

# THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST

## DAY 1: SMALL BEGINNINGS (LUKE 13:18-19A)

If you've ever tried to grow a garden, then you know it isn't easy. You must pick the proper seedlings for the proper season. Radishes and kale grow best in spring, cucumbers and melons grow best in the summer, collards and turnips grow best in the fall, and garlic and peas grow best in winter. You must also pick the proper seedling for your climate. Certain plants and vegetables grow best in hot, dry conditions, while others grow best in cold, moist conditions. However, something you would never plant, no matter the time of year or the climate you live in, are weeds.

Read Luke 13:18-19a. Mustard seed was considered little more than a weed in the first-century. It grew fast and thick like a wild bush all along the countryside, and the last thing someone would have done intentionally was plant mustard in the field because it would have quickly overtaken everything. Jesus knew this full well, but He often used surprising imagery to communicate His teachings. As other Christian commentators have noted, Jesus' intention with using the mustard seed simile is clear: His kingdom was going to start small, humble, and even be despised by some, but it was going to spread nonetheless, like the weeds that grow thick along interstate highways and push through cracks in pavement.

How have you seen the Kingdom of God grow, even in places where the gospel was unwelcome?

## DAY 2: KINGDOM IMPACT (LUKE 13:19)

Kickstarter is a website that allows people to crowdsource their ideas. For example, one of the most successful Kickstarter efforts was a cooler designed by an inventor named Ryan Grepper. This cooler, which came with waterproof speakers, brought in revenue of \$13,285,226 from 62,642 backers. Incredible, right? And to think, it all started as a single idea in the mind of one man before an online grassroots effort helped Grepper's vision become reality.

Read Luke 13:19. When Jesus spoke these words, His disciples had to trust His underlying promise on the basis of faith, because Jesus' movement was still just in its seedling form! However, two thousand years later we have the benefit of seeing the tree that has grown, of marveling at how the branches of Christianity stretch across oceans and cultures and into different countries touching the lives of people of different races, backgrounds, and tongues.

Like every Kickstarter campaign, Ryan Grepper's initiative to fund his high-end cooler started small. However, unlike other Kickstarter campaigns, his effort gained traction and grew large. To an infinitely greater extent, this is true of Christ's kingdom, which has spread across the face of the earth and impacted billions of lives.

What steps can you take to further invest in and support the campaign of God's Kingdom to see it grow and spread to those who have yet to hear the gospel?

## DAY 3: CHRIST IS THE KEY (LUKE 13:20-21)

The term "viral video" refers to a video, possibly a funny news interview or a comedy skit, that spreads rapidly through social media. The interesting thing about viral videos is no one can predict with certainty what will go viral and what won't. Companies have spent millions of dollars attempting to create viral marketing videos for their products without success.

Read Luke 13:20-21. Leaven causes bread to grow and rise. Elsewhere in Scripture, Jesus used leaven as an illustration for the false teachings of the Pharisees, but here leaven is used as an illustration of the powerful spread of God's Kingdom. Biblical scholars have pointed out that this passage described a large amount of flour. In fact, it would have made enough bread to feed approximately 100 people. Again, Jesus used this dramatic imagery to give people a better understanding of the magnitude of His kingdom and the lives it would impact.

Without leaven, bread won't rise. There have been countless religious movements throughout history, but they have fizzled out over time. Of those that remain today, their influence pales in comparison to the incredible rise and spread of Christianity across the globe. Unlike the spread of viral videos, there's no mystery as to why Christianity caught fire—the key ingredient is Christ.

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## DAY 4: THE POWER OF PARABLES (MATTHEW 13:34)

Stories are powerful. Because they hold our attention, people fill their bookshelves with printed stories and pack theaters to watch visual stories. Scientists have actually studied the power of story on the human brain. What they found was simple but important: we are able to process and retain information more effectively when we receive information in the form of a story rather than simply as a list of facts.

Read Matthew 13:34. Jesus taught in parables. And, Jesus never did anything without specific intentions. He was mission-focused. The Father sent Him for specific purposes, and therefore Jesus was never half-hearted or reckless in what He said or did. During this period of time in Jesus' ministry, He chose to teach in parables. Parables are stories that seem simple on the outside, but on the inside, they convey deep spiritual meaning. Jesus didn't use these stories simply because people enjoyed them. He used them as a method of communicating deep spiritual mysteries. This doesn't mean that everyone heard and understood the deeper meaning of Jesus' words. Tragically, many heard His words, but their hearts were further hardened.

What causes us to sometimes hear Jesus' words and miss the meaning, or worse, harden our hearts?

## DAY 5: PARABLES AND PROPHECY (MATTHEW 13:35)

Our words reveal a lot about us. In fact, a study conducted by social psychologist James W. Pennebaker of the University of Texas at Austin found that just by examining the words people used, researchers could determine general details about them, such as their gender and age, but also more specific details about them, such as whether they were depressed or had recently suffered some kind of trauma.

Read Matthew 13:35. Matthew quoted a Messianic prophecy from Psalm 78:2. Like all Messianic prophecies, Psalm 78:2 is an Old Testament prediction about Christ. This prophecy revealed that the Messiah would teach using parables, and that's exactly what Jesus did. Scripture records dozens of parables that Jesus used when teaching people. Today's verse reminds us that Jesus' parables actually served *two* functions. First, parables were used to teach people spiritual truths. But second, Jesus' parables actually served as a fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy!

Jesus' words communicated a *lot* about Him. Similarly, our words tell the world a lot about us, but also a lot about the One we serve. In what ways can we better use our words to advance God's kingdom on earth?