

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast

Matthew 13:31-35

January 27, 2019

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The two points of my message today are:

- Faith must have a starting point
- Don't compare the size of your faith to others

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:31-32

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."

EXPLANATION: It is presumed that Jesus was talking about the black mustard seed which is incredibly small. It's about 1 or 2 millimeters, about four to eight hundredths of an inch.

Mustard plants were normally not planted in gardens, but in fields, with a growth of around nine feet or so. One commentator said that is it unlikely that birds would perch in a normal mustard plant, and Jesus used this expression to describe an extraordinary plant.

SCRIPTURE: 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."

EXPLANATION: Jesus didn't explain what yeast does to a dough, because he didn't need to. Everyone would have known.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:34-35

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

FAITH MUST HAVE A STARTING POINT

EXPLANATION: The listeners to Jesus’ parables must have realized Jesus was telling them that a little faith is better than no faith at all. They weren’t able to heal those who were blind, deaf, or mute; they weren’t able to turn water into wine, they weren’t able really to do anything except be subjects of the Roman Empire – or so they thought.

It’s common for us to second guess our faith, or lack thereof. It’s common for us to believe that we don’t have the faith to do much of anything.

ILLUSTRATION: I’ve shared with you about a couple of people I know who say they want to believe that Jesus is the Savior, they want to have faith in him, but they just cannot get there. My guess is because they think they need an extraordinary amount of faith – massive amounts. They may have heard about the dramatic conversion experiences of others and think theirs must be the same. (I remember once a man asked me if I saw a light when I was saved like his aunt saw when she was saved. I said no.) The truth is even small faith in Jesus is saving faith.

APPLICATION: The size of your faith might be the size of a mustard seed or some yeast, it might be so small that most would never see it. It might be so small that even you don’t see it or might easily disregard it. Until the mustard seed is planted or until the yeast is mixed with the flour – they’re dormant. The difference between having the makings of faith and putting faith to work is action – taking that step into the unknown, taking that risk.

ILLUSTRATION: Let's think about the mustard seed and the yeast. If a gardener realized what could happen with one seed, then he or she knows what would happen with two seeds, and so on. If a cook realized what could happen with yeast in sixty pounds of dough, then he or she knows what would happen with a hundred twenty pounds of dough. In the business world, it's called profit! Last week, I spoke about servants who were entrusted with bags of gold by their master. One of them did not put the gold to work, he just buried it to keep it safe. The others put theirs to work and made a profit!

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine retired earlier than most people. He told me the secret to investing was the Rule of 72... I'll leave it to you to look that up. He drove a truck for UPS for a living and listened to radio programs about money. His best advice for investing for the future is to start. He said people are waiting until the right time to start investing. They are waiting until they have a nice sum of money before they invest. He said that was wrong thinking – you have to just start, now. A dollar not invested is a dollar not invested.

APPLICATION: I used money as an illustration...but what Jesus was talking about was the kingdom of God. Your investment in the kingdom of God is what's really important. Life is short. We are here for only a while.

There is a famous poem by C. T. Studd – listen to a verse of it.

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
And when I am dying, how happy I'll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee.*

Don't worry about the small size of your faith – if you believe it is small. Put your faith to work and trust God that he'll take your mustard seed faith and turn it into something great.

DON'T COMPARE THE SIZE OF YOUR FAITH WITH OTHERS

EXPLANATION: Notice how Jesus spoke about one gardener and one cook. He didn't speak about a group of gardeners or cooks in competition. Competition TV shows are popular today... cooking competitions, fashion design competitions and so on. When my kids were younger and still at home, they'd try to guess who'd win. I think my son Aaron was the best guesser. Since those programs are pre-recorded, he'd take into account the camera angles and other things.

In the parable, Jesus spoke of the faith of one gardener, not in competition with anyone, and one cook not in competition with anyone. Picture the farmer looking at the speck of a seed and knowing what it could do. If his vision was poor, he would not know if it was seed or a grain of sand. Picture the cook looking at the yeast and knowing what it could do. The only way they could have known would have been if they had witnessed it before. To them, the outcome was predictable.

They would do what they knew to do – planting the seed and kneading the dough, by themselves, and they would eagerly wait to see what happened.

ILLUSTRATION: Now, use your imagination for a moment. What if the gardener compared his speck of a seed with the gardener down the road who had an orchard of mustard plants? He or she would have thought, "I can never compete." What if the cook had compared her sixty pounds of dough with the large bakery down the road that had been in business for years? He or she would have thought, "I can never compete."

APPLICATION: Take the faith God has instilled in you – as small as it may be – examine it, consider that it's from him, don't compare it to anyone else's faith – and put it to work.

Here is a truth that you can take home with you today: God is going to challenge your faith in different ways than he is going to challenge mine. God knows where my faith is lacking, and he'll challenge me that way. God knows where my faith is strong, and he'll challenge me in that as well. If you were challenged with the mustard-seed- and yeast-sized faith years ago and you've moved on to greater

things – that’s great... just make sure you don’t become arrogant about it. Always remember your small beginnings, your small steps of faith.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:6

Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

ILLUSTRATION: In the early 1800s, Adoniram Judson was the first protestant missionary from North America to preach the Gospel in Burma. His step of faith to become a missionary began like all our steps of faith begin. He had a thought which he nurtured, and eventually, he took a step of faith and went to preach to the Burmese. It was six years before he had one convert, but after his death at age 62, it is believed his determination led to the conversion of some 200,000 people. Today we have some of his spiritual descendants right here. Probably most Burmese Christians have never heard of Adoniram Judson.

APPLICATION: And the same with you – somewhere in your past, someone dug a well you are drinking from today. Someone planted that mustard seed of faith and now, like the birds that nest in the tree, you are nesting in something you did not plant. Someone else did it. A decision you make today could affect your family tree for many generations or eternally. Taking a small step of faith today could result in the conversions of people in the next generation, or the next.

Don’t compare your faith with others – move with the faith you have. Even if it’s as small as a mustard seed.

What will you do with your small faith?

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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