

Remnant Life Church  
October 16, 2016  
**The Parables of Jesus:**  
**The Power of Small**  
Matthew 13:31-35

Matthew:

- Unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew is one of the 12 disciples and an eyewitness to what he writes; also called Levi; a Jew; but he has a problem...his vocation
- Matthew is a tax collector for the Roman government placing him in the eyes of the other Jews lower than even the Gentiles because he cheated and stole from his own people
- Most likely the keeper of the records (scribe) for the disciples given the meticulous detail which he writes and his background of keep record of information for the Romans
- Matthew is placed at the front of the NT as a bridge or hinge between the OT and NT writings
  - There is a time period between the last book of the OT (Malachi) to the writing of the Gospels of approximately 450 years where God stopped speaking through the prophets – that time is called the Intertestamental Period
  - During that time-period one great kingdom after another rose and fell in world domination
    - Cyrus, the King of Persia, released the nation of Israel from Babylonian captivity (the kingdom he overthrew) in 3 waves to return to Jerusalem
    - We read of this time in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah
  - 200 years later Alexander the Great ended Persian rule and the Greek culture expanded throughout nearly the entire known world including Israel
    - Even after the Greek empire fell its culture and language were still what the people lived under
    - This is why the original manuscripts of the OT were written in Hebrew and Aramaic but the NT was written in Greek as it was the language the majority of people would have understood
    - The word “Gospel” is Greek for “good news”
  - Then for a little over 100 years the nation of Israel would enjoy a measure of self-rule thanks in large part to the Maccabean revolt that freed Israel from Greek rule.
    - As a result of the rebellion the system of Synagogue worship was established in Jerusalem
    - It was during this time that a bi-leadership system emerged relating to the spiritual lives of the people
      - The Pharisees were the theologically conservative leaders of the Synagogue
      - The Sadducees were the more politically-connected leadership that walked closely with the foreign government
  - But what brings us to the time of Jesus and Matthew is in 63 BC the freedom for Israel came to an end when Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem
    - While the Jews were permitted to continue to worship God as they had been they lost many of the freedoms they had come to embrace and were crushed under excessive taxations

- Matthew worked within that taxation system
    - And now Rome must now put a new leader in place - someone who would know and understand the people
  - Herod the Great is put in power, himself a Jew, to rule over Judea which, in addition to Jerusalem, included the surrounding regions
    - He had come to initial power about 20 years earlier when he, along with his brother, were both named tetrarchs by Marc Antony meaning they were 2 of 4 rulers of a province
    - He was then proclaimed King of Judea or King of the Jews by the Roman Senate
    - This is the same title mockingly placed on the cross by the Roman soldiers during the crucifixion
  - It is Herod who orders the male infants killed in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth in an effort to squelch a revolt he is certain is coming (Matt 2:16)
    - Highly paranoid man who during his reign killed his wife, several of his sons, and many of his military men when he thought they were plotting against him
  - Herod died in approximately 4 AD at about the time of Jesus' birth
    - Remember we read that just after Jesus was born an angel appeared to Joseph and told him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to keep them safe (Matt 2:13-23)
    - When Joseph and his family return they settle in an area outside of Galilee in a town called Nazareth (2:23)
  - His son Herod Antipas, also called Archelaus, now rules the area surrounding Judea and is the ruler who Jesus appeared before in third of the four trials the night he was arrested (Luke 23:6-12)
  - He is also the one who had John the Baptist imprisoned and beheaded (Mark 6:14-29)
- This is the time-period in which Matthew lives and writes about the life of Jesus
- He writes to the Jews so they will know that the 4 ½ centuries of God's silence to them as His people, since the writing of Malachi, has come to an end in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- He does this in part by emphasizing the teachings of Jesus regarding His Heavenly Kingdom
- While Mark writes of Jesus as the Servant, Luke - Jesus as the Son of Man, and John - Jesus as the Son of God, Matthew writes to establish the Kingship of Jesus as the Messiah
- **READ Matthew 13:31-35**
- This chapter is the third discourse of Jesus that Matthew records
  - There are 7 interrelated parables with an 8<sup>th</sup> added
  - The first 2 parables in this chapter have to do with a farmer sowing seeds
    - In the first the seed is the Word of God being sown into the hearts of the people (soil) – the good soil yielded a large crop (13:3-23)

- In the second one the “good seed” are each of us sown into the world (the weeds) to help bring change to the lives who do not know Him
- However, Jesus simplest and most powerful statement of His Kingdom is in just a few short verses of the third and fourth parables of the chapter

### 1. The mustard seed

- a. The seed Jesus is referring to was common in that region
- b. It was about the size of a pin-head
  - i. He called it the smallest because that is what the people would understand
  - ii. There are those who try and make a case for the error of Jesus’ teaching as there are smaller seeds than the mustard
  - iii. He was not making that statement for all of creation just what they knew
- c. Despite its small beginning the plant that grows can, in the right climate, be large enough for a man to climb into and certainly for birds to nest in
- d. Many interpretations have been assigned to this parable
  - i. For some, because of the use of birds in the account are often a representation of evil, it is a warning to guard against sin and temptation
  - ii. For others it is a representation of faith and the power it possesses even in small measure
    - 1. Jesus teaches this later in the chapter after the disciples fail to heal a demon-possessed boy
    - 2. **Matt 17:20** – “...*Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*”
  - iii. But Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven
    - 1. His analogy using the mustard seed is to illustrate that, in spite of a movement begun by only 13 men (of course one being the Son of God,) the increase of the Kingdom will be mighty
    - 2. From humble and small beginnings, the church, (His Kingdom here on earth) has become a force that has spread around the world
    - 3. It has and continues to endure persecution and continued to impact the culture of every nation
  - iv. While the birds Jesus refers to have been used in the Bible to convey the presence of evil Jesus is, in fact, using them as a representation of the Gentiles and the lost
    - 1. The Kingdom of God is for EVERYONE

### 2. The yeast (or leaven)

- a. Yeast is an agent of change
  - i. When baking it is the difference between ending up with a hard, flat cracker or a nice fluffy, tasty loaf of bread
  - ii. But the change is not immediate nor can it even be seen
  - iii. It is subtle and takes a little bit of time work but it infiltrates every bit of the dough
- b. Again this passage has been interpreted many ways

- i. It too has been seen as a warning to guard against allowing even a little bit of sin to enter your life because it will work its way into your life (**I Cor 5:6**)
    - ii. Jesus did speak several times to guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (**Matt. 16:6,11; Mark 8:15**)
    - iii. But here Jesus is talking about something different and even more powerful
  - c. Yeast is a representation of, just as Jesus said, the Kingdom of God
    - i. Who is the representation of God's kingdom in this time? We are!
    - ii. We have been called of God to be the yeast that works its way through every area of our lives bringing change

### 3. What seeds are you planting? What yeast are you spreading for the Kingdom of God?

- a. These seeds and this yeast will not be seen
  - b. The mustard seed is so small that it could be easily be overlooked or not seen at all
  - c. Yeast is a single-celled microorganism that cannot be seen without the aid of a powerful microscope
- Witnessing takes many forms
  - It can be conversation
  - It can be an activity
  - It can be leaving a pamphlet or tract for someone to find
  - Or it can be your day-to-day living going from place to place doing nothing out of the ordinary to the naked eye but spreading tiny seeds and microorganism of God's love and truth
- Even when you think no one is watching I can guarantee you someone is
- Even when you think your words are of no importance you do not know what God is doing in that other person at that moment (encounter Friday at rehearsal)
- **Isaiah 55:8-11** *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*