

TOTAL REVOLUTION in OUR WORLD

Session #2: The Parable of The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32)

Session Objective: The objective of this session is to get students thinking about the nature of the Kingdom. It is not always grand or impressive according to the world's way of thinking, nor can we measure its growth in the same way. This session will also help students focus on some of the "themes of the Kingdom" that were important to Jesus. Things like reconciliation, unity and protection. The discussion should offer students the opportunity to discuss how they might fit into what God wants to do on this earth.

Minimum Prep: Read through the entire session outline and the parable. Prepare an environment where discussion can occur.

Extended Prep: If you have some extended prep time, consider a dramatic reading or a straight skit with a narrator and several actors. If you video tape it you can edit and add sound effects!! Another idea would be to use a video clip for 'cultural tie in'.

- One clip that might work would be from "**Antwan Fisher**". This movie, now out on DVD, tells the real life story of a boy named Antwan who is a Foster child. He is placed in the home of a minister. The minister's wife beats him and allows him to be sexually abused by a relative. You could use this clip to interact with the discussion about the "Kingdom theme" of protection and shelter that this parable initiates. If the Kingdom of God is supposed to offer shelter to wounded birds, and if the heart of Jesus is so tuned to the needs of the broken, what **SHOULD** have been the response of the minister's family to the needs of young Antwan? What should Christians be doing then, if God wants us to offer shelter to the broken birds in our world?
- Another possible video clip could be from "**A Time To Kill**". This movie tells the story of a trial in the American south where two white men rape a young black girl. The girl's father knows he will never get justice from the white jury so he kills the two white men. His defense lawyer makes a great speech where he tells the jury that until people can see each other as equals regardless of their colour, we can never experience justice. You could use this clip to interact with the "Kingdom theme" of racial reconciliation that is implied in the phrase "the birds of the air (symbolizing the nations of the earth) will find rest in its branches". Clip locator: 2:16 into the movie. Runs for 9 minutes.

- Another clip could be from the movie “**Pay It Forward**”. In this movie a young boy is given a project: Come up with an idea that will improve the world. His little idea (of paying good deeds forward) sweeps across the country and creates a media stir. Watch the whole movie and select a possible clip or show the whole thing. The application is clear: Just like the small seed that becomes the great tree, so God can take our small offerings and multiply and grow them into **TOTAL REVOLUTION!**

Session Outline

Leader Preamble:

This week we are going to be starting with a look at a story Jesus told about the Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke in images and pictures because it allowed his hearers to play a role in how those images would be interpreted and realised. Some of the language and symbols are pretty Jewish and since so few of us are 1st Century Jews, it might be helpful to go through it together. As we read and discuss this story, hopefully you will catch a glimpse into the heart of Jesus and notice a few “Kingdom Themes” that represent his passion for this world. Let’s read (or watch the video/skit of) Mark 3:30-32.

Small Group Questions:

1. **[In every culture there are little pithy phrases that have cultural meanings. For example in English we often say: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”; or “A stitch in time saves nine.” These phrases would be absolutely meaningless to a 1st Century Jew. In the same way, 1st Century Jews used sayings we don’t understand. In that culture, a mustard seed was a known symbol of smallness and potential. It was not ACTUALLY the smallest of all seeds nor did it ACTUALLY become the tallest of all trees.] It was though a symbol for something small that became something big. In what sense is the Kingdom of God like something small that becomes something big?**

Jesus told this parable in partnership with a few other stories. It is one of the “seed parables” that run from Mark 4:1- 34. As such, the primary meaning of the seed in this parable is the word of God. The meaning is thus that the word of God, even a small bit of it, can take root in a heart and grow into something huge and powerful. The word of God is full of potential in a human heart. Its secondary meaning is about the visible Kingdom of God. This small movement grew into the largest movement the world has ever seen! God tends to do big things with little things. If you have extended prep time,

*show a clip from “**Pay It Forward**” and discuss how God can take small things and use them for great change.*

2. In Jewish language and culture, the saying ‘The birds of the air’ represented the nations of the earth. Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God will grow into such a large movement that all the nations of the earth will find peace and shelter there. The Church today is the most multicultural movement on the planet! There are more Christians in Africa than there are in North America and the Church is growing in Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe at lightning speed! Jesus’ words have come true! Still there is work to be done. What can you do to ease racial tensions in your school, town and country?
3. In the bible, the image of “shade” often implied God’s protection from the harsh realities of the world. We live in a hard world. Psalm 121 tells us: “The Lord is your shade ... and the Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forever more”. This theme was obviously close to Jesus’ heart for the Kingdom of God on earth. What could we do to offer “shade” to the oppressed people in our world?

*If you have extended prep time, cue up a clip from the movie “**Antwan Fisher**” and use it to discuss how Christians should view the protection and sanctuary of broken and oppressed children as our personal responsibility.*

Transition:

Leader Note: The following paragraph represents a sample of how you might transition the group from the pulse of the parable to the dream of the Kingdom. You can reword it as you choose.

Jesus seems to be opening his heart to us in this parable. He too has dreams for the Kingdom! He wants it to be a place where people of all colours and races can live in peace. He wants the Kingdom to be a place of safety and protection for all who seek shade in its branches. He reminds us though that great things often have humble beginnings. Don’t be afraid to think small. Sometimes we think so big that we lose heart. Rather than planning to open a multi-million dollar home for abused women, how about being a big brother one afternoon a week? These small things might grow into big things down the road. Let’s spend sometime thinking about what we can do ourselves and together to make the Kingdom of God a place of peace and shade.

Dreams of The Kingdom:

Leader Note: *The following discussion would work best in a circle fashion. Offer students the opportunity to answer each question. They may 'pass' if they feel uncomfortable.*

- 4. Jesus claims that even a small word from God, if planted in a good heart, can produce huge change. Has a passage in Scripture ever sunk into your heart and produced change? What was it?**

You may have students in your group who have never even read a Bible. Don't pass over this for fear they will feel excluded! If you handle this discussion skillfully they may be encouraged to give the Bible a try! Make 'passing' a viable option. You might also offer the less Biblically fluent to offer some non-Biblical piece of advice that has helped them in their life: "My dad said once to never let the sun go down on your anger. I think that is important". Not only is that actually a Bible quote (as many cultural sayings are) but it can make them feel included.

- 5. Jesus also seems to be suggesting that small deeds can be used for big purposes for God. What is something small you could do tomorrow to make the world a better place?**
- 6. Have you ever experienced racism or abuse? Did someone protect you or where you left on your own?**
- 7. What could we do as a community to offer shade to people experiencing racism or abuse?**

Comments and Feedback

Leader Note: This is your place each week to record significant sharing or growth in the lives of your students for subsequent follow up. You can also use this space to provide feedback on the material. All suggestions are welcome.

Please see the following handout. You have permission to reproduce these handouts for your group.