

Incredible Hidden Growth and Value

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[0 : 00] Our reading tonight is on page 979. This is from Matthew chapter 13, verses 31 through 35.

He 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.

He told them still another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 30 kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. 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.

And then verses 44 through 46. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

[1 : 19] Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

This is God's word. Thank you, Hannah. As James said, I'm Robbie.

I'm one of the ministry trainees here. I'd just extend a warm welcome to you, as well as James already has. I wonder how many people here tonight have heard of a man called Dick Rowe. No, not many.

That's kind of what I thought. He's pretty much famous for not being famous, and for actually missing out on his chance at fame. But on the other hand, I'm sure you've all heard of the Beatles.

The Beatles, John, Paul, George, and Ringo, the greatest boy band of all time, the boy band that changed the world. Well, Dick Rowe was a record producer, a label called Deco, and the Beatles came and auditioned for Dick.

[2 : 17] But he said no. He passed on signing them because he said they had quite a poor audition, and he said, I think guitar groups are on the way out. He missed out on signing the most influential band of all time because he thought they didn't look great, and he was valuing them by his view of the markets.

To change the tag slightly, let's do a quick experiment. Put your hand up if you've got a phone with you here tonight. Yep, everyone, pretty much. That's what I thought. Well, if it was up to a man called William Orton, who worked for the Western Union back in 1876, that probably wouldn't be the case.

Alexander Graham Bell approached William Orton to sell the patent to the telephone for \$100,000. But William Orton said, no, I'm going to pass on that because I can't see the commercial appeal of this.

It seems a bit more like a toy than a useful tool. Two years later, Orton's quoted as saying if he was able to buy that patent for \$25 million, not daughters, he'd consider that a bargain.

\$25 million in 1878. If you can order it just for inflation, William Orton was valuing the patent of the phone at \$650 million.

[3 : 40] A lot of money. And that's probably nothing as well, considering it now. But Orton missed out on the patent because he was valuing it by what he thought the market was. If he had seen what was coming and what the telephone would turn into, he definitely would have shelled out that \$100,000 because that's nothing compared to the eventual value of that patent.

It's easy to look back for us now and see that both of these men made a great mistake. But Orton and Roe weren't the only ones who didn't buy the patent and they obviously weren't the only ones who didn't sign the Beatles because both of those things only went to one group eventually.

But both these men made their decision according to their estimated market value and both men missed out. So tonight, what we're thinking about is how we value the teachings of Jesus.

Do we follow the market value that the world sets? Do we follow the market value we set for it? Or do we follow the value that the Bible tells us, that Jesus tells of his own teachings?

So we're looking at these parables in Matthew 13 tonight. And if you've read all of Matthew up to this point, you'd have seen that Jesus has been going around a little place, less little, a place called Galilee, telling people that the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, they're the same title for the same thing, telling them that the kingdom of heaven was near and that people need to repent and follow Jesus.

[4 : 59] Now the kingdom of heaven is what we would call the saving reign of God. It began when God sent Jesus into the world as his long-awaited promised king. What Jesus was saying is if you turn and follow him, you'll become part of the kingdom of heaven.

Now alongside this teaching, he was also doing some pretty amazing things. He was healing people. He was driving out demons. He was doing amazing miracles. And great crowds had started to seek out Jesus, to hear what he was saying.

Only a few had actually done what he'd said and turned and followed him. You'd also seen in Matthew that the local religious leaders are judging what Jesus is saying and they're accusing him of going against God, of blaspheming, and going against the rules that religious leaders had set.

And then just before our passage, at the end of chapter 12, when Jesus is teaching, he's preaching to a great crowd, his mother and brothers come up and try and talk to him when he's in the middle of speaking. His ministry isn't going exactly like you think it would be.

For those who had listened to Jesus' teaching, it was clear massive changes were needed in their lives. It required them to turn around and follow Jesus.

[6 : 13] That is a hard decision to make because the kingdom Jesus spoke of didn't seem very powerful at the time. It was being rejected by most people. It didn't seem very valuable because even his family weren't paying attention.

They were trying to interrupt him and stop him doing what he was doing. So it's into that situation that Jesus tells these parables. Now parables are stories with a hidden meaning. Through these parables, Jesus is challenging people to make a decision according to what they've heard.

Each listener has to choose. Will you stay with Jesus and accept him as king? Or will you go with the crowd, shrug your shoulders, and just walk away? So tonight we're looking at two pairs of parables.

And the first two we're going to look at is the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, which show incredible hidden growth in the kingdom of God. Let me just read them again. He told them another parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his fields. Though it's the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree.

[7 : 18] So the birds come and perch in its branches. And he told them still another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all the way through.

So first off, we have this mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. If I were holding one up now, you probably wouldn't be able to see it. See on the finger? Absolutely not. It's tiny. Absolutely tiny. Yet it would grow pretty large.

In fact, an average mustard tree is probably about 10 feet tall. So maybe like halfway up the screen from the stage would be the average height. Now when you think about it, if you're actually relating trees, that's not very big.

If Jesus was trying to emphasize the size of the kingdom, surely you'd have picked a different tree. Maybe you've picked a nice big sequoia or a redwood. You know, they grew up to 300 feet tall.

Now that's a big tree, but that isn't what Jesus is trying to emphasize in this parable. He's not emphasizing the sheer size, rather the sheer growth of the kingdom. He's emphasizing the difference in it from the beginning to the end.

[8 : 24] Now to call something as small as a mustard seed was a local phrase, a phrase people would use to describe something really small. The same way we might say that's as small as a drop in the ocean. Jesus is taking a phrase that people use regularly and in day-to-day life and applying it to the kingdom so that people can figure out what it means.

So he's saying it may look tiny to begin with, this mustard seed, but it's going to shoot up and become the tallest of all garden plants. Jesus' ministry didn't look impressive.

Jesus was just one man. He was raised in Nazareth and nothing good came from Nazareth. In fact, to be called a Nazarene back then was an insult. It basically meant you were a nobody. You don't matter. And this man, who was a Nazarene, walked around the country preaching a message to broken people.

He interacted with the sick and the unclean. He didn't go for the impressive, the kings, the leaders. He interacted with those who worked in improper jobs. The religious leaders hated the people he was dealing with.

He wasn't working with the powerful. He was working with the weak and his message, his kingdom looked weak. So people rejected it. It was taught by a man from the middle of nowhere. They were judging the value of Jesus' kingdom by what the world told him, told them about Jesus.

[9 : 43] And the idea of the kingdom of heaven itself was not new to the Jewish people of Israel. In fact, everybody in Israel was awaiting the kingdom of God. This isn't something new for them. They've been waiting for it for thousands of years, promised throughout their scriptures in our Old Testament.

The religious leaders of the time were expecting it to happen. They were expecting it to come and look a certain way. It was going to look powerful and it was going to be mighty. It was going to be a militaristic kingdom.

They were awaiting a leader to come back and take hold of Israel for the Israelites. But that's what they're expecting, but that's not what Jesus looks like. But just because that's what everyone was looking for, just because that's how they were evaluating the kingdom of God, doesn't make it right.

Jesus is telling his followers that what seems small now and that what is rejected now will grow. And it will grow way beyond what any of them would expect.

Then next, we hear this parable about yeast in dough. If anybody here is a keen baker of bread, you'll know that to make a nice loaf, you're going to need a rising agent in there, something that will cause the loaf to rise.

[10 : 53] Otherwise, it looks pretty sad and pathetic. And it causes a chemical reaction that makes some carbon dioxide and it becomes a nice fluffy loaf of bread. It's normally quite a small amount of yeast that's needed to make a loaf rise, but the impact is huge.

Picture a bit of pits of bread that's made without a rising agent and a normal loaf of bread. Just that alone is the kind of difference we're talking about here. Now, Jesus tells us that this yeast that's used by the woman is enough to mix into about 60 pounds of dough.

That's a lot of dough. 60 pounds of dough is probably enough to feed between 100 and 150 people. That's the size of like an entire village back then. In fact, it's probably enough to feed like everybody here twice.

It's almost a comical size of dough. Jesus is using hyperbole to make his points. Once worked into the dough, this yeast is going to have huge influence and make a difference in a lot of dough.

And that's what he's trying to say. Whilst it seems like he's having very little effect, when you look at yeast, it looks like it's going to do nothing, but it makes a huge change. That's what Jesus knew was going to happen with his teaching and with the kingdom of God.

[12 : 00] Again, he's telling this parable so that those listening will understand that his small ministry will impact the world way beyond what it should if you were to judge it by the world's standards. So what do these matter to us now?

These are stories from 2,000 years ago. In fact, these parables are still so relevant to us because realistically, when you think about it, we're in a similar context to the people he was talking to back then.

We live in a world where rejecting Jesus and his kingdom is the norm. The world around us tells us we don't need him anymore, that he's useless, that it's not what we need. It's outdated or it's wrong.

It would be so easy to judge and value Jesus by what the world tells us. And the church, which is the expression of the kingdom of God that's around today, it still looks weak.

It's dwindling. It can look and feel like a mustard seed. The church seems to be dying off and numbers are falling, but Jesus tells us size isn't how we should judge it.

[12 : 58] One man with 12 followers is pretty much as small as you can get. But look at the church now throughout the world. It spreads in the past 2,000 years from a dusty backwater Israelite town all the way here to Glasgow tonight.

It would be easy to look at Scotland today and judge that the kingdom growth has stalled. In fact, it's almost stopped. But that's not true. The kingdom is still growing. If you look at countries like China, Brazil, Zambia, the growth is staggering.

People are turning to Jesus and declaring him their king in droves. What was a mustard seed has grown exponentially? And it's also so easy to look at the influence of the church and think that's disappeared.

What good does the church do now? But that isn't true either. Jesus' teaching is hugely influential. It was back then and it is now. It causes mass transformation.

We see that when people become a part of the kingdom of God, they change. Their thought processes, their actions, they might more closely resemble Jesus than they did before.

[14 : 04] We see examples of this throughout the Bible of Jesus' teaching affecting people when it happens. He spoke to prostitutes who turned around and changed their life. These rural fishermen that he called to follow him became the pillars of church and so influential in Roman society and wherever they went.

And there's people like Levi the tax collector who was once solely lived to gain money, who was essentially viewed as a traitor because of his greed against his people. And even if he had to cheat against those around him, he wanted the money.

He gave up everything to follow Jesus. And we still hear about transformations happening now, today. In fact, as James mentioned, in a few weeks, here at St. Silas, we're having three events that we'd love you to come along to and you'll get to hear some people's stories of how their lives have been transformed by Jesus and why they've decided to accept Jesus as king.

So you have the transformation individually, but when you get a group of kingdom people coming together, the influence it has is massive. This can actually be seen all around us.

The influence in the church and our society is huge, even if we don't see it or understand it as that. We can look at history and see that Christians have done so much. The abolishment of slavery to being the forefront of international aid mission and charities, setting up schools and orphanages throughout the world, often it's because of Christians and what they believe as the equal worth and value of all human life that starts these things.

[15 : 38] In fact, there's a historian called Tom Holland who's a non-Christian, but he's just published a book within the past year called Dominion. He honestly believes through his research through his entire life that everything we believe as a Western society is caused by our Christian heritage.

That's a huge statement, but he claims that the reason we value all life, the reason we want equality and the reason we believe every deserves goods derives from the original heritage of our Christian faith.

That without that, we wouldn't believe this at all. We wouldn't care about other people. The weak would be the weak and that would be that. We'd all be vying for power. If that's true, and I won't say that it is or not, go read the book, Jesus' teaching has been extremely influential throughout history.

Even if it doesn't look so now, it still is in ways we can't understand. So the kingdom is yeast because it's transformative even when it looks unimpressive. Dick Rowe, who I mentioned earlier, he passed on the Beatles because he thought they wouldn't have an impact, that people didn't want what they were offering, that they weren't impressive enough in their audition.

We look back now and see that is absolutely ridiculous. How could he have missed out on Beatlemania? Imagine the money Dick Rowe would have made had he signed them. If you judge something by the wrong criteria, it's going to cause regret and sometimes ruin.

[17 : 01] If you've discounted Jesus because he looks unimpressive or because he can't have a real impact, I don't believe somebody 2000 years who couldn't do that, I'd recommend re-evaluating that judgment.

In light of maybe historical data, you'll look into. But also, I think you should re-evaluate it because of what Jesus has told us. He told us it was going to be this way. What he said is true about the fact that people are going to judge him and reject him.

Don't listen to those around you when you're judging Jesus. Don't judge it by the world's standards, but judge him by what he says and whether that is true or not. Now we're going to skip on to our next two parables.

We're going to look at verses 44 to 46. In the chunk we haven't read, which we looked at our tri-church service last month, Jesus has snuck off into a house, he went into a house with his disciples.

So the next set of parables, the one that we're reading, he's telling just them, it's not to a great crowd anymore, it's to these 12 men who have given up their life to follow him. These men have even, earlier, they clearly believe in Jesus, they were sent out to preach about him throughout the country.

[18 : 14] So let me read these verses. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again. And then, in his joy, went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

So the first in this pair of parables is this man. He's out for a wee wander. He's just having a wee walk around town or an old field. And he stumbles upon a hidden treasure.

He's absolutely buzzing. It's common back then that that's what people would do. They would bury their treasure because there was no banks. There was no safe place to keep it in your house if you got robbed. He realized he couldn't just take it and run away because that stealing it belonged to whoever the field then belonged to.

What he had to do was he had to gain it rightfully so he could gain this. The man wants to make this treasure his own. So he runs off filled with joy, which is really important. He runs off filled with joy to give up everything he has to buy the field.

[19 : 27] He's so excited for what he's going to gain, he doesn't care what he has to give up to buy it. Now our second parable in this pair tells of a merchant who deals in pearls.

He could be a specialist in that area you might say. He spent his life searching for fine pearls, buying them, selling them on, dealing in them in many ways, trying to make some profits.

Eventually he finds a pearl that is of such great worth that he runs off, sells everything he has at that moment, every other pearl he's gained, sells it off to buy this one pearl.

That is the true value that he found in it. This isn't just a decent pearl, this isn't just a nice pearl, this is the greatest pearl this expert in pearls has ever found.

This is worth everything the pearl collector has. To try and make this a bit more one we can understand, imagine you're a bit of, you're a book collector, you're an expert in collecting books.

[20 : 25] You know everything about them, you know what first editions look like, you know the specialist collections, you know the value of everything. One day you're wandering along Byers Road, you pop into a charity shop, you're just browsing and you see, you see an old looking book.

It's an old, it looks like Shakespeare. You open up, you have a glance through and suddenly it hits you. Somehow this charity shop has gained one of the original copies of Shakespeare's folio.

You can't believe it. You know that this is actually worth about five million pounds that you're holding in your hands. So you look at the price tag, in fact you don't even look at the price tag, you run away.

You run as fast as you can home, take all the books you've ever collected in your life, you sell them. Then you sell a few of your other things that you just live by, you sell it because you need to get this book because you know the sheer value of it.

What is the price you'd be willing to pay for something worth that much? Anything they ask so you can take it and sell it on for what it's actually worth. I think that when this pearl collector finds a pearl, you have to assume that he buys it and then is able to go and get rid of it at the real value.

[21 : 36] The treasure he makes, the profit he makes must be huge, otherwise he wouldn't be this excited. I think it's the same, imagine this, if you're a book collector and you find it for like 3,000 pounds and you're like, oh, it's worth 5 million, that's it, I'm going to sell my entire life to get this book because I know the value I'm going to get.

This situation is almost the direct opposite of what we heard about William Orton earlier. He saw something and didn't realize the value of it so ignored it and said no.

The pearl collector has seen the real value in it and has done everything he can to acquire it. Both of these parables are telling us the same thing with one slight difference. The kingdom of heaven is of extreme value and when we realize it we're going to want to joyfully give up everything we have for it.

Whether we're deliberately searching for it like the pearl collector or whether we accidentally stumble across it like the man. Jesus is speaking to a group of men who've already given up all they have.

They've left their jobs, their homes, their families to follow Jesus. They've left it all behind to follow him but they've just heard that actually the kingdom they believe in and have followed whilst it might grow to be great is quite small.

[22 : 53] They've seen the rejection of Jesus, his message, so many times that Jesus is telling them this to encourage them. You've given up everything, Jesus says, but what you will gain will be worth it a hundred times over.

It may not seem it now when you look at the church or whether you think, whatever you think about Jesus, but the kingdom of heaven is the most valuable thing you can be a part of. Thankfully, the disciples have already seen that so Jesus was able to encourage them.

They followed him from the beginning despite the rejection of people around them. Maybe you're a guest here tonight. Maybe this all sounds well and good, but what about the kingdom of heaven is worth that much?

Well, Jesus' message when he came was that the kingdom of God is near, but it's not fully come yet. When Jesus was on earth, he healed many people. He cast out demons.

He fed thousands. He even raised people from the dead. Jesus came to show us what the kingdom of God will look like, but only in a partial form. He's given a taste of it with the promise that it's going to come fully for those who join it.

[24 : 02] Often Christians say that the kingdom is now and that Jesus has come and it's begun, but it's not yet because we're yet to see the full glory that it has.

We saw what Jesus did and we now have some of the blessings because of him, but we will see the kingdom come in full. There'll be no sickness, no pain, no death.

Everyone will be fully satisfied in that kingdom. And it's this kingdom that Jesus says is worth everything we have. If we know we will have access to a place where everything is perfect, then what is there that isn't worth giving up now?

If you're already a follower of Jesus, do you always believe this? When we look around ourselves and see that people are rejecting this message, it gives you an uneasy feeling. How can they just get on with life?

Is it really worth giving up everything I have to follow what Jesus is telling me? Am I right to base my entire life on this book? Well, these parables assure us that it is absolutely worth it.

[25 : 13] Despite how the kingdom can look, its value is immeasurable and is worth giving up everything with joy like that first man did. The priceless nature of the kingdom is not one we're going to fully know until Jesus returns.

But that isn't to say we don't know anything of it now. When we accept Jesus as king, the Bible tells us we'll receive his spirit and enter into a real relationship with him. But when he does return, no one who has lived for him will regret what they've given up.

When the merchant made his immense profit off of that pearl, do you think he regretted giving up everything he had? What do you have in your life that is of more worth than what Jesus is talking about?

Are you afraid that if you take this message seriously, you're going to have to give up something you like? Maybe it's a relationship or a bad habit. Is there some aspect or some part of your life that you don't want to open up because you're afraid of the mess that's going to come out?

The good news is that Jesus wants to see what is in that mess. If you come to him, you're still welcome in the kingdom. You're still welcomed as a child of God is what it tells us in the Bible.

[26 : 34] All these things you don't want to give up. If what Jesus is telling us is true, the pain of giving them up now is worth nothing compared to the glory that will come. So if you aren't a follower of Jesus yet, let me ask you, how do you respond to this news?

Are you going to judge this kingdom that Jesus talks of by the value the world has set on it? Let me encourage you to look further into this whether you're like the man who stumbled upon a treasure, whether you're here by mistake, your friend invited you and you said yes before you realized what you'd said yes to, or maybe you've been seeking for years, you've been looking into every religion you have ever heard of and you're trying to find that great pearl.

I genuinely believe that if you read about Jesus' life, the value of his kingdom becomes clear, both for our lives now and for the ones to come.

Our parables tonight have told us the immense value of the kingdom isn't in how it looks immediately, but it's going to continue to grow. We can't judge it on its size now because it will be worth giving up everything that we have to be a part of it.

Last month, we looked at a different parable and essentially that parable told us is that there will come a time when you can't make this decision anymore. Don't put it off if it comes down to it.

[27 : 59] I just urge you to look into this. There's nothing better I think you can do with your time or your life than to read this Bible and decide what you think. If you have questions or want to know more, please come speak to myself or James.

We want to talk about this with you. Don't end up like Dick Rowe or William Orton. Don't trust the judgment of the world around you to tell you about this. You have to decide yourself.

If something this small and weak looking as the church and the kingdom of God like Jesus describes it really has the value that Jesus gives it, it's worth joyfully giving up everything you have to receive it.

Let me pray to close. Father, thank you for your words. Thank you for the chance to come and hear from it and read it. We pray that you might open our eyes to see the value of this kingdom that you might encourage us when life is hard that we can trust that your kingdom is worth everything we've ever given up and more, Father.

Give us strength to go in the week and to live this out and give us knowledge and wisdom to seek you out in any way we can, Father. In your holy name. Amen.