



TIME OF GRACE®

Jesus' Growth Plan for Me: When Average Moments Are Okay?

Study Notes

Summary

We live in a culture that often says bigger is better, as we easily dismiss the small and mundane as too insignificant to be powerful. But believing this common trope can be spiritually dangerous. Pastor Mike walks us through two of the smallest stories Jesus ever told that give us a really big message for the average moments of our spiritual lives.

- It is dangerous to dismiss _____.
- **Matthew 13:31-32** — 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.”
- Remember: “_____”.
- **Matthew 13:33** — ³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds^a of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

Points to Ponder

1. Ask a friend about the most important spiritual moments they have experienced. What might you say if they asked you the same question?
2. Read the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23). What connections do you see between that story and today's parables?

3. Challenge: Let at least one friend know about your home church's service times, or let them know how/where to watch Time of Grace. Good news deserves to be shared!

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 13: 44-46

Time of Grace Ministry
Jesus' Growth Plan for Me: When Average Moments Are Okay
Matthew 13:31-33
September 11, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

There are some moments in the Christian life that are powerful and they're beautiful and they're memorable. When you can feel the momentum of the people around you, it like trainwrecks your heart in all the best ways. Those are great moments, but in my experience, they are not frequent moments. Often when you go to church, you might look around and realize that if you wanted to you could kind of lay down, the pastor wouldn't even see you, you could catch a quick nap in the middle of the message, because there's a seat or two or ten. There's some Sundays, especially around here when the Packers are playing, where you check your phone, and you wonder if you're early because there's whole rows that you could take over if you wanted to. Sometimes you feel the energy like on an Easter weekend, but often times you don't. And you might get in your car after the worship service and wonder, "Well, that happened." But nothing incredible happened in your heart or in your mind, and, at least for me, it's hard in those moments to like get the energy up to preach and to believe and to trust that this is a really big important thing in the eyes of God. We love the mountain top spiritual experiences, but most of our spiritual experiences are not that. They're average. They're normal. They're this. And it's really, really important that you and I know what to do with moments like this.

Here's why I say that. We live in a culture here in America that often equates bigger with better, right? How many of you are YouTube kind of DIY project people? Searching for something to fix at home? So, you're looking for the right videos to get, and which videos do you pick? The one with the grainy footage and the 17 views? No, that's probably terrible. No. If it's, you know, how to change your car battery? Four million views, you click on that because you think bigger is better. Just like having a walk-in closet is better than squeezing a couple into a regular closet. Just like having two sinks instead of one might save some of your marriages. Just like having, you know, a bigger back yard. I think bigger is better. You want to watch something on Netflix. I mean, you could scroll through every single movie, or you could just check the top ten list and see what has the biggest engagements. We just live in a culture and it's not totally bad, but it teaches us in so many ways that bigger things are better things.

But today I want to tell you that that can be a dangerous thing. If we always assume that better comes with bigger, we might miss moments like this. Like average Sundays with the Word of God and with the people of God and that's a very, very dangerous thing. If you're taking notes at home or here in your programs, I'd love for you to write this down. It is very, very dangerous spiritually to dismiss small things. It's very tempting, it's incredibly natural, but Jesus is about to tell us how dangerous it is to dismiss small things. That regular moment with an open Bible, that mediocre church service, the worship where the music isn't going to win a Grammy and the pastor is kind of off his game. It is tempting but dangerous to dismiss small things.

And that's what Jesus wants to teach us today in two of the smallest stories he ever told. Let's look at Matthew 13:31: He, that's Jesus, told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 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."

I was at a restaurant two nights ago, I ordered the giant pretzel that they serve with a cup of little mustardy sauce, you ever seen one of those? That little black dot inside the mustard, that's a mustard seed. If Google is correct, the average mustard seed is 1-3 millimeters wide. There's big old sunflower seeds and massive pumpkin seeds. But not the mustard seed, it's so small that if you were sitting in the second row at church today you still couldn't see it. I think if my measurement was right, if you would take an average penny, find Abraham Lincoln's ear that's about the size of a mustard seed. And yet Jesus says, "Don't dismiss that nearly microscopic seed." Because it doesn't just grow a bit. Jesus says, "It grows a whole bunch." Doesn't happen the second you plant it, doesn't happen maybe even that month, but Jesus says, "When it grows it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree." The tiniest of garden seeds in Jesus' day didn't grow like your cilantro or like a nice tomato plant in the garden. It became even bigger than the shrubs around your apartment building. The average mustard tree is 10-12 feet tall. Feet! A tiny seed you could barely see isn't half of me or all of me, or this much of me. Standing jump I can touch the bottom of a basketball rim so we're going, it's like... Oh! Like right about there is a small mustard tree. And if my math is right even though a mustard seed 3 millimeters in diameter grows a thousand times its original size to become a small 10-foot mustard tree, what's Jesus point? Don't judge a book by its cover and don't judge the spiritual impact of God by the original size of the moment. If you're a person who gets impressed by the big thing, the tree where the birds come and find shade in its branches then in the kingdom of God you should probably be impressed with the small thing that it came from.

Actually, makes me think of this. A few months ago with our media ministry partner Time of Grace, we published this little book called 'How To Heal.' It was a book about a number of messages we gave on the topic of abuse. And a woman apparently picked up this book and she worked through its messages and some of the journal entries and she got to page 98, where we asked this, "How does simply admitting that abuse is a problem give hope to the abused?" And she emailed the office at Time of Grace and wanted to tell us the answer that she wrote in the lines of this booklet. This is what she said. "Your question on page 98 made me feel loved and it helped me to seek a Christian counsellor instead of acting on my suicide plan." Now, that is a big thing. Can you imagine if this poor woman would have acted on it? Can you imagine the person that would have found her the next day? Can you imagine the memorial service where confused family and friends would have shaken their heads in shock and wondered and felt guilty about what they said or didn't say, what they did or didn't do? Can you imagine how hard that would have been?

But it did not happen. Instead, this woman continued to be alive and breathing, she continued knowing that she was loved and that God understood. She reached out to someone that would help her heal from the trauma that she had been through. That is a massive work of God and do

you know how it all started? Didn't start with this book, it didn't start with me, didn't start with this, didn't start with a staff of 15 people, 28 television networks, three national stations, You Version, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube. It didn't start with any of that. It started, actually, in a seafood restaurant. Have you heard the story yet? Couple Christian guys, they were down in Florida and they were studying media ministry. They go out to a seafood restaurant and one of them says to the rest of them, "Why not? Why not? We don't know who the pastor is going to be, we don't know how much money it's going to take, we don't even have the equipment but why not try." And so they did. That little mustard seed of a question, "Why not?" led them to reach out to a pastor that they all respected named Mark Jeske. He led them to reach out to a local Christian college who donated all their camera equipment to help them start it. On a single station in Milwaukee, a ministry called Time of Grace began. Did those men have any clue that 20 years later that little seed would grow into a tree, that a little bird with a broken wing would sit in its branches and make it? They had no idea. But in the kingdom of our God, great big things start so, so small. And friends, God's still doing that exact same thing. It's easy for me to tell an inspiring story like that and say, "Yes, God does amazing things." But you know who had no clue? The guys in the seafood restaurant. And I wanted to tell you that today not so that you can just look back on the big blessings of your life, but so that you will learn not to dismiss small things in the kingdom of God.

I just want to give you a little bit of help and a little bit of homework. Write this down, too. I want you to remember this phrase for the rest of this week. The phrase is "Mustard seed moment." When you are reading the word of God, when you are praying to the Holy God, when you are inviting someone to hear about the son of God, when you are trying to disciple your kids in the way of God, when something seems so small, so average, so mediocre, so stuttering and stumbling, I want you just to tell yourself in a quiet voice "This is a mustard seed moment."

That's why we are going to practice today. I'm going to describe a rather average situation in the life of an average Christian and it's going to seem very small, like a story I shouldn't be telling in church. But at the end of that story, I'm going to say, "But it's a... And I'm going to point to you and you're all going to say... You're going to say, "Mustard seed moment." Just like that. Normally, when I do this in church, people do real strong after the first one and then about the fourth one they're like, "Yeah, okay, we get it, we get it." But you're different than that, right? You're not the average. So, you're going to say with all your passion, "No, it's a big thing." The kingdom of God, those big things that start in small moments like this. Think you can do that for me? Alright.

So, you go home this week and it's Monday morning and you grab your phone in bed, and the Bible app gives you the verse of the day and you read it, and doesn't zing you. And your brain doesn't immediately say, "Ah, I needed this right now. Oh, my goodness, this is so good." In fact, by the time you're in the shower or brushing your teeth, you've probably forgotten the thing that you read which would tempt you to think, "Does it matter at all?" Except, you're going to remember that it's a...

Congregation: "Mustard seed moment."

It's a mustard seed moment. Or, you're at your job and you're trying to let your light shine and the doors aren't opening and no one is asking you about your faith. It's been a whole nine months since you've invited anyone to come to this place and you're starting to feel like maybe God's going to use other people and not you. But before you think that you're pointless in the kingdom of God, you remember that our God loves to work through a . . . "mustard seed moment". Yeah.

Or, you're sitting there with your kid and you honestly think in the moment, he's demon possessed. And he's acting like he doesn't have a spine and you're trying to keep him there. I used to do this to my daughters, like, how tightly can I squeeze them before Jesus gets mad? Like, "No! We're reading the Bible right now, alright." And you finally put the kids in bed, they're mad, you're frustrated and you think, "What are we doing? How do other parents do it?" And you think that God has nothing to do with what just happened but then you remember that it's a . . . "mustard seed moment".

And then you come to church and you open the bulletin and the songs aren't your favorite songs and the pastor gets up and you just -- It's not the best, alright. You're here, you're checking the box and you're tempted to say, "Okay, maybe I should just stay at home. Maybe I should just start podcasting this later. Maybe I don't need to be an 'every Sunday in church' kind of person." But before that thought takes root in your heart, another thought takes root in your heart, that this is a . . . "mustard seed moment". And you don't have to shout it, friends, but I want you to remember it.

Listen to his words in Matthew 13:33: "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.'" Now, I have to confess, I kind of knew what yeast was before this message, but now I really don't. Yeast, I learned from searching the internet is a fungus that makes bread delicious. Some of you science types know this better. Yeast essentially eats up sugars and after eating the sugars -- I don't know it's like a chemical burp but it shoots out like a gas that makes unleavened bread leavened, it rises. If you had communion bread, it's kind of like dense and thick because it doesn't have yeast in it. A good loaf of bread on a beautiful sandwich has yeast that has made it fluffy because there are these little air bubbles and pockets within there. And Jesus picks up on this analogy. He says this woman took 60 pounds of flour, that's a lot of flour. And she works in just a little bit of yeast. And just like the mustard seed, a little bit makes a big difference. But here's this phrase I don't want you to miss from Jesus' words. He says, "It worked all through the dough."

Yeast, in other words, is not like chocolate chips in banana bread. Can I take a bite, "Oh, there's one." Take another bite, "Eh, nothing there." Take a bite, "Oh, there's a couple of them." Little bits scattered about. Yeast is like one of those ingredients that every bite you take has yeast. It works according to Jesus, "All through the dough." And that's what God's kingdom is like. But when Jesus comes into your life, when you become a Christian, when you follow him, when he is your King, he is your Lord, your Savior. Jesus isn't just like one little part of your life. He works through all of it. He has no interest in being a part-time king in your heart. He has never once been just the Sunday habit of one of his saved people. He doesn't want to be like fantasy football that you think about sometimes and there is a season and there is an off season.

No, just like yeast works through the whole batch of dough, the kingdom of God is meant to work through the whole entirety of your life. So, the way you think, is Jesus. The way you speak, shaped by Jesus. What drives you at work, that's Jesus. How do you handle your sexuality or your feelings about your gender, that's Jesus. What do I do with this money? Jesus, tell me. What do I do with my time? Jesus, guide me. Should I get married? How should I get married? How should I treat my husband? How should I treat my wife? What should I think about my mom? Should I forgive people? I don't really like my boss, my neighbor is a hand-full, what should I do with all these things?" The answer is always... Jesus. He's not a part of our life, he's all of it. Relational, sexual, financial, vocational, all of it is Jesus because just like a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough, the kingdom of God does, too.

So, here's my question. Does that sound hard? Or does that make you pretty happy? If you said hard, I'd say, "Yup." What is so tempting for humans is to put Jesus in this little square of our life that just happens to be pretty convenient. And Jesus refuses to be contained, right. It's like there are certain people in your life, maybe your family, maybe your mom, maybe your dad, maybe your ex, maybe your neighbor, maybe that one guy that -- You know, there are certain people I like, people I love for sure, I forgive people; I'm in. Be patient with people. But then there's ... then there's that person, right? And we want to love our neighbor, but we want to have a little asterisk at the end we and you look down at the bottom of the Bible page and it says, "except that guy," obviously. Now, friends, Jesus is not a chocolate chip, he's like yeast and he spreads to every person and he says yes, friend, even him, even her. Love him, be patient with her, and we want to say, "Jesus, have you met him?" and Jesus says, "Uh-huh, I made him. I know more about his badness than you do. I've seen all of it, you've only seen some of it."

And here's what I'm saying to you. The kingdom of God gets in all, to all of it. We've done a bunch of surveys on younger Christians in the church and we are finding that one of the biggest problems is the desire to compartmentalize Jesus into their life. Alright. I'm in a prayer, I'll go to church, I'll read my Bible, I'm grateful for the cross, for forgiveness. But this stuff and this parable, Jesus is saying no. There are no barriers, there are no boundaries. I want all of it, all of it, all of it.

Here's my honest question for you. Is there some of it that you don't want Jesus to get to? And if so, Jesus wants to share a one verse story with you. The kingdom of God is like yeast and it works through the whole batch of dough. However, if you answer my original question, not with 'that sounds hard' but 'that makes me really happy', I would say, "Me too."

The fact that the kingdom of God is like yeast means there is not a single square inch of your story where King Jesus doesn't show up and forgive. The sins that you have committed and are embarrassed about, he works with the whole batch of dough. The parts of your sexual past that you can't undo and just the thought of that makes you feel so unworthy and so less than and so undeserving of his love, he gets to that too. The broken relationships from your past, the divorce, the things your father did not say to you when you were little, he's not running away from that.

His love works through the whole batch of dough. I can tell you this, friends, that sin that you still think about today, Jesus shows up there and he puts it underneath his royal sandal and he rules with all of his authority because he is the king of this kingdom and there is no one that can stand against him.

So, I want to declare to you in the name of the King, there is nothing you have said or done or thought. There's no place that you have been that Jesus does not show up and give his whole forgiveness for the entirety of your life. Yes, he's a 24/7 king and that means he comes 24/7 with grace. And he has given a divine decree that you are forgiven in his name, you are okay with God, and that will never ever change.

So, friends, the next time you open this book at home and nothing magical happens, the next time you turn on your TV and watch a program that you don't save and share with a friend, the next time you show up in this place and there are enough seats to lay down and take a nap, don't. Because according to this God, this amazing king, the biggest things in the universe start like a mustard seed. Let's pray.

God, I thank you for this moment. I don't know if I'll remember this moment in a few days. I don't know if next Sunday people will remember what this Sunday's message was about but this is your word and it never comes back empty. It achieves the purpose for which you sent it. And just like the snow comes down in the winter and doesn't immediately produce beautiful flowers, it takes some time. We believe that you'll do the same thing with this message. This will melt into the soil of our hearts and some time in some way you'll change us and you'll bless us and you'll be good to us.

Thank you, God, for that promise and we're reminded every time that we share our faith, every time we come to church, every time we open the book in our homes, every time we pull out the app, every time we teach our children and our grandchildren about you, it's always worth it. Thank you, God, that we don't need to be a megachurch, we don't have to be the biggest, the best. We just use our gifts, our abilities, our personalities and we talk to each other about your son and great things happen. We love the fact that you're the God that reaches to the bottom. You climb up to the mountains and celebrate with the greatest and you get down in the valleys and reach the least, that's why we love you.

Father Jesus, I thank you for your grace. For all those moments we dismissed your word, thank you for covering that in your love and your blood. As we leave here today, inspire us even more and more to cling to your word, to have good roots in your name that maybe not today, or tomorrow, but in time, you would produce the fruit of love, of joy, of peace.

We ask all these things with confidence because we know you, we love you and we trust you. We ask it all in your name and all God's people said Amen.