

Aiming to glorify God by calling and equipping people to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ

From Small Beginnings.....

When standing in our kitchen recently I was reminded of two things. First, that great growth can come from very small beginnings. Second, that small things can have a significant effect.

Through the kitchen window I can see our vegetable patch. Only a few weeks ago there was apparently nothing apart from the freshly dug soil. I wondered if the tiny seeds that had been planted would really produce anything. But already the growth has been great. We now we have lettuces ready to eat and other plants growing well.

On a kitchen surface sits the bread maker. Each time I use it, I see the considerable effect of yeast. Just a small quantity of the yeast will cause a large lump of dough to rise into a tasty loaf.

In the light of two short parables of Jesus', I find these things a great encouragement. Do we ever think that God's Kingdom seems small, particularly in the UK? If this is ever the case, then Jesus wants His followers to know that His Kingdom may have small beginnings, but will have a huge end result. He says,

"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 your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." (Matthew 13:31 & 32).

At the time when Jesus was first teaching this, the mustard seed was used as an example of the smallest of all plant seeds. The mustard seed, however, grows into one of the largest of the garden plants. It can be about 12 feet (4 metres high) - big enough for birds to land on it.

Jesus is not here stressing how big the final plant is. If He had wanted to do this, then he could have spoken about something like a massive cedar. No, what he was stressing is the connection between the tiny mustard seed which produces an immensely larger mustard plant, a tree. This helps us to see how much His Kingdom will grow.

Following on from this, Jesus' second parable tells us that God's Kingdom has small, insignificant beginnings, but widespread final effects.

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:33).

In bread making, only a little yeast is needed compared with the total amount of bread mixture. If the yeast is worked into the mixture then it will affect the whole batch of dough. The effects are powerful. If you've ever seen dough rising, then you'll know that it's quite extraordinary. But, you can't actually see the yeast itself at work. In the same way, just because we don't always see the Gospel working, that doesn't mean that it isn't working.

It began in Jerusalem with a few disciples. It spread out to Judea and Samaria. By the end of the NT it had reached Rome in the west and the far edges of Asia Minor in the east. Later God's Kingdom reached the far reaches to the planet, even to places like Enfield!

So how does God's Kingdom grow? It's clear from the rest of Matthew chapter 13 that it's when God's word is taught. It happens when people gather to study the Bible. It happens when youngsters attend church groups and are taught from God's Word. It happens when parents read the Bible and pray with their children.

These things might not look very flashy or impressive. In fact, it's about as flashy and impressive as a mustard seed growing or as yeast working through a pile of dough. If we ever feel discouraged in Gospel work, then remember: great growth can come from very small beginnings and that small things can have a significant effect.

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