

## LITTLE IS MUCH WHEN GOD IS IN IT

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Mark 4: 30-34

Mark 4: 30-32

<sup>30</sup>And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, <sup>32</sup>yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade."

Heavenly Father, these are the words of Your Son given to us and we pray that through the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, we will be able to understand it and even go further to know how to apply it in our own lives. in Your name as always, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

I think this short passage of scripture has a lot of profundity attached to it. I think there are important things captured in these three verses that we need to grapple with and see how it informs us. it's a mustard seed that He's talking about, and He's talking about the kingdom of God. So, two questions arise that I think we need to answer for us to fully understand these three verses and the implications they have for us.

### **Two Questions:**

1. How do we define the kingdom of God? We see these three words, 'kingdom of God' coming up repeatedly in the New Testament, and sometimes in the Old Testament as well. but we need to know what it means before we can say you can compare it to something. So we are going to spend a little time trying to understand the kingdom of God from various passages that are around this passage.
2. To what do we compare the kingdom of God? Once we know what the kingdom of God is, then as we look at application, as we try and make it into our own understanding, we need to compare this kind of intangible thing that we're talking about to something that is tangible so that we can better understand it.

### **HOW DO WE DEFINE THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**

#### **1. The Reign and the Rule of God.**

How does God figure into this kingdom of God? Very simply, it's His reign; it's His rule. He is the king of this kingdom, and He rules the kingdom. We look at the core of the kingdom of God and say: God is in the midst of it. he is the ruler, and we are His subjects. We are citizens of God's kingdom. And the kingdom, for His rule to be done, is where His will is followed. That's when the kingdom of God comes alive, where His justice, love, and righteousness prevail.

Psalm 103:19 says *"The Lord has established His throne in heaven and His kingdom rules over all."*

Matthew 6:10 *"Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* That's the plea, that's the cry and the prayer that Jesus taught us. it says, "Let Your kingdom come on earth, and Your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven." And that is what the kingdom

of God is about, that the will of God this is done in the heavens, in His throne room, will find its way here on earth, through us.

**2. The already and the not-yet nature of the kingdom.**

This is kind of what theologians have put together as they try to grapple with this whole understanding of the kingdom – the already and the not-yet nature. In other words, the kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom during His earthly ministry, but it will be fully realized when He returns. So Jesus ushered in the kingdom during His sojourn here on earth, but it will be fulfilled completely when He comes again. This means that we are living in this tension of the already and the not-yet.

Luke 17:20-21 tells us that *“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed; for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”* Already there.

Revelation 11:15 *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”* That’s the future, the culmination of God’s kingdom.

**3. The kingdom is both spiritual and physical.**

How do we draw this delineation? Spiritual – because it involves God’s rule in our hearts. God is doing a work in our hearts. However, it also has physical implications because as we begin to follow what God is doing in our hearts, then it changes behavior. Our behavior begins to change and that behavior affects society. It affects justice, it affects the transformation that must come in communities where God’s kingdom is being ushered in. And His kingdom is ushered in by you and me. We are citizens of God’s kingdom. And for the world to see the present reality of the kingdom, it must see the rule of God in our own hearts and the changes that happen in us that transforms communities.

**4. A Present experience.**

The kingdom is not something that we wait for; it is active now in our lives. The key is that it is active when we submit to the rule of God in our lives. Because, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, believers experience the power, the peace, and the transformation of the kingdom today.

Colossians 1:13 *“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,”* which is the kingdom of God.

Matthew 12:28 *“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”*

And so, as we see the power of God evident in us and around us, then we know that God’s kingdom is present in our midst.

**5. The kingdom is manifested through Jesus.**

The kingdom of God was uniquely revealed and embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Through His teaching, miracles and ministry, Jesus demonstrated what life in the kingdom looks like. Healing, forgiveness, justice and love. He embodied them and He epitomized them. He was the epitome of all these characteristics.

Mark 1:15 says, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel, the gospel of salvation.”*

Luke declares in 4:18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* So, Jesus Himself assumed that, when He came and He said, "It is now fulfilled in your midst."

**6. The kingdom of God is not only inclusive, but expansive.**

It not only is inclusive for every kind of person or people group, but as more and more people come in, it expands as well.

Revelation 7::9 *"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language."*

It's an inclusive kingdom. Nobody is excluded from it if they are willing to submit to the rule of the king whose kingdom this is. And as the submission takes place, then the expansion of God's kingdom also takes place.

So, that's the answer to the first question of what is the kingdom. How do we understand this kingdom that Jesus is talking about, all is sprinkled right through the New Testament.

**TO WHAT DO WE COMPARE THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**

When we look at it, most of it is kind of ethereal or intellectual. It's there in the head. but how do we bring it into focus? Things get easier to follow when we have tangible things that we can use as examples. Jesus understood that. in fact, His question was: How shall we picture the kingdom of God? And then he said, "To a mustard seed." The mustard seed they talked about, both black and white mustard seeds at that time, were very tiny, just about 1-2 mm. That's all the mustard seed was. But, in ideal conditions, it could grow to about 5 to 10 feet high. In fact, Jesus says that the branches would so spread out that birds could come and nest in them. And as we look at this, the kingdom of God compared to the mustard seed, I believe that there are three traits that we can pull from it which would be easy applications for each one of us.

**1. The kingdom of God starts small, but grows large.**

A small seed becomes a large tree. The kingdom of God often has small, humble beginnings. Take Jesus Himself. Born in a cattle shed, born in a small town. His ministry in other small towns. But the scope of His ministry grew until it covered that entire area. So, from just that initial ushering of the kingdom through His birth, His death, and His resurrection, there was such an expansion.

As we look at this comparison, we should never underestimate what God can do with something that is small. It could be a small act of kindness that comes from citizens of His kingdom. It could be a simple prayer. it could be a small step of faith or even a church faithfully serving what God wants to do in and through the church. God specializes in taking the small things and doing something significant from them.

There's an old hymn written probably 100 years back that says,

- i. In the harvest field now ripened  
There's a work for all to do;  
Hark! the Master's voice is calling,  
To the harvest calling you.

- ii. Does the place you're called to labor  
Seem so small and little known?  
It is great if God is in it,  
And He'll not forsake His own.

Why?  
Little is much when God is in it!  
Labor not for wealth or fame;  
There's a crown, and you can win it,  
If you go in Jesus' name.

Little is much when God is in it. Beloved, don't despise the small things that you do, or even the small things that you think are gifts from God that don't match up with some of the more flamboyant things that you see outside. God can take the small things. He took five loaves and two fish, and He fed 5,000 people. And Jesus told the others of how good the widow was when she gave a small bit, but it was everything that she had.

So, make sure that as you look at yourself as a citizen of God's kingdom, that you are able to know that even the small things that you have, God sees and God will use it if it is done, as the songwriter says, in the name of Jesus.

Prophet Zechariah says, "Who dares despise the day of small things?"

1 Corinthians 1:27 *"God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."*

I wonder, whether you're sitting here, you've come Sunday after Sunday, you've lived your life, and you look at yourself and say, "I'm just small and insignificant. I really can't make a difference to the world that is around me." And yet, when we look at the power of the kingdom in our lives, we can see that God can take the smallest thing, a grain of mustard, and make it into something that is large. So, look at yourself, beloved, and take heart. Look at those things that you thought were small and insignificant, and say, "If I use this, yield it to the Lord, He can use it and make something significant of it."

## **2. God's kingdom grows through His power, not human effort.**

The small mustard seed is a result of the way the mustard seed has been made, made by God who crafted it and said, "Within this mustard seed is the potential to grow." Beloved, within each one of you is the potential to grow and be all that God wants us to be. and God is the one who brings the growth.

As we submit to Him, as we submit to His rule, He's able to take us and use us mightily for the work that He has for us. Think about how the early church started. Soon after the death of Jesus, the disciples were huddled together, a group of 11 fearful men and women, hiding. And yet, after the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they were bold. They went wherever God told them to go, spoke boldly in the same synagogues to the same people who had crucified their Master. That boldness came as they submitted to the power and the will of God under His Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

## **3. The kingdom of God provides refuge and is a blessing to people.**

Just as the birds can come and nest in this mustard seed tree, so too, all of us, the kingdom of God that is present today, must be a place of refuge and care for people around us. We must

be a place where hurting people can come to. We must be a place where people who are lost can come and find God. We must be a place where there is always compassion and love. We must be that kind of a place that the kingdom of God and the church is – a place of refuge and blessing.

Psalm 91:1 *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”*

Matthew 11:28 *“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

That’s the place of the kingdom, beloved. Those are the characteristics of the kingdom that people must see in us as we claim to be citizens of God’s kingdom.

So, what’s our takeaway from this? There could be many that God plants upon your own hearts, but I would just say this because this was laid on my heart. maybe till now, you’ve never really given God what you have or what God has placed in you. Maybe you just kept it saying, “This is small, it has no value. It’s just something in the way I’m crafted together.” And maybe God is waiting for you to say, “Lord, this is a small thing. I have no idea what it can do. But Lord, Your word says that You can use it, that there’s nothing insignificant in the things that you give to us.”

Maybe today could be a day that you say, “Lord, would You take this thing that I thought was useless? Would You use it?” Or maybe today you’ve never really embodied the fact that you are a citizen of God’s kingdom. Think about it, beloved. If we say that we are Christians, then we are citizens of God’s kingdom. And in God’s kingdom, God rules. And His values must be translated into the values of the citizenry.

And the question for all of us today is: Are we citizens of God’s kingdom, true citizens of God’s kingdom? Are we fulfilling the mandate that God has, that His kingdom that is present now, is visible to people through His church? And that’s the question for us? As we look at our actions, our behavior, our thoughts, at the way we interact with people, can we say that I am a citizen of a holy God’s kingdom? And if the answer is no, I don’t think so. I think I’ve compromised that. Then, maybe today is a day for you to say, “Lord, I’m sorry for the way I’ve lived. Lord, would You forgive me? And would You bring cleansing and help me to be a true model citizen of Your kingdom?”

Let us pray.

Amen.

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