

Matthew 13:31-35 & Psalm 78:1-8

Gospel Growth

Hello everyone, it's great to be with you in church this morning, if you don't know me my name is Tom, along with Hayley I look after youth ministry here at the peak. We have come to the last couple of weeks in our journey through Matthew 11-13, I hope you have been encouraged and come to a better understanding of these parables that Jesus tells. I think they are some of the most interesting parts of scripture but they can also be hard to preach because they are so well known. Yet when I sat down and started thinking and writing I was once again excited by the work God does in his world through his people, how a seemingly simple parable can carry a message of eternal importance for us to hear together.

How about I kick off my praying for us?

What do you think of if I told you to think of someone who is powerful?(Rugby analogy)...

...someone so small was able to bring down this monster.

Power in the world

The thing is I think all of us here conform to a concept of power that is put on us by our world. We think of great leaders, maybe great dictators, we think of CEO's maybe we think of our bosses. My boss is 9ft 4. We think of athletes. Or really, more close to home we think of our friend who controls our social group, that influential person in our social circles maybe. As humans we are attracted to power, physical power because we find security in it. We find a feeling of fulfilment in it. But we are also attracted to power because we are scared of it. Why do people befriend the bully at school or work? Because we are scared of being their target. Why do we do things to make our boss happy? Why do we make alliances with nations who commit atrocities? Because we are scared of not being on their side?

But power is more than people. Power in our day to day lives is about choices. What we chose to do with our time to create security

for ourselves. What will earn us the most money, how we use our money we are permanently working with the power to protect ourselves. In other people, in material things, in our position. We are people who chase power in the world. At the centre of this pursuit of power is a simple problem, an emotion we feel. Fear. We fear what we have to lose should we find ourselves without the power, or at the heel of those with power, that you could lose some of the things you have the peace of mind you feel in your life. We fear being victims of the world so where do we run to for cover? The world. Our jobs, our friendships with people where we see physical and economic strength and power.

The thing is, God's people have always been victims of the world's power and they have always felt like there was no way they were going to overcome it as it attacks and rains down on them. They have constantly through the scriptures been helpless in the face of the power of the world. Slavery in Egypt, under siege from the Assyrians, exile in Babylon, and servitude under the Roman Empire

just to name some that occurred. The people Jesus is speaking to, the people he is calling to follow his message, that is the world they live in, the pressure they feel, the fear that takes them as they wonder if God's Kingdom will ever come. They know their history of servitude, they know of the suffering of their ancestors, of the brief periods of prominence, of the return from exile that didn't live up to their expectations that now they have found themselves yet again being ruled by a foreign power, that God's King is not on the throne and hasn't been for centuries. They see the power and dominance of Rome, they think of the failed rebellions of the failed claim to be messiahs, they think of the public crucifixions of their brothers and sisters and they doubt. How can this man and his tiny group of followers make any real change come about in this world where there is so much oppression and suffering?

The Parables

My friends, the kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in a field. The smallest of the seeds used in

Palestinian farming yet it grows into a tree which in the fertile crescent stands above all other garden plants, with many birds perching in its branches. While at its beginning what you see before you is small over time we see it grow into what it will become, the tree which stands above all else, the place where all things come for shelter and life.

Do not let what you see with your eyes deceive you my friends. As the people looked upon Jesus and his followers he called for them to not trust in the physical impressive terrifying power that they saw around them in the world. Do not let the world fool you. It is not nearly as powerful as it wants you to think. Rome may cover the known world but it is not in control of the world as much as you may perceive. True power is not found in the strength that you think you can see. But Jesus they kill us, they tax us, they have taken our land from us, the land God promised us.

And we may say but Jesus, look at what the world does. Christians are the most persecuted people group in the world. In Australia, what was once normal Christian teaching is being treated like its evil and damaging for society while the very things we know are harmful are being embraced as the great victories in the world. Some of us are at risk of genuine consequences in our lives for simply believing what we believe. We can't speak up. Every week there is a news article criticising us, we worry the government will make laws that hurt us. It just doesn't seem like the Kingdom is winning.

My friends, the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. The dough doesn't start leavened, and the yeast doesn't start off worked through the dough, but it is inevitable that it will work through it in its entirety. Jesus is speaking to the problem that comes from valuing the physical world's power but also from focusing on the present. As Christians we aren't a present focused people, we are a future focused people. The yeast will work through the dough.

Being Kingdom focused means being future focused. Seeing the world and knowing that what is happening now is part of the process that was started by Jesus and is continuing til he comes back and is worthy of our attention. But we must always remember that the Kingdom will work through the world and be restored at the return of Christ that is the growth that is happening and will happen. It is an inevitability.

What about those last two verses though:

³⁴ 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.”

Why has Matthew used a quote from Psalm 78 to explain the purpose of Jesus at this point? I'm glad you asked and its why we had a reading from that Psalm this morning. In Psalm 78 Asaph,

according to Matthew, is foretelling a time when all that has happened in the history of God's people will make sense, that a generation will come who will have the hidden things of old revealed to them that the purpose and plan of God may be seen and the wonders of the Lord would be known and Matthew is saying that is what is happening right now. The fulfilment of the prophecy the time of the Lord is here, that unlike the Israelites of the Old Testament who were stubborn there will be a people loyal to the Lord as they see what his plan has done for them.

But the shock to the world is that this truth, this glory, this plan would come through the death of God on the cross for his people that a symbol of Roman power that looks like defeat to the Jews, becomes the great symbol of victory. That the Kingdom of Heaven would not be like the Roman Army, the Babylonian Empire, the Pyramids of Egypt but a mustard seed. Something that seems at first in comparison to its contemporaries to be something of little consequence or even weakness would take the world for its own.

Matthew is saying, this prophecy in Psalm 78 that has been fulfilled in Jesus, it just looks different to what we may have been expecting. And that's because we have our concept of power mixed up.

True Power

True power in the world does not look like what we may expect it to.

True power looked nothing like the Israelites expected it to. They thought the great prophecies of the coming messiah would be a warrior King who defeated the enemies of God's people in battle.

How could they be expected to turn and follow someone with a small following and who appeared to fail because he was arrested and executed?

Growth is happening

My question is, where is Rome now? Not only did Christianity, not only did the growth of this mustard seed outlast the Empire it consumed it. In 312 AD the Emperor of Rome, Constantine converted

to Christianity and established it as the state religion. Edward Gibbon a British historian cited Christianity as the cause of the fall of Rome, you know why? As the Roman Army converted to Christianity in huge numbers they lost their capacity for brutality and the Empire crumbled.

Communist China, a country that outlawed Christianity for huge parts of its 20th century history and still regularly cracks down on it has the fastest rate of conversion in the world perhaps the fastest conversion rate in the history of the world with the exception of the early Church.

In response to Isis huge numbers of Syrian and Iraqi Muslims have turned to Christ as their saviour, the Gospel of Grace and love because they have seen the damage that powerful men can do. That physical power brings destruction and suffering.

Gospel Growth in the world is happening. We can see evidence of that all around us and through history. Christians are persecuted,

Christians are attacked, the power of the world pushes against the Gospel, the physical victories seem to be won by evil yet the Gospel built on sacrifice and love of one's enemy in response to the love of Jesus continues to grow continues to push on. Great powers have stood in the way of the gospel but somehow the gospel just keeps working, just keeps growing, its like the tide you just cant stop it.

You see when we talk about our Churches vision to see everyone in Peakhurst and beyond transformed by the good news of Jesus we are serious. Yeah it seems like a high standard but in comparison to what the Gospel has achieved in this world and the change it has brought in people's lives its almost seems like too low a standard.

But this is what happens when we run events its what happens every week in our growth groups. The kingdom has grown and is growing and here in Peakhurst we are part of it we have a responsibility to be part of it because the truth is worth trusting and brings real change.

Growth is humble

Another important point about the growth of the kingdom that I think comes out of these parables. Growth isn't flashy. Growth is humble. Look at Jesus ministry. Do you see the bells and whistles? Do you see him standing in amphitheatres addressing crowds. Do you see him living a lavish life? Do you see him courting the great leaders and powers? Or do you see him living the life of a peasant walking with the needy, the sick, the poor? Christianity is not meant to look impressive to the world. If you are impressed by the bells and whistles of God's people, of God's Churches, of God's leaders then I ask you to take a step back and consider whether those things are aiming for the kingdom because the true Kingdom is like a mustard seed, it is humble, and it relies on the Gospel and nothing else to bring people to Christ. The gospel alone grows the Kingdom, the unimpressive to the world but remarkable truth that the God of the universe became a man and sacrificed himself for his people, Jesus. Not flashy preaching, not flashy music, not eloquent and well constructed apologetic arguments, just the Gospel. The work of a

few disciples who God used to spread the truth has grown into a worldwide movement, on the basis that it is through the grace of God alone by Faith alone in Christ alone that we are saved.

Growth gives hope

But this is the good news, this is the hope that we have, because growth gives hope. The hope that the disciples had and those who followed Jesus to his death and after his resurrection had. A hope in the future that is to come, a hope in the growth of the mustard seed, looking towards the great tree that is coming. Because as God has revealed his plan through scripture we see that it is not through the power that the world might expect that he conquers but through his love for his people in his sacrifice for them which means we are not people who are solely focused on our lives at this moment. But we are people who see the future coming of the Kingdom, a hope that transcends present suffering and happiness because we know that through his Gospel the Lord has grown his kingdom and if you follow Jesus you are part of that growth which is continuing.

I don't want you to cast away all the things that provide you with security in the world. But I want you to not hold on so tightly to them in the fear that the Kingdom won't be enough. We can't hedge our bets with the Kingdom we can't have back up plans for if it doesn't work out, but as soon as we forget that true power is not in the strength of the world we will be tempted to turn away from the Kingdom. Know that the true power, is in the truth that you know, in the sacrifice that gave you salvation. That true power put sin to shame because it didn't take the world for its own instead he put others before himself. Have hope my brothers and sisters in the kingdom. Because while at times it may not seem as impressive as the power of the world. There will be a time when its incomparable glory will be undeniable. When the yeast has worked through the dough and taken hold of the world. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. You wait and see what its going to be.