



Kingdom of Heaven
2 – The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven
Shay Robbins

Good morning, Woodland Hills Family Church. I am very proud of you guys. It is both spring break and daylight savings and here you are. Well done. It was a miracle we had people at the 8:15, but we did. And a pretty good crew.

My name is Shay Robbins and I'm a part of the teaching team here at Woodland Hills Family Church. We welcome everyone here in the Castle, if you're watching online, our friends that are over in the Chapel, and then I imagine we have some visitors and we're glad to have you guys too. I'm glad to worship with you today.

As a part of our worship service, we take an offering. Today is kind of a fun day. We're really going to celebrate what God is doing through our collective efforts together and giving in ministry, so a lot of great stories coming our way. There are offering boxes located out in the foyer, the Church Center App, you can give online at woodhills.org, or you can text 84321. For all the Gen Zers out there if you want to tithe your bitcoin, you can send it there, I bet.

We continue with Part 2 of the Kingdom of Heaven series. Adam Donyes did a great job kicking things off last week. Ashley and I were getting ready for bed, and we were sitting next to each other. She was reading a book and I was watching *The Mandalorian*, which actually tells us a lot about our relationship. Out of the corner of my eye, I see her take off her readers and she looks at them and says, "One point five is not strong enough anymore. Many of you guys can relate. When you have the wrong prescription, things can get a little bit blurry. I really think that as we sit under the teaching of Jesus, and we look at what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, that he's going to give us a proper perspective and allow us to see clearly.

Last week, Adam mentioned that a lot of the Jewish people of the day did not see Jesus as the Messiah. At the time, they were in a context that had them looking for something else. Specifically, they were living in a situation where Rome had overtaken their country and they were being oppressed and controlled and ruled over unjustly. So, as they read through the Old Testament scriptures, where there are hundreds of prophecies that describe what the coming Messiah would look like, where he would be born, how he would carry himself, how he would rule. They looked through those hundreds of text and in their current setting, some of them they focused on more than others.

Many of the Jews at the time were looking for a political savior to save them from Rome. Jesus was sitting down with his disciples and explaining through parables, saying here's what the Kingdom of

Heaven is like. He was helping to give them a clear view of what was actually happening right before their eyes. Now, here we sit, two thousand years later and the power of the scriptures remains the same. In fact, interestingly enough, I think a couple of the character qualities of God that the Jews were getting tripped up on happened to be things that we still get tripped up on today.

I want to show you two Old Testament scriptures and I think it will help us as we head into the text. The first one is Isaiah 53. This is an interesting passage in the course of history because during Jesus' day, they commonly read this chapter in synagogue. Some point after Jesus' death, the Jewish people stopped reading the last part of Isaiah 52 and all of Isaiah 53 in the synagogue. We know this because a notable rabbi in the 17th century admitted that they stopped reading those texts in public because it was confusing people. They were getting into arguments of what these texts meant so they removed it. You'll see here that it describes somebody different than what the Jews were looking for.

The text starts with ***Who has believed a report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*** This is God rolling up his sleeve to show you his strength. ***"...For he (the Messiah) grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground, he has no stately form or majesty... This would have been a major tripping point. How does this fit in the paradigm of a political savior? ...that we would look at him, nor an appearance that we would take pleasure in him. He was despised and abandoned by men, a man of great pain and familiar with sickness; and like one from whom people hide their faces. He was despised and we had no regard for him*** Isaiah 53: 1-3

That did not fit the paradigm of what the Jews wanted to find in their Messiah. The reality is that Jesus demonstrated one of the character qualities of God, and that was humility. He was coming in a different way and for that reason, many of them missed him.

Another passage from Psalm 94 displays another one of his characteristics. The Psalmist writes, ***How long, Lord, shall the wicked – how long will the wicked triumph?*** The psalmist is saying, "This is a mess, Lord. Where are you? Why aren't you coming?"

We know that another one of the character qualities of God is that God is a God of patience. Peter writes that God is not slow as some count slowness. He is not slow about his promises, but he is patience, wishing that none would perish and that all would come to repentance to find relationship with him.

So, his humility and his patience was a struggle for the Jews of the day and so it is with us as we look around at this broken mess of a world we live in and we say, "God, what are you waiting for?" Sometimes we feel like we're actually losing ground.

But today, I have good news for you. You see, God's ways are higher than our ways. Often times, we can mistake those for weakness, a disconnectedness from our current situation, slowness, a lack of control, etc. Today, as we look at the text, I think what you're going to find is that God's humility and his patience have great purpose and there is a lot to be excited about as the Kingdom of Heaven grows and perpetuates itself.

Parables help us to refocus on God's narrative rather than man's. It ensures that God's narrative is informing our thoughts, decision, emotions, and actions. As an example, one of Jesus' disciples that we really don't know much about, Simon the Zealot. There are two Simons in the twelve disciples, Simon Peter, which we know much more about, and then there is Simon the Zealot. All we really know about him is his nickname, the Zealot. Interestingly, the Zealots were a group of zealous political activists, and their heartbeat was that they were going to overthrow Rome with force. We can make some assumptions. It seems that Simon came from this sect. You can imagine him and his zealous passion that Israel would reclaim its old glory to be sitting before Jesus, the man that he's placing faith in as the Messiah, yet the way that he's carrying himself is puzzling to him.

Jesus would sit down with him and others, and as he explained the parables and the Kingdom of Heaven, they would bring a clearer perspective for Simon and others. Interestingly, I think it's very similar to our situation. Simon and the zealots had a certain narrative that they were viewing the world through, and we can fall into narratives as well. If we watch one network or news, we'll see things through that lens, all of the political hot takes, the situation of how things are going out in the world, the economy, etc. If we are not careful, what can happen is we'll begin to see the world through man's narrative rather than God's narrative. So, we go to the scriptures, and we sit under the teaching of Jesus, and he helps adjust our perspective. That's what the parables are for today.

We are going to look at two of these parables, the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, together today as a church. The first one, if you guys have your Bibles, you can turn to Matthew 13. We'll find the parable of the Mustard Seed in Verses 31 and 32.

31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." Now, for those of you who know me, you know that I have a degree in horticulture. The only problem is I didn't pay attention for four and a half years. It's just kind of funny how all of these horticultural analogies fall to me. But from the little that I do know, the mustard seed is one to two millimeters, so it's a very small seed. It's one of the smallest seeds in all of the garden plants. When it is planted... Where we are at, we're used to the herb version of mustard – a simple, small plant. But in the Middle East, it's a completely different genus. It's a plant that's a perennial and it grows into trees that can get as big as 30 feet tall.

In the text, I think it's really important that Jesus points out that it's smaller than the other seeds, but when it's full grown, it's larger than the garden plants and it becomes a tree. Most plants in a garden are annuals – you plant them in the spring, they grow up, they produce fruit, and then in the fall, they begin to weather out. In the winter, they die off entirely.

A perennial grows year around. This perennial mustard seed grows into a tree that becomes larger and it becomes the dominant force in the garden itself. Jesus goes on and explains that it becomes a home or a place of refuge for the birds of the sky. They sit in that tree. A tree provides refuge, safety, belonging, and peace. It's a home. And so it is for followers of Jesus. As we find our refuge in the

Kingdom of Heaven, we get to cash in on all these beautiful qualities of a tree. We find our refuge, safety, belonging, and peace in the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the most important points that I want to make this morning is that **the Kingdom of Heaven starts with Jesus**. You know from Isaiah 53 and from the stories from the gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that Jesus' beginning came in a great deal of humility. And yet, from a small seed has a grown a large tree. A mustard seed is a reminder that the Kingdom of Heaven is a home and it's set apart from all others. **From humble beginnings to indescribable glory**. We know that this is true on a large scale, but it's also true on a personal level. The Kingdom of Heaven in your life starts with an interaction. A gospel seed was planted in your heart – the seed that Jesus loves you and that he died for your sins. And that through him you can be forgiven and have a relationship with God for eternity. That seed, when it's planted in your heart, takes root and then it begins to grow up and produce fruit throughout your life. **The Kingdom of Heaven starts with Jesus**.

And so it perpetuates through the fruit of the believers that have chosen to follow him.

The next passage is the leaven. **33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."** The leaven was seeded in it, and, through the fermenting process, it spread throughout that 60 pounds of flour. Leaven is a substance, typically a yeast, that is used to make dough rise.

My brother, Blake Robbins, married an amazing woman named Katherine. You guys have heard the phrase, "You outkicked your coverage." When you meet Blake Robbins and then you meet Katherine, you're like, "Wow." Most introduction you say, "Nice to meet your." With Blake, you're like, "congratulations." She's an amazing woman.

Katherine, in all of her awesomeness, has started getting into baking and she has been baking sourdough. Sourdough is so hot right now. Sourdough is popular because it's supposedly the healthiest bread to eat because it's much more digestible. The way sourdough works is you take a sourdough starter... In Katherine's refrigerator, she has a jar with her starter dough. When she goes to make a batch, she'll reach in her jar and pull out a chunk of the starter. She'll put flour and the other ingredients on it. She'll mix it up and then she'll let it sit. What will happen is that starter dough will ferment and it will permeate the rest of the dough until it rises. The following day, she'll bake it and have fresh bread.

As she takes from her starter dough, the way that she replenishes her supply is she simply takes that jar and dumps flour in it, puts the lid on it and puts it back in the refrigerator. That starter will then also ferment and permeate the rest of the flour and increase that lump of starter dough. There's a secondary English definition of leaven and this is it: "A pervasive influence that modifies something or transforms it for the better." Isn't that a beautiful definition? I'm going to come back to that same point. The Kingdom of Heaven starts with Jesus. I thought about making an additional point – Jesus is my starter dough. But I thought that was kind of corny. We did print T-Shirts and you can pick one up on your way out in the foyers. Gen Z, you guys can text 84321 with your bitcoin and pick it up on the way out.

The Kingdom of Heaven starts with Jesus. And the leaven for us is the call to activate personal ministry to bring a dead lump to life, to immerse ourselves and influence a dead culture and bring it to life. So, if it starts with Jesus, my role is this... I'm reminded of Galatians 2: 20 – ***It's not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*** So, from this point forward, the leaven has touched me, it has touched us, it has had an influence where it has permeated our lives and changed us. And the, guess what? Then the permeation continues to spread through you. So, who is my responsibility? It's the man or woman next to you that you ought to affect.

In the Lord's prayer, one of the phrases is "Thy kingdom come, they will be done." I want to share some stories with you that I think will be an encouragement because I think a lot of time, as you look at the context of the world that you live in, it feels like the gospel is actually losing ground. I want to encourage you today. I talked to a friend of mine, Chris, and his wife, Lauren. They are missionaries that our church has supported for a long time. They moved away from Branson, Missouri, and they live in Indonesia. They have now for years and years. They are reaching, through the locals, into unreached people groups throughout the island network of Indonesia.

Several years ago, they began to reach out to an unreached people group that had not been untouched by the gospel called the Potony (sp). The Potony people is about 14,000 people in this series of villages and it's extremely remote. In fact, Chris said, "From where he lives, it's a one-hour flight to an island, then a one-hour boat ride, then a four-hour car ride, then a six-hour boat ride, and then a one-hour truck ride to get to the village of Potony. Several years ago, one of their first generation, Indonesian Christians went to Potony and shared the Gospel of Jesus with a family there and they came to faith. Now, several years later, there are 16 believers that they know of that are walking with Jesus amongst the Potony. Now, 16 out of 14,000 doesn't seem like very much, like a drop in a bucket. But that's the way the leaven works. It starts with one person and then it spreads to the next and then the next and then the next.

One of the amazing things that Chris shared with me is that they are working on a Bible translation. To their knowledge, there has never been any translation of the Bible into the Potony language. They are working on it right now. They translated the first story from Luke 17 into the language. It's the story of healing ten lepers. I want you to hear it today. *audio plays.*

Isn't that cool. Again, to our knowledge, that is the first translation of the Holy Scriptures into the language that you just listened to. The daughter of the original family that came to faith listened to that for the first time in Chris and Lauren's presence and she started weeping at the Word of God in her native language.

Interestingly throughout the Muslim world, we keep getting reports of Jesus appearing in people's dreams. There is a man right now, his name is Johnson of the Potony people. He's a 60-year-old fisherman. The boy of that original family is a young guy, 16 years old overheard these fishermen telling a story that he was sharing. He was sharing that the Christian Jesus has been appearing to him in his dreams. The guys that were sitting around him said, "How do you know it was Jesus?" he said, "I saw the wounds in his hands.

This young man overhears this, and the word gets back to Chris and our team. Last week they were sending one of the mature believers and they are looking for Johnson right now to share who this Jesus is in his dreams and how Jesus feels about him. It's the Leaven.

We mentioned the Jewish people. I have some friends that just returned from a trip to Israel. They got back and he explained to me that in pre- World War II there was about 250,000 Messianic Jews. These are Jews that place faith in Jesus as the Messiah. In world War II, many of them were living in Europe and they were wiped out in the Holocaust. In 1950, post, World War II, there were next to no Messianic Jews in the world.

Lifeway just finished a new study. They have the Messianic Jewish population worldwide at over one million people. That's amazing considering that the world population of Jewish people is somewhere between 15 and 18 million. That's a significant number. One million is the most messianic Jews in all of human history. The Leaven is spreading. Even here, in our backyard at Woodland Hills Family Church, in the last several years, we've seen hundreds of people baptized, from kids in elementary all the way up to grandmas who have been baptized, stating publicly "I am dead to this old way of life and I'm embracing this new life of walking with Jesus. In fact, Easter Sunday is on its way and we will be hosting baptisms for folks that want to take that step of faith, but the Leaven continues to grow and permeate.

I want to share a passage with you that has really been super meaningful to me recently. In John 5: 19, Jesus is giving explanation for why he's doing all of these miracles and the things he's doing. It says, ***Jesus answered, and he was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you the Son can do nothing of himself unless it is something that he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same way.***

This is a tremendously significant passage for you and me. Here's why. While Jesus was God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. He laid aside his divine power for a season and he took on human flesh and all of its limitations, so that he could show us how we issue the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The same way that Jesus did it is the path that you and I are to follow. For those of you who have placed faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of your life, you are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. And through the Holy Spirit, you have access to the throne room of God himself. And through prayer and communion with him, you ask God, "God, what is it that you want from me. What are you doing that I can come alongside and be a part of?" And through the power of the Holy Spirit, that power transfers from the throne room, through this carcass of a body and is unleashed on the earth. The Kingdom of Heaven – they kingdom come, thy will be done. Through you and me.

Sometimes you hear stories like I've shared, and that Jared shared, and your like, "That's not me. I'm not a professional minister. I'm not paid to do this. How can I be a part of this. What can I do?"

I want to share with you 20 really simple ways that you can be the Leaven, that you can impact the kingdom of Heaven. What you are going to find as I read through there is, "I'm doing that." "I can do that." "I'm passionate about that." I think you'll find it to be encouraging. I want you to know this is not a to-do list. This is something that you listen to, and I want you to think about how practical your ministry is today.

1. Start investing in kid and student ministry by volunteering. Lucy Watson, by example, started investing in my daughter, Lulu's, life when she was in kindergarten. Now, eight years later, Lucy has followed her through our program and their relationship is amazing. She has been leaven to my daughter.
2. Mentor at the Boys and Girls Club.
3. Use the Same mechanic for a lifetime and build a friendship.
4. Encourage servers regardless of their performance.
5. Give the Kingdom of Heaven initiatives. One of our young adults is a C Of O student. She shared a testimony with me. She was trying to raise money for a mission trip she felt called to go on and was having a hard time making any headway financially. While working at the Keeter Center, she was serving. A couple asked how they could pray for her. She shared her situation and kind of the stress that she was experiencing related to that mission trip. That couple left her a tip for \$1,000.00. When I talked to her, she hadn't even been on the mission trip, but her faith was impacted so powerfully by their generosity.
6. Pray for lost and unreached people groups.
7. In the quiet of your home, you could pray for the Schwar (sp) and the people.
8. Spiritually invest in your grandkids.
9. Send kids to Christian summer camps
10. Find your sweet spot at church and give back.
11. Start a Bible study with some friends. If you don't feel comfortable leading the Bible study, host a home group. Bring people into your home and allow ministry to perpetuate there.
12. Be a servant leader in our community. Last week, I visited a rotary. Rotary, nationwide, is a secular business men and women's club where they influence their local community for good. I was amazed at the dominance of Christian leaders in our local rotary, Many are a part of Woodland Hills Family Church. I was just so impressed.
13. Commit to truth and love on social media.
14. Take time for people.
15. build relationships with your neighbors.

16. Invite people from church to lunch.
17. Encourage teenagers. Put your hand on their shoulder, look them in the eyes, and speak life into their heart.
18. Be loyal and gracious. Your relationships last longer that way.
19. Discover, sharpen, and employ your spiritual gifts.
20. Be an instrument of reconciliation.

Let me remind you again the **Kingdom of Heaven starts with Jesus**.

Anyone of these things that we practice in our daily lives... It ought not to be a to-do list, but rather to be a love list. I do these things because of the love that I've experienced from Jesus. And the forgiveness and grace that I've experienced in my life. It is so valuable to me that I cannot help but pass it onto others.

I found this last quote from John MacArthur. He says, *"Small things have very large affects. All music, symphonies, concertos, oratorios, hymns, songs, all music basically come from eight notes. All profound notes that have ever been written or spoken in the English language come from 26 letters."* Small beginnings, profound, extensive results.

Father, we come to you with, humble, thankful hearts. For those of us who know you as Lord and Savior, we say thank you. I pray that we would be leaven. I pray, Jesus, for those that don't know you that are searching, hurting, feel broken and perhaps lost, that they would be found today in you. We know that you love them and you want a relationship with them.

Jesus is King and it's in his name we pray... Amen.