The Kingdom of God Is Like…

Luke · Luke 13:18-19; Luke 13:20-21

AT A GLANCE

Preaching through Luke on a Sunday that ends at the Lord's table, Dan reads Jesus's twin parables of mustard seed and leaven as a guide's orientation to a strange land. The kingdom starts small yet grows large, works hidden yet unstoppably, and is wide enough for everyone. Because God gives the growth, believers sow, wait, and make room, and the cross, where Jesus becomes the buried seed, shows the kingdom's logic is the world's true shape.

- Nothing done in the kingdom is small: a word of encouragement or a prayer is seed God can grow into something large.
- Hidden is not idle. Like leaven in dough, God's work often looks like nothing, yet its growth is inevitable and unstoppable.
- The kingdom is big enough for all people and all kinds of people, so we make space for Jesus and for outsiders.

> *"There are no small things in the kingdom of God. There are no small people."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

> Luke 13:18-19 — 18Then Jesus said, "What is God's kingdom like? What can I compare it to? 19God's kingdom is like the seed of the mustard plant. Someone plants this seed in their garden. The seed grows and becomes a tree, and the birds build nests on its branches." (ERV)
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> Luke 13:20-21 — 20Jesus said again, "What can I compare God's kingdom with? 21It is like yeast that a woman mixes into a big bowl of flour to make bread. The yeast makes all the dough rise." (ERV)

The argument

The Kingdom Starts Small and Grows Large by God's Power — A mustard shrub that becomes a tree is the shape of Jesus's ministry, the church, and our smallest obediences

Dan notes that mustard is a weed, a shrub that reaches four, maybe ten feet. "It's not a tree." Jesus's picture is deliberately extravagant: by the power of God it grows into something birds can nest in. Dan traces the pattern through Jesus's twelve disciples, a ministry that ends in abandonment and a cross, and an early church too small and fragile for the history books to notice. He puts today's Christians at two and a half billion, with the tree only beginning to grow. The principle reaches us. Dan tells of Edward Kimball, a businessman who nervously walked past a shoe store before going in to speak with a young clerk, Dwight, later D.L. Moody. "There are no small things in the kingdom of God."

> **Insight —** *Because God does the growing, the size of an act of obedience is never the measure of its worth.*

Hidden Is Not Idle: Kingdom Growth Is Inevitable and Unstoppable — Two batches of dough look identical until morning

Dan presses the leaven image: knead it into flour and the dough looks the same as a batch without it, until you wait. Then the growth "is both inevitable and unstoppable," sometimes blowing the top off the container in his own kitchen. He discloses his own experience: mentoring high schoolers in Chicago, watching them take steps forward and back, and not sensing that God was doing much. Then a student wrote after ten years to say a pizza-parlor conversation had been working in him all that time. "I thought that was the end of those words." The response is expectant waiting, and Dan prays for a glimpse of the leaven at work, "not because I need to know."

> **Insight —** *Not seeing God's work is not evidence that it is absent; the kingdom mostly works unseen, and faithfulness means waiting and praying.*

The Kingdom Is Wide Enough for Everyone, So We Make Space — Nesting birds and an overflowing batch of dough both speak of room

Dan hears a second point in two phrases. The birds nesting in the branches draw on Ezekiel's image of a great tree, where, he says, the birds are the nations: the kingdom was never meant for one people. The three measures of flour, which he puts at roughly fifty pounds and enough to feed 150 or 200, speak of abundance that overflows. So "there is room for all people and all kinds of people," though not everyone chooses to enter, and the invitation stands. The response is to make space, first for Jesus as Lord, then for outsiders in our churches, homes, and communities. His warning: "the people most at risk of not making their way into the kingdom are the people that assume they're already in."

> **Insight —** *A kingdom designed to overflow forms a people who open their lives, and not only their hearts, to those who are not yet inside.*

Kingdoms Are Grown, Not Built, and the Glory Is God's — Why a garage startup is a poor image for what Jesus describes

Dan wonders what image Jesus would choose in Palo Alto today, and whether the startup that grows into a giant corporation would need many caveats. Startups speak of building; the kingdom speaks of planting, mixing, and watching God bring growth. Startups chase the flashy next big thing; Jesus reaches for the mundane. Companies, however large, will one day fall, while the kingdom grows slowly until it fills creation. Above all, the founder benefits most, but not here: "We do so because we believe that God is great and we want other people to come to know that God is great also."

> **Insight —** *Kingdom work is organic and ordinary, and it is aimed at making God known rather than making ourselves great.*

The Kingdom Seems Strange Only Because the World Has Bent In on Itself — Jesus is a guide to the way the world was made to work, culminating at the cross and the table

Dan opens and closes with Lewis's Ransom, who finds a strange new planet and needs a guide. The twist is that the truly strange land is Earth, the silent planet, bent in on itself. Dan applies it: we think Jesus's teaching is weird, that small things grow large and unseen work is certain, yet Jesus says, "This is the way that I have created the world to be." The contrast is sharpest at the cross, where Jesus becomes the seed buried in the ground so new life can come. The Lord's table is where we practice the kingdom's strange rules, and Dan invites us to come "to learn about the kingdom from the king himself."

> **Insight —** *What feels foreign in the kingdom is the world's true shape, and the cross and table are where its logic is shown most plainly.*

Cross-references

- Mark 4:31 — Mark calls the mustard seed the smallest of all seeds, underlining how small the kingdom begins
- Matthew 17:20 — Faith the size of a mustard seed is enough to move mountains
- Ezekiel 17:23 — The great tree sheltering birds, which Dan reads as the nations finding room in God's people

DEVOTIONAL

Picture two bowls on a kitchen counter at night. Flour and water in each. In one, a woman has worked in a little leaven and covered it over. Look at them and you cannot tell which is which. They sit side by side, equally still, equally plain. Then morning comes, and one has swollen against its cloth. Most of the Christian life is lived in the evening of that picture. We knead in a word of encouragement and cover the bowl. We pray for a relative and the house stays quiet. We sit across from a young man at a pizza table, and then a decade of silence. It would be easy to take the stillness for verdict, to conclude that small means pointless and hidden means

absent. Jesus says otherwise, and he says it with weeds and bread, as though to refuse us any grandeur to hide behind. The seed is tiny, the shrub becomes a tree, and the dough is more than one household can eat. The growth is not ours to manufacture. It is God's to give, and it cannot be stopped. So our work is humble: throw the seed, work in the leaven, make room at the table. And when we cannot see the rising, we may ask, as Dan does, for a glimpse. We ask not because the dough needs our witness, but because encouragement is a kindness he sometimes grants. Even a seed buried in the ground, even a cross, was never the end of the story.

Reflection

- Which small act of faithfulness in your life have you written off as insignificant, and what would change if you trusted God to grow it?
- Where are you in a season of hidden leaven, praying or investing without visible result, and how are you tempted to read that silence?
- Who is not at your table, in your church, or in your family, and what would making real space for them cost you?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, you chose a seed and a bit of leaven to show us your kingdom. Teach us to trust what we cannot see. Give us courage to sow small things and patience to wait while you grow them. Keep us from building our own greatness. Open our lives to you and to the people you are calling. Where it would encourage us, grant a glimpse of your work; where you do not, hold us steady. You gave your life like a buried seed. Let us live by your strange and true kingdom. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

The kingdom is not something we build but something God grows; our part is to plant and mix, then to wait and pray.

This week

This week, do one small kingdom act for one person: a word of encouragement, a note, or a conversation. Then pray Dan's prayer each day, asking God for a glimpse of the leaven at work, not because you need it, and leave the outcome with him.

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