



# KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

The Kingdom of Heaven is Growing  
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Matthew 13:31-35

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*Introduction // The Exclusive Kingdom (24-30, 47-50)*

Last week we learned that the kingdom of God is an outwardly-complicated kingdom. The two parables that bookend this section of Matthew's Gospel tell us that the kingdom of God *looks* all mixed up. In one parable it's described as a kingdom of weeds and wheat; and in the other one (which comes later in verses 47-50), it's a mixed catch of fish, with some good and some bad. But last week we learned that that's temporary. Because while (for now) the weeds grow with the wheat and the carp swim with the trout, we're told that God is going to sort that all out. Both parables teach that at the end of the age (at the end of this world order), there'll be a **separation** of the righteous and the wicked.

That was the first thing Jesus taught in this group of parables that are almost like a parable sandwich, in between the two judgement parables - wheat-and-weeds / carp-and-trout. That forms a section, but in the middle we get some more information about the kingdom.

*The Growing Kingdom (24-33)*

You see first we learned that there were four different reactions to God's kingdom. Then we learned about how God's kingdom is complicated: weeds + wheat, carp + trout. The *third* thing we learn about God's kingdom is that it is a **growing** kingdom.

You see, in each of these parables, the kingdom of God, when Jesus talks about it...it starts off *little*. It's like seeds sown in a field...this bare field with freshly tilled dirt - you chuck in these seeds and it's *nothing* compared to what it's going to be when the wheat hits full height. Or a mustard seed sown in a garden, or a packet of yeast mixed into some flour. It doesn't start big.

It's true, isn't it? I mean the reality is that it starts out with one man and his 12 followers walking the backroads of Galilee. But it doesn't stay that way, does it? No, it grows into something very big.

Over the last few weeks we've seen that the good seeds of the kingdom grow into wheat, or into fruit. This week, there's two more parables that drive home that sense of *growth*. Jesus says in verse 31:

*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and [it] becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.*

You see what he's saying? It starts out with one tiny seed - like a flower seed, but it grows into a tree. The kingdom of God starts small, but it grows.

The next *short* parable says pretty much the same thing in a similar way:

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven (or yeast) that a woman took and mixed into fifty pounds of flour until all of it was leavened.

It starts out small, but it *grows*. The bakers amongst us will know that when you mix leaven (or yeast) into bread, it

grows. And did you notice the detail? Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that is mixed into **50 pounds of flour**—that's a lot of dough! 22 kilos! And it spreads through the whole lot and leavens it all, and it has just this massive growing effect through this monster bread loaf. And Jesus says, that's what the kingdom is like. It starts small, but it *grows*.

And it's true, isn't it? It is! You see, for most of recorded history, religion was *small*. It was *local*, you know, like locals-only surf spots. It was about where you lived. And the nations - the nations on earth, they all had their own gods, and Israel had her God. And sure, a Pharaoh or two may have learned to fear Yahweh (Exodus). Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and Cyrus of Persia learned to revere God's Name. But their lessons were *quickly* forgotten. And generally Egypt had Egyptian gods, Rome had Greek gods, and Babylon had Babylonian gods. But that all changed with Jesus and the Christians. And all of a sudden, the message of the kingdom of God shot from Jerusalem to the ends of the known world within a lifetime.

See it starts out small, but it grows. And you know, that's important to notice. It's a great reminder for us. Because I don't know about you, but I find it's easy in the doom and gloom of our age to think that it *won't* grow. But it **has** and it *does*. And it *will*.

Like leavened bread dough. Or like a mustard seed, growing into a tree. The kingdom of God will grow.

But not just for its own sake.

That's not all there is to say. Because, yes, there's the obvious: the kingdom grows from small to big. But did you notice that in that first image - the mustard seed and the

tree, there's a bit more detail? Have another look at verse 32: it says the little seed grows into a tree... ***so that:*** Cause and effect. It doesn't just grow because it grows, it grows with an outcome. It grows **so that...** *the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.*

And that's really interesting, because I didn't twig to this when I first read it either, but...that's an Old Testament reference.

This image isn't a new one with Jesus; it's actually one from the Old Testament.

It goes back to the story of King Nebuchednezzar of Babylon and the book of Daniel. Because in Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchednezzar has a dream where there's this *huuuge* tree that he sees. And one of the things that he notices about this tree is that it's a shelter for wild animals, and the birds of the sky live in its branches, and every creature was fed from it (4:12). It's a beautiful image. And in explaining the dream, Daniel explains that the tree represents the great king – Nebuchednezzar; he's the tree that provides so much blessing. But there's bad news for the tree. Because in the dream, God warns that because of Nebuchednezzar's pride, God would cut him down to size. And he does.

That's one of the references to this idea of a tree that provides refuge and shelter and blessing to the birds of the heavens.

Then later in the Bible, we get talk of a tree again, but this time it's God's tree. You see in Ezekiel 17, God promises that one day he will establish this kind of tree. In Ezekiel 17:22, God says: *I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar. [Just a sprig!] I will plant it, and under it every kind of bird will live.* This is God's plan; he's going to plant a

tree from a small, small part; just a sprig, or a mustard seed. It's a promise that God's going to do something new in this world, in his way, and from the smallest part of a tree (a sprig) he'll provide for the blessing of the whole earth. The small, mustard-sized kingdom of Jesus is going to be the way that the Creator and his Creation are brought back into relationship, and the way that the world is blessed. Isn't that awesome?

I think it is, and I hope you do too.

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But at this point, it's worth asking, *can we trust Jesus' promise?*

Can we trust what he says about the kingdom and how it will bless the world?

Well...it *should* be easy to answer that, don't you think? Because we don't just have what he says here on the page, do we? I mean we have that, and that's the most important thing. But also, 2,000 years later we have...*history*. And we can look back and see *how* what Jesus promised has been fulfilled. Because the kingdom *may* have started small...but now Jesus is known and is hoped-in from Memphis to Mumbai, from Hobart to Hong Kong to Honningsvåg, Norway. Jesus has brought hope in all the world. And that tree has grown *huge!*

So we know God keeps his promises, because we know he **has** kept his promise.

And I don't know about you, but for me, that gives me hope... even in hard times. Because there can be hard times, can't there? There can be. The tree can look a bit sick. Like, you know those *native* trees, they say you get 20

years and then they get ratty...I think we can *feel* like the church is like that.

We can. And if not us, certainly our *culture* could feel like the church is like that. I mean how *on-the-nose* is church in this last five years? There's been Royal Commissions and divisive politics in the States and all kinds of reasons why my generation and others could feel like...*this tree doesn't look healthy!*

But...that's not how Jesus sees it and that's not what he promised, is it? Jesus promised that he would grow the kingdom and that the kingdom would bless the world, and that one day he'd root out the weeds from the wheat. And he's kept his promises so far, so I think we can be confident that he'll keep on doing that.

I mean, what do you think?

Can we trust his promise? I think we can. Because what he said *would* happen, *did* happen. So we know that what he says *will* happen; it **will** happen.

## Application

So let's draw it all together: What does this passage mean for us, now? Well the parables that Jesus tells us show us what the kingdom of heaven is like. We've learned that there are different reactions to it. We've learned that it's sometimes a confusing and mixed kingdom (but—God will judge). And today we're reminded that the kingdom of heaven is growing: so we can have *faith!* Because Jesus keeps his promises.

And he has! In the ancient world, Christianity started off *little before* it became the faith of an **Empire**. And the Union Jack in the top left of our Nation's flag has at least *three* Christian

crosses in it. It's easy to feel like that's the past and like we're living in the decline. But Jesus reminds us that God's kingdom grows; so have *faith*.

And look for how God is building his kingdom. Because, yes, it's a mixed kingdom and there are the good and the bad alongside each other but...*it is also* a vehicle for blessing in the world. And we know that that's true, and that when we live Jesus' way it is *so good* for us *and* for others. So let's live Jesus way, as we're part of his kingdom.

But what does it mean if you're here and you're not Christian? What does it mean for your non-Christian neighbour or family? Well I think it means...come to Jesus! *Encourage them to come to Jesus*. Like it sounds simple, but it's so simple we need to say it so we remember: God built his kingdom so *that* the world would be blessed. It's like a tree whose branches are for shelter and rest for the birds of the air. And you can find that in Jesus.

He says, *come to me, you who are wearied and heavy-burdened, and I will give you rest for your souls*. So come to Jesus! Trust in him...and you will find rest. *Hallelujah!*