

Little Is Much When God is in It – Matthew 13:31-35

Introduction: If you are like me, sometimes you get discouraged. I have been a pastor for ten years now, and in the ministry for 27 years, and in that time I've preached somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,600 sermons, taught about 1,000 Bible Studies, conducted about 30 weddings and about 70 funerals. Now, I know that pales in comparison to a lot of preachers you and I know who have been in the ministry for 30, 40, even 50 years. But I am sure at some point just about every one of them have asked themselves the same question I have asked: "*What good am I doing?*" Sometimes as I look out over all faces and think back over the years, I wonder what has been going on in the hearts of the people I've tried to minister to. And I have to ask myself, "*Has any of it really had any impact on their lives?*"

I guess, at times, we tend measure our accomplishments in this life by the world's standards. We want to see results! That's what we're taught: Make a profit! Build Equity! Expand the Business! Create Market Share! We want more of the tangible things that we can see!

But sometimes, you just have trouble seeing it. Sometimes, no matter how hard you have worked; no matter what you do, it's hard to see any accomplishments. Or even the things you do see, seem so small and insignificant.

This is especially true in the area of our service for the Lord. Teachers can teach a class for 20 years, and graduate pupil after pupil, and maybe about 10% of them tell you they appreciate you. Deacons can serve for 20 years, and most of the time all you hear is complaints rather than compliments. Musicians can use their talents in service for the Lord and oftentimes only receive a cursory hand clap. But has there been any fruit? Have we done any good whatsoever, or have we just been wasting our time?

Do you see how our efforts for God can be attacked by Satan? Do you see how discouragement can set in? The perception of a lack of results can make even the most solid of Christians become disappointed and discouraged to the point where they begin to wonder, "*What good am I doing?*"

Ironically, did you know that even the ministry of Jesus was a disappointment to a lot of people? The Jews expected their Messiah to come and unite the people, build a political base, gather a mighty army, destroy the

Romans, and re-establish Israel to their rightful place as a world power. They were looking for big things. They wanted glory and power because they believed that this was the way God worked but instead they got Jesus.

They got a baby born in a stable in the dirty little town of Bethlehem. They got a boy who was raised in little insignificant place of nobodies called Nazareth. They got an itinerant preacher who was resisted by the religious leaders and ignored by most of the political leaders. They got a guy who could only attract a small group of followers who were nothing more than uneducated fishermen, tax collectors and other social outcasts. This didn't look like any Kingdom of God they had envisioned. This wasn't anything close to being successful. Therefore, God couldn't be in it because it wasn't big enough. It wasn't powerful enough. It couldn't be successful.

Well, it's this very perception that Jesus set out to correct. And we need to hear it today because people still tend to be drawn toward the bigger things and forsake the smaller things.

There is a song my Mom and Dad used to sing called "*Little Is Much When God is in It.*" The third and fourth verses say:

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

*Are you laid aside from service,
Body worn from toil and care?
You can still be in the battle,
In the sacred place of prayer.*

*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.*

That is what the two Parables in our text are all about. Let's look at the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast found in Matthew 13: 31-35.

These two parables are about potential. The Army's recruiting slogan is "*Be All You Can Be!*" It's a good tool for recruiting young men and women who want to reach their potential. Potentially, God created every child of His to be successful. As we say, God don't make no junk!

George Bernard Shaw the famed Irish playwright was once asked the question: "*If you could live your life over and be any person from history, who would you be?*"

He said, "*I would choose to be the man George Bernard Shaw could have been, but never was.*"

I hope we would all want to be the very best we could be and all that God created us to be. But sometimes, because we've been beaten down, dumped on, defeated, and discouraged, we find ourselves at the point of giving up.

In these parables, Jesus is revealing what the Kingdom of God is like. Someone has said that the expression "*kingdom of God*" refers to the establishment of the purposes of God. If that is true, then Jesus is saying "*This is how God works to establish His purposes in the world.*" First I think Jesus wanted His disciples to recognize that

1. Things are not always as they appear.

Once a lady was flying from Seattle to San Francisco, but the plane was diverted to Sacramento along the way. The flight attendant explained that there would be a delay, and if the passengers wanted to get off they would re-board in an hour.

Everybody got off the plane except one lady who was blind. She had her seeing-eye dog laying beside her.

When the pilot disembarked, he stopped and said, "*Maam, I am the pilot, we're going to be here for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?*" The blind lady declined the offer, but she said, "*But maybe my dog Buddy would like to stretch his legs.*"

All the people in the gate area came to a complete standstill when they looked up and saw the pilot walk off the plane with a seeing eye dog!

When it comes to what we do in service to the Lord, we have to remember; things are not always as they appear. Those things that others may deem insignificant, unimportant, God is actually using to accomplish His

purposes. Jesus shared this with His disciples so that they wouldn't compare the things they were doing to the things others do who think bigger is better.

As we stated in the beginning of this message, the tendency is for us to compare ourselves to what the world says is success. And when we do that, it's natural to jump to conclusions and think of ourselves as unsuccessful or unimportant. But there are no unimportant tasks in God's service. There are no small things in God's Kingdom. Little is much when God is in it. Jesus was reminding the disciples that they were like the mustard seed, they may seem tiny and insignificant, but these same men would later literally turn the world upside down.

What does this mean for us? It means that when we get down on ourselves and begin to wonder if we're doing any good or if we're having any impact, we have to be careful not to evaluate our success or significance on size, numbers, power or prominence. We tend to think that God must be in those things because they are bigger and more significant and that God must not be in what is small and insignificant by man's standards. The lesson from the mustard seed the lesson of the yeast teaches us otherwise. Things are not always as they appear!

Satan would like nothing better than for us to believe that our lives will never amount to much, or that we'll accomplish anything great. He wants to discourage us as much as possible so we'll give up.

The prophet Elijah let discouragement creep in to his life, and it almost cost him his life. In **1 Kings 19:10-13**, we find that Elijah got discouraged and was ready to quit because he thought nothing of significance had come from his ministry. He was looking for a mighty moving of God but he didn't see it. He was only looking for big things so God gave Elijah a spiritual lesson. He had Elijah go to a cave and then there was a powerful wind, but the "*Lord was not in the wind*" and then there was a mighty earthquake but the "*Lord was not in the earthquake*" and then there was a fire, but the "*Lord was not in the fire.*" The Lord wasn't in any of these big things, but then there was a "*gentle whisper*", a "*still small voice*" and Elijah went to the entrance of the cave because the Lord was in this small, insignificant thing. God was telling Elijah "*I am working mightily but you haven't seen it because you have only looked for me in the big things.*" Elijah was evaluating his ministry based on size. Do you see the point? If you think that bigger is better you'll be looking for God in the sensational and miss Him working through the small things.

This is why a lot of Christians give up or don't give it their all because they don't see what God is doing in those small things. Sometimes, size can become a discouragement. Second, Jesus wanted His disciple to understand that:

2. God Works through small things.

Jesus says that God's working is like a "*mustard seed*" which is a very small seed, "*yet when it grows,*" it becomes a very large plant – big enough for the birds to perch in.

Did you know that it takes 20,000 mustard seeds to weigh just one ounce? It is a very, very small seed. Jesus used the mustard seed on another occasion to talk about how little faith it would take to move a big ole mountain. But in the context of this parable the emphasis is not on our faith but on how God works in establishing His purposes. God works through small things.

But I believe the emphasis here is not just on the fact that God works through small things, but that He can do some mighty things through small things. Jesus said here that in spite of its small size, the mustard seed produces the largest of the garden plants grown in that area. According to the Bible Background Commentary, (pg. 83), the plant can potentially reach a height of 10-15 feet, and thus be large enough to provide a place for birds to rest in its branches as Jesus alluded to.

Success doesn't depend on size! Just like big plant can grow out of an insignificant seed, God can do the same with us. We may not be a large church. We may not have a 200 voice choir, or a million dollar budget. We may not have a lot of big shots on the roll, but hey, a big shot is just a little shot that kept on shooting, right? So, let's not get discouraged because we're small. Let's be encouraged because God works through small things.

I want to illustrate this point with four examples from scripture. The first is found in Ex 4:2. God asked Moses what he had in his hand, and Moses answered "*A rod.*" It was actually Moses' shepherds crook. It was what he used to shepherd the sheep. But when it was taken up in faith, it became the rod of God. Look at the potential. A simple stick became the sign of God's power.

Next, notice what Samson used. In the book of Judges, we are told that he took up the jawbone of a dead animal and killed a thousand men with it. A piece of decaying bone had the potential to defeat the enemy when it was in the right hands.

The same was true in the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. There we are told how David took a small stone and killed the giant. Again, we see the potential of putting yourself in the right hands. A teenager, in the hands of God defeated the enemy of all Israel.

Then finally, notice how God used a small lunch of five loaves of bread and two fishes. Jesus fed five thousand men besides all the women and children, with a little boy's lunch. Do you see the potential of something small in the right hands?

Look around your church! Think of the potential of this small church if we all were to put ourselves in God's hands?

No matter how insignificant you may feel. No matter how out of place, or out of touch with reality you may feel. When you submit yourself to the hand of God, you can do anything. Paul wrote in **Philippians 4:13** (NIV) *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

You say preacher, I'm nothing. I can't do anything. But you can if you'll only submit, and be willing to be used of God. That is when you have the potential to do mighty things for God.

What could God do with you if you allowed Him to use you? I'll tell you what He's done in the past; God took Moses, the murderer, and transformed him into Moses, the leader of Israel. God took David, the adulterer, and transformed him into the writer of the book of Psalms. God took Saul, who was a persecutor and murderer of Christians, saved him, changed his name to Paul, and made him an Apostle, who gave us 13 books of the New Testament.

Conclusion: In the movie, "Facing the Giants," one of the small characters is a man who is seen at Shiloh Christian Academy walking the hallways methodically touching each locker and praying for the students. He does this day after day. And some of the students think he's crazy. But then one day, after Coach Grant challenges the team to start doing their best in everything for the Lord, one of the assistant coaches tells Coach Grant to come with him out to the football field. There he sees hundreds of students sitting in small groups with

many praying to receive Christ. The revival on campus had begun, all because one solitary man had living faith to believe that God could do it in His own time. It was a small thing, but God made it a big thing.

God can do the same with you. He can take you, and use you to help lead someone to Christ. He can take you to make a difference in the world. He can take you and make something significant in the Kingdom of God if you will only let Him.