but I'm not going to go into it at the moment.

But in considering the parable of the mustard seed, what we have to do first of all is to explain the picture itself, to explain the parable and what it is exactly that Jesus is saying, to gather the facts as it were.

Well, first of all, he's saying that this is a picture of the kingdom of heaven. This is a picture of, you could say it's not, I suppose, exactly synonymous, but a picture of the church.

There is a difference between the kingdom of heaven and the church, depending on how you look at it. But in the way that it's used here, it is really speaking about those who own the kingship of Christ, those who own him as Lord and Savior.

This is a picture of them. They are like a mustard seed. My kingdom, of which I am King Jesus says, is like a mustard seed, a mustard seed which will grow and become like a tree.

[22 : 54] Now the mustard plant isn't a tree. It's really a shrub or a bush. Technically, it's a head. It's a garden plant.

It's the kind of thing that each Jew, each Palestinian in that area would have had growing in their back garden and they would have used it. They would have used its leaves.

They would have used the seeds. They would have put it in food and so on. Now generally, they were quite small. They may have grown to about six feet, which was big for a herb.

But often, depending on where they were and depending on the conditions, they could grow a lot larger than that. They could grow almost to be like the size of a tree so that birds would come and nest in its branches.

They could grow to about 12 or 15 feet. There's a story which many of the commentators tell about a man. I think he might have been in South America, but it might have been in this area as well, who saw a soldier on a horse, sitting on a big horse and he saw him ride under the branches of a mustard plant.

[24 : 04] So that shows you that although it's technically not a tree, it grew to be like a tree. It was a great plant. So this is descriptive of the kingdom of heaven.

This is what it's going to be like. But why a mustard seed? Why a mustard plant? I mean, it only grows to be about 12 feet or 15 feet, at its most.

There are far bigger trees. In fact, Ezekiel, he describes, uses a similar metaphor of the kingdom of God, but he speaks of a cedar tree, which would grow to be upwards of 100 feet.

So why doesn't Jesus speak of a cedar? If he wanted to speak of a large tree, he could have used a cedar, or even in terms of ratio between the seed size and the plant size of the mustard plant.

I haven't calculated it, but I think if you were going to take an acorn and to compare it to the size of a nook tree, I think the ratio there might actually be larger.

[25 : 04] That's maybe something for the boys and girls who are good at maths to calculate. The thing is, Jesus could have used another picture. He could have used another plant.

You might even say, and I say this speaking with reverence, that he could have used, looking at it that way, a bigger example. But he doesn't.

He uses the mustard seed. Why? Well, a number of commentators will make reference to the flavour of the mustard seed. You know that yourselves. I'm sure boys and girls, some of you don't like mustard because it's too hot.

And the seeds have that sort of tang, that spiciness to them. And there is a story about a Persian king sending Alexander the Great, who was his enemy, a bag of mustard seed, to say, well, this is what my army is like.

Not only are they numerous, but they are powerful. And people say, well, that's what the kingdom of heaven is like. It starts small, but it is powerful and has a kick as it were.

[26 : 08] But whether that is through an autumn or an entire day, sure. But certainly it's not the main point. The main point is that as small as a mustard seed was a proverbial saying.

If you wanted to describe something that was tiny, that's what you would say. It's just a metaphor, like a common metaphor, we have plenty of them ourselves.

You can think of them. But this is what they said. When something was tiny, they would say it is as small as a mustard seed. So Jesus at one point says that if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, then you can move mountains.

And what he was saying is basically, even if you've got a wee tiny bit of faith, it's amazing what you can do. It's amazing what God can do through your faith. He was just speaking in language that they used themselves.

I read somewhere that in the Arab world, even today, they still use this saying. It's common among them. Well, mustard plants are common in the Arab world. So they say this regularly today as small as a mustard seed.

[27 : 09] So Jesus is here using a well-known saying to describe the kingdom of heaven, and especially to describe the growth of that kingdom. Now, I'm not going to give this much time, but some nitpick.

And they say, well, it says that it's the least of all seeds, the smallest of all seeds. Well, it's not. It's tiny, but there are seeds that are smaller. I think the poppy seed is smaller.

And I think another fact for the boys and girls, I don't know if I was supposed to do a children's talk for you, but if I was, I'm sorry, I forgot. But the smallest seed in the world is, I think, an orchid, an orchid seed.

Perhaps some of you have orchids in your house. I know we had one in our mass for a wee while. An orchid seed is apparently the smallest. And in many cases, the smaller the seed, the more difficult it is to grow.

But the fact is that this was the smallest seed that the Jews would have used in their own day, the smallest seed that they would have used.

[28 : 11] And they would have all used it. They would all have had their back gardens with their different herbs. And this was the smallest. But it's also the case that this was the smallest seed at the time.

It wasn't just a saying, a smallest and mustard seed, but at the time it was the smallest one known to them. In all of the crops that they would have planted, the mustard seed was the smallest herbal seed.

And actually, it still is just about today. I think the only herbal seed, which is smaller than a mustard seed, is tobacco. And tobacco wasn't commonly planted until, I think, the 16th century.

I mean, it was going back maybe 2,000 years, but it wasn't commonly until the 16th century. And that was mostly in the Americas. So this was the smallest seed that they would have known, that they would have used, that was used in this area in terms of heads.

So that's just an aside. The fact is there's no need to complicate it. What Jesus is saying here is very simple, that the kingdom of heaven was going to start very small, and it's going to grow to be very large.

[29 : 16] As he says elsewhere, the kingdom of God comes not with observation, not so that you can see it and say, well, that's going to be something that's going to grow. You hear people talking about new companies sometimes, and investors, and they say, keep your eye on Tesla or keep your eye on some other company, maybe back in the day it would be Microsoft or Dell or whatever it might have been, or Google, because it's going to grow.

But you wouldn't say that about the kingdom of God, because it was so small, or it appeared to be so insignificant. And that's what I want us to consider initially, small beginnings, small beginnings.

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, and a man took and sowed in his field, it is the smallest of all seeds. Now, I want us to try and understand this in the context of the expectations of the disciples.

Now, they were different to the rest of the Jews in that they believed, they believed that Jesus was the Christ, they believed that the Messiah had come. And the whole of the Old Testament dispensation, it was going to culminate in this, in the coming of the Messiah.

This is what the people were waiting for. Well, it was certainly what the people were supposed to be waiting for, the coming of the Son of Man, the Son of David, the coming of the King. Now, the difference with the disciples is that they believed that he was here, that Jesus was him.

[30 : 42] He was a Messiah, he was the King of the kingdom of God. And so they knew that, as Jews, they knew the Old Testament scriptures, they knew what was written about this Messiah.

They'd been taught in the synagogue about this King that was going to come, that the government was going to be upon his shoulder. And of the increase of his government and peace, there would be no end, that he would sit upon the throne of David and of his kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth and even forever.

At his birth, the angel had said concerning Jesus that the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom.

There shall be no end. And they're thinking, well, he's here. This is him. He's come. And just as the Jews expected the Messiah to reign in Jerusalem when he came, stayed away, so did the disciples.

That's what they expected. They were under Roman tyranny. It was humiliating for them, knowing the Old Testament history and the glory of the Davidic kingdom that was free from all tyranny and from all external powers.

[32 : 05] It was humiliating for them to think that here we are paying taxes to the Romans. But when the Messiah comes, he's going to sort that out. He's going to trample the enemies under his feet.

And now he's come. And that's what they expect. And it'll help you in your understanding of the disciples, I think. If you always bear this in mind, they mistook Jesus's first coming with the second coming.

So they read their Old Testament. They read everything about the Messiah when he came. And they kind of missed out the chapters, like I say, of 53 and the servant songs and the places where you read about the death and the suffering and the wounds of the servant of the Messiah.

They kind of missed out that, which is speaking about the first coming. And they skip forward to the second coming. The places where you read about the coming of the King and of his dominion and of his kingdom and of his power and of the fact that he was a Jew, all of his enemies.

That's what they skip to. And that's what they expected when Jesus came, first of all. And arguably it looked likely. Things were moving in Palestine in these days. You think about the ministry of John the Baptist.

[33 : 15] And he came and he came preaching in a different way. He came preaching repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. And people came out into the wilderness to hear him. And they repented on mass or they certainly appeared to.

And he said, and this looked amazing to the people. They'd never seen anything like this. It was like one of the Old Testament prophets of old. And yet this amazing man, John the Baptist was saying, one is coming after me, who's preferred before me.

He was but preparing the way for another man, one who was mightier than him. One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. One who would judge his enemies.

Let me just say we think of judging enemies and it's a kind of an archaic, almost a non-PC thing to say. We live in very different days. We live in sterile days, I suppose in that sense.

But it is different when you're living under tyranny as these people were. And there are people today in different parts of the world.

[34 : 20] You may be in contact with them in Africa and in Asia and they can enter into this. The desire for enemies to be judged and the persecutors of Christians.

Yes, to be saved, but also just for the Lord to deal with them. We struggle to enter into that because we're so comfortable in our Christianity. But if we weren't, we would understand it more.

We could enter into it more and the disciples certainly could. But what excitement for them then as they awaited the one who was greater than John the Baptist?

And you know they weren't disappointed. Already on anyway. When Jesus burst on the scene and he came with the same message, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand and the people surrounded him and they came to hear him and they came again en masse to follow him and to wait on his every word and to see his miracles and they were seeing people changed and they were seeing people healed and they were seeing demons being cast out.

And they were seeing a measure of the Old Testament glory that they were hoping for. So that when the servants of the disciples of John the Baptist came to see Jesus, he could send them away saying, you tell John that the blind received that sight.

[35 : 35] At the lame walk, the leper, the leper's are cleansed and the death here, the dead are raised up and the poor of the gospel preached to them. It was all happening.

Everything that was expected. So you can understand the disciples' expectations on their own reading of the Old Testament and what was happening. You can understand that they were becoming maybe a bit impatient with perhaps the pace of things.

Yes, they loved to hear the teaching. Yes they loved to see the miracles. They were rejoicing to see the crowds coming but they wanted it to happen. They wanted the coronation to happen.

They wanted the kingdom to be restored to Israel. They wanted to see Jesus enthroned in Jerusalem and then at either side. But that's what they wanted.

And yet after a while it becomes evident to them that Jesus isn't looking for that. In fact, he seems to have induced something that is exactly opposite to that.

[36 : 37] So that when Christ makes the great declaration as to who Jesus is, who do you say that I am? Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter says.

He makes this great declaration. Thou art the Christ, the King, the Messiah, the one who was to come. What does Jesus say after that? He says to them, yes Peter, you're right.

But you know the Son of Man must suffer many things. And the Son of Man must be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and of the scribes and be killed.

And after three days rise again. Peter doesn't hear this. He doesn't want to hear this. Be killed, suffer, be rejected. The King of Kings, how? How can that be?

And then there's another time when the people try to take him by force and make him a king. What does Jesus do? He departs into the mountains to get away from them because that's not why he is here.

[37 : 34] That's not the way things are going to work. And then you remember his triumphant entry into Jerusalem a week before his crucifixion. And they lay palm branches on the road and he's sitting on a coat and they're shouting Hosanna, Hosanna.

The King is here and the Greeks come. The Gentiles are coming, which is another thing that was promised in the Old Testament scripture and the Greeks want to worship him and they say, we would see Jesus.

And the disciples must have been thinking, well, it's here. The time has come. This is how making his way up to Jerusalem, not to be killed, not to suffer, but to be enthroned. And what does Jesus say to them?

Accept a corn of wheat, fall into the ground and die. It abides alone. But if a die brings forth much fruit, it's a different idea.

He has a mustard seed idea of the kingdom of heaven. And then after the resurrection, when hope had perhaps been revived in the disciples, they said to Jesus, Lord, whatever this time restore again the kingdom to Israel.

[38 : 49] They say, well, surely now, okay, you've died. You've been on the cross. You've done what you said you're going to do. And now you're here again. It's a time now for you to sit upon the throne and Jesus leaves them gazing up into heaven.

He gives them instructions. He tells them that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon them, that they're going to do remarkable things, that they're going to preach not just here in Judea, but throughout the coast and throughout the whole world.

And so they leave, as opposed to that glimmer of hope, that something is going to happen, that it's not come to an end. And so they retire to an upper room with 120 like-minded people.

And at this point, they could sit in that upper room and they could say, well, it's been a remarkable three years. It's been a roller coaster. But what's really happened?

And what's come of it? Very little. It was a ministry which didn't begin till Jesus was 30 and only lasted for around three years. It took place among small towns, not the great cities of this world, not your Rome and your Athens and your Babylon.

[40 : 01] But yes, a wee bit in Jerusalem, but mostly in the towns round about. Yes, there were a few converts, not many. There were a few who. And yes, there were 12 disciples and maybe a hundred or so others who were faithful.

Some of them weren't faithful. And then after three years, he died. He was condemned as a criminal. He was crucified as a thief.

And he died and he didn't even make any attempt to save himself. And neither did his disciples make any attempt to save him. And so looking at the fabric of society and Judaism, there was no real change, really, in the fabric of society either.

Nothing significant. There had been no coronation in Jerusalem. There had been no enthronement, no destruction of the enemies. The thing you could say from one perspective had ended in failure.

Church was the seat of the kingdom of heaven. And if it wasn't for the resurrection and if it wasn't for what Jesus had taught them after the resurrection and the instructions had he given them just before he ascended to heaven, they might have just dismissed the whole thing.

[41 : 06] And I said, did for a while go back to the fishing, go back to the fields. But no, they don't dismiss it and they go to the upper room and they pray together and they wait and they recall all the things that have been done over these years.

And you wonder if that time, as they talked among themselves and as they had fellowship and as they waited, you wonder if they remembered the parable of the mustard seed. They remembered what Jesus had said.

But this seed that was so small that you would hardly notice it, so insignificant that you could miss it. And you wonder if they said, ah, this is what's been happening.

This is the kingdom. This is us. You wonder if they did. Because yes, to the world it was insignificant.

It was a tiny seed what had happened, what Jesus had done and what they were now. They were 120 people in a city of thousands in a country, perhaps of millions in a world of tens of millions.

[42 : 12] That's what they were. Just a seed. Just a seed. What could they do? What could they change? What could they be?

Well, very little, you would say, looking out from a natural perspective. Very little. It is a small beginning. And before I apply that properly, I want us to look at the second point.

And that is that it has a significant end. But if you look at these verses in the translation that you have here, verse 32, it is the smallest of seeds.

When it has grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree. So the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. These two words, smallest and larger are largest.

These are the words that we need to consider because it begins as the smallest, most insignificant, but it will become the largest. So what Jesus is saying here is simply, initially, he's saying this seed, it is a seed, but it's going to grow.

[43 : 20] It's a wonderful thing when you see a seed growing, especially if you've lost hope for it in your own garden. Well, Jesus is saying that the kingdom is going to grow. It can't but grow.

Christ has said that he will build his church so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And that's what's happening here. The kingdom will grow, he says. It's a promise, and it's a promise that we need to remind ourselves of.

It's a prayer that we pray often, isn't it? Thy kingdom come. I will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We can forgetful that the kingdom is coming, that it is growing when we don't see it grow, especially in a country where we are seeing spiritual decline, when we're seeing less and less coming out to church, lessons less through the professing and the name of Christ and walking to the walk.

We can say, well, it stopped growing. It stopped growing, but there's very little happening because we don't see the bigger picture. We don't see what's going on behind the scenes. We don't see what's going on in the hearts of men and women, but also we don't see or understand what's happening in different parts of the world, where there are revivals, and where there is significant growth and rates of conversion.

We need to remember that. But what Jesus is saying here isn't just that it will grow. He's not just saying that, well, you're 120 just now. Next year you'll be up at 150.

[44 : 39] Maybe the year after that at 200, and then 10 years on you'll be up at 300 people. What he's saying is this, that it's going to grow significantly, that it's going to be the largest as it were in the head garden.

And difficult for them to believe perhaps, but come again Acts chapter one, that in the upper room they're praying together 120 of them, just a seed. But then you move forward to Acts chapter two.

And what you see there at Pentecost is the seed as it were germinating in the ground. And Peter preaches the gospel to them, and 3,000 people are added to the church that day.

And then you read throughout the book of Acts, and it's a wonderful thing to read. And we should read it time and again. And you have this saying recurring and look out for it, and the word of God increased.

And the word of God multiplied. And the word of God grew, as if the word of God itself were a plant. That's what you see. The seed is germinating, it's growing, it's becoming a tree.

[45 : 45] That's what's happening. It's bearing seed. And the seed is falling into the ground. And what you find is that you've got more and more growth. And the small tree is becoming a large tree.

And the small gathering of people is becoming a large gathering of people. And you've got churches being planted in every city. And Peter is going and he's preaching even to men like Cornelius.

And the Holy Spirit is descending upon the Gentile people. And Paul's going to Asia Minor, and churches are being planted in Ephesus, and even in places like Colossae and Laodicea and all of these places.

He goes to Macedonia. All sorts of people are being converted, an anti-ethnic, a great movement of the Spirit, and people there are called Christians for the first time. In fact, the Gospel is going to go to Rome, so that there will be sense, sense even in Caesar's household.

Servants of Caesar in the dragons den, and their believers. And you follow this through church history. And what you find is the world being turned upside down, and the structures of this world being changed.

[46 : 50] And the Gospel is going west, and the Gospel is going east. And it's coming into Europe, yes, it goes into Rome, makes its way to the United Kingdom, to Ireland.

It goes out to Asia and to Africa, makes its way to the Americas, to the North and to the South, to every part of the known world the Gospel goes. And as Jesus prophesied, the Gospel shall be preached in all the world for our witness and to all nations.

And it is happening. In fact, such is the size of this tree that he says here at the end of verse 32, that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

Amazing, isn't it? A tiny little seed that you could hardly see in the palm of your hand. I saw somebody actually come home from the Holy Land once, and he showed me some of these seeds, and he took them home with him.

With him, and they were tiny. And then from that, you've got birds nesting. The word is making their tent in the branches.

[47 : 51] And there they are, they have food, there they have shelter, there they can build their nests. I think it's a reference to Daniel chapter 4.

Some of you will remember Nebuchadnezzar's 3 there, and he takes of a tree, and the tree becoming fruitful and bearing fruit, and the fowls, the birds of the air coming and nesting within the branches of that great tree, and there they find rest, and they find shelter, and they find food.

And it's a picture of the influence that Babylon would have on the world. It's the picture of the influence that it would have on the culture round about them, in terms of all sorts of things, in terms of infrastructure, in terms of culture, and politics, and technology, and mathematics, and science, and all of these kind of things.

You would have a huge impact, it does to this day. It does to this day. So it will be with Christianity.

The birds of the air and the countries of this world shall come and they shall lodge in its branches. And this is coming into the territory of the Levin, where the Levin is really talking about the fact that the moral fabric of the world is changed by Christianity, the spiritual fabric of the world.

[49 : 14] It makes things better, not just in terms of its extensive growth, but the way that it changes people, the way that it changes communities. I heard somebody recently tell a story about, where it was.

I can remember where it was, but a man who was converted, a drunkard who was converted, and he was questioned. And he said, do you really believe this stuff by an old friend?

And he said, well, yes I do. He said, you don't believe in miracles, do you? He said, yes I do. He says, my God turned beer into furniture. He said, my God turned beer into furniture.

The money that he'd been spending on beer, he would now spend it on furniture for his home and for his family. The gospel changes people.

It doesn't just change people, it changes families, and it changes villages and communities and countries. That's what it does. That's what the Levin is talking about. And wherever Christianity has gone in the world, people have benefited from it.

[50 : 20] People have learned from its values. They've taken in its culture, its view of life, its view of death, its view of politics, of all of these things, and they've benefited from it.

I remember, Green Thomas Chalmers saying that when he was ministering in one of the poorest areas at Net and Burrow, he said, he didn't see as many converts as he would have liked to have seen, but he said, for every one man that was converted, another 50 men were civilised.

That's the way he changed it. Another 50 men gave up their drink, their habits, their wife beating, whatever it was.

It was changed. The gospel had this leavening influence, even on those who weren't converted. But the point is that it begins here, begins on the cross at what you might call the highest part, the highest point in a sense of Christianity, but it looked like the lowest point.

The king, the leader, the rabbi, the savior being crucified. This is where it begins. Or you could say it begins in the upper room. And look what it becomes.

[51 : 29] And friends, only God could grow His kingdom from such an insignificant seed. Only God could do that. Only the Spirit of God could turn a prayer meeting of 120 people into a world power.

Only God could turn that very small number just over 100 into what today is, around 4 billion people who, at least in some way or other, subscribe to Christianity.

Only God could turn a mustard seed into His glorious church. And friends, we need to learn this lesson. And I conclude with this. God doesn't build His kingdom, even today, as men build it.

He chooses the foolish things of this world and the weak things of this world and the base and the despised things of this world to build His kingdom. And they look insignificant.

And we might look insignificant ourselves. You might look at your own congregation and think, well, in our community, it's relatively insignificant. But that's how God begins. And He does so in order to illustrate that it is not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, say, of the Lord hosts.

[52 : 42] All beginnings are often God's beginnings. And He does so in order to show us that His kingdom is not of this world. It doesn't work as men's kingdoms work.

If you're going to build a kingdom, build an empire, well, you wouldn't do it the way that God calls you to do it. You would do it your own way. You would follow the intellect of the world and the ideas of the world and the books of the world.

That's what you would do. But that's not how God builds His kingdom. His kingdom isn't of this world. And you know, friends, this is where we are in Scotland here today as well.

Our country was once, perhaps you could say, a great mustard plant, a great tree. And there were great movements of the Spirit. And the fabric of, moral fabric of society was thoroughly, to an extent anyway, Christianized.

And now the tree almost seems to have shriveled up. And it's gone. And there's so little. But you know, tiny seeds have fallen from that tree.

[53 : 44] Tiny seeds. And with their seeds and with their life, there is potential for greater life. There's potential for growth. And we see that today all around our country, Scotland and England and Ireland and Wales, that there is, that there are small pockets of faithful men and women, small congregations here and there with potential for growth, with potential to multiply.

And surely we can say that that's true here in Carly and through our own congregations throughout the island. Small they may be, but if we're faithful, if we're true to the Lord, there's potential for growth, is there not?

You think about the history of this island. They say that before the revival happened exactly 200 years ago from now in Oodgen throughout the rest of the island, that there were only around four Christians, born again Christians on the whole island.

Only around four. And look what happened. The whole island. Talk about the world being upside down, turned upside down. Well, that's what happened here. I think about the Reverend Robert Finlayson when he went to Lough's in 1831.

And what did he find? A mustard seed, hardly anything. People in superstition and unbelief. And look what we gave him, a great, pouring out of the Holy Spirit and conversion on mass was the flame of the burning bush, not very dim in Carly at the beginning of the 1930s.

[55 : 18] Look what became of it. The mustard seed began to grow and turn into a great tree. Why not again friends, if we're faithful people, if we're prayerful Christians, if we're full of love and full of the Holy Spirit?

Why would the Lord not do it again here? Why won't He? Why would He glorify Himself in Carly? And throughout our island and throughout our nation, it's His way.

It brings glory to Himself to make great things from small things. That's why friends, we ought never to despise the day of small things.

Because often the day of small things is the day in which the Lord is going to work and show Himself to be glorious and show Himself to be powerful and show Himself to be almighty. The conqueror of men and women, the conqueror of souls.

And you know friends, as our new ministry begins here in the next few weeks, remember that small it may seem, we see the same thing throughout our island, but the fields are ripe, the fields are ripe for harvest, for the Holy Spirit to work and to make this mustard seed into a great tree, the Lord grant that He would do just that.

[56 : 36] Amen, let us pray. Gracious and ever blessed God, O move in our midst, we pray, and grant that we would have faith to believe.

Hear that the Word of God who is able to do the impossible. Hold up Thy people in their most holy faith, help them to be true to Thee and help them to continue in the good fight and to lift up their eyes to the One who is able to guide them and to teach them and to lead them.

All we pray that we would all be led of the Holy Spirit and guided into the truth. Amen with us now then we pray and forgive us for our sin, for Christ's sake, amen.

We are going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 102 to check the portion.

Verse 13, Thou shalt arise and mercy yet, Thou to mount Zion shalt extend. Her time for favour which was set, behold, is now.

[58 : 04] Come to an end. To verse 18, the afflicted's prayer ye will not scorn. All times this shall be unrecord. And generations yet unborn shall praise and magnify the Lord.

These four verses to God's praise, Thou shalt arise and mercy yet, Thou to mount Zion shalt extend.

Thou shalt arise and mercy yet, Thou to mount Zion shalt extend.

Her time for favour which was set, behold, is now. Come to an end.

Thou shalt arise and mercy yet, Thou to mount Zion shalt extend.

[59 : 12] Thou the earth as an evening host, the earth thy glorious gift shall appear.

God in his glory shall appear when Zion reveals and repairs.

He shall be high and let his ear unto the needs of all prayers.

Thou to mount Zion shalt extend.

And generations yet unborn shall praise and magnify the Lord.

[60 : 39] Stand for the vindiction. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.