

Small Things Can Make a Big Splash

Luke 13:18–21

October 7, 2007

Since we began with an eye test last week, I'd like to begin the sermon this morning with a little quiz to see how much you know about the world around you. Ok, here we go.....Who can tell me, **1. Which country has the largest population? (China: 1.3 Billion)** **2. What is the world's tallest mountain? (Mt. Everest)** **3. What type of tree is the tallest? (Redwood)** **4. Who is the world's richest man? (Bill Gates)**

So far, so good. You're pretty good when it comes to big things, but now let's try the second half of the quiz. Who can tell me... **1. Which country has the smallest population? (Vatican City: 920)** **2. What is the world's smallest mountain? (Mt. Greylock)** **3. What type of tree is the shortest? (Dwarf willow—5 centimeters when full grown)** **4. Who is the world's poorest man? (Jed Matthews owes \$22.4 million and has no assets due to bad investments in an internet company)**

How did you do? Better on the first half of the quiz, I bet. The point of the quiz is that we tend to recognize, respect and remember those things in life that are big, while we tend to give little thought to the small things.

In nearly every aspect of our lives we seem to believe that "*bigger is better.*" We even believe it in spiritual matters. We think that more people, more money, bigger ministries and buildings, more programs, and greater talent will result in greater effectiveness at God's work. We often think that God is doing more and can do more where there is something going on that looks grand and marvelous.

And we tend to think the opposite about smaller things. We act as though God is not working or could not work though smaller churches and ministries, lesser talent, and fewer programs. In fact, I'll never forget the sting of the insult and the vision of hundreds of my colleagues in ministry leaning the arena when a speaker at the American Baptist biennial meeting suggested that people who were pastoring

tiny little churches of one or two hundred needn't be jealous of his big ostentatious mega church because God had just given us what we were able to handle.

Like that unnamed speaker (who not surprisingly was not invited back to speak at subsequent biennials, far too often we are tempted to believe the lie that says, "*if it isn't big and flashy, God must not be in it.*")

Not only do we think this about churches and ministries, we also tend to think it about ourselves. How many of us have felt prey to the temptation to feel like we aren't big enough, rich enough, talented enough, or important enough for God to use us in any meaningful way.

But is bigger always better. And this is a point that Jesus desperately wanted to get across to his followers. So he gave them two illustrations of how God works in his kingdom.

Turn with me to today's passage. Luke 13:18–21: ¹⁸ *Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?"* ¹⁹ *It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."*

²⁰ *Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to?"* ²¹ *It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

Jesus asks a question: "What is the kingdom of God like?"

No one had ever seen the "kingdom of God" Jesus was describing. And like so many other times in his life, Jesus chose not to offer a specific description or pin point answer. He just told stories and gave comparisons to help people understand and visualize what it was like.

In his first example, Jesus says that God's working is like a "mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."

The mustard seed is very, very small. The black mustard seed was the smallest seed ever sown by a first-century farmer in that part of the world. Because of its size the mustard seed was used proverbially for anything that was small and

insignificant. Today we would say that someone had a “*pea brain*”; if we lived in Jesus’ time, we would have said they had a “*mustard seed brain*.”

But even though the mustard seed was small, it grew to be the largest of the herbs grown in that area. It typically grew to be 12 feet—two feet taller than a basketball goal. It was big and bushy enough for birds to nest in it.

In his second illustration Jesus says that God’s working is like “*yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough*.” As a boy, Jesus undoubtedly had watched his mother make the daily bread. She would have used yeast to make it rise. She wouldn’t have used dry yeast used today; rather, it was a very small lump of dough taken from the previous day’s making of bread. She would take that lump of dough and knead it in to the new flour mixture and eventually that yeast would permeate and influence the entire batch.

But the most important part of this illustration is the amount of flour into which the small amount of yeast was mixed: the amount is lost in the translation from Greek to English. The NIV says, “*a large amount*” but the Greek is more specific and says, three “*satas*.” Three satas is about 50 pounds of flour. This will feed 100 people. This was more than daily bread. No housewife had an oven large enough to hold that amount of dough. The very vastness of the dimensions of Jesus’ story shows us that he was not describing an ordinary household baking situation. Even though the original ball of yeast was small, it would have a huge influence.

So what was the point of these examples? Jesus wasn’t teaching about horticulture or baking. He was revealing a kingdom of God truth. When it comes to spiritual things, God uses small things to do BIG stuff.

When God wanted to create a new nation to call his own, he didn’t start with a large, established family. Instead, he used a nomadic man and woman too old to conceive children.

When God wanted to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt, he used a man rejected by his own people and who had spent most of his life leading sheep.

When God wanted a king to represent his people, his choice wasn’t a big shot, but a shepherd boy.

When Jesus wanted to feed 5,000 people, he used a small boy's sack lunch to do it.

When Jesus watched people give, he wasn't impressed by the big donors, but by the widow's penny.

And when God came to earth as a human, he didn't choose a rich and famous family to be a part of. He came as a baby born in a barn to a poor and seemingly unimportant family.

God uses small things to do BIG stuff.

What we might see as too small and insignificant to matter, God sees as something he wants to use to accomplish his purpose. Or maybe you feel too small and insignificant to make a difference. But you see, here's the secret of God's formula for Christian ministry. Whereas one tiny little drop of rain may not seem like much on it's own, if you take hundreds and thousands of tiny little individual drops of rain and combine them together into a torrential downpour, the awesome power of water will quickly become evident as the abundant water floods the creeks, rivers and even the streets of the surrounding area.

Now apply that principle to ministry and imagine the power of many people doing small things, and what God can do to multiply the influence? So don't wait for someone else to start it, go ahead, jump in. With God by your side you are more than able to be the one to start the chain reaction of incredible life-changing power that springs to life when one person grabs hold of the fact that through Jesus Christ one life can make a difference. One life touches a life, which touches a life, touches another life, touches another life, and another and another and another until a flood of love, grace and good will beings to race over the land.

Be encouraged you're not in this alone. Our efforts may seem like a drop in the bucket ... But that's precisely what we are: a single drop that joins with others to become a mighty river.

God can use "little" you to make a BIG splash!

Amen