THE RELIANT KINGDOM +++

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Amen. Let's give it up for Gretchen's testimony. I love Gretchen. She's over at our Fremont campus. It's a blessing to be able to hear how these small things happened in her life, and yet the Lord did amazing and big things. To think about the small thing of being tasked to care for one's mother and an estate. I mean, it feels like a really big thing, but in the grand scope of the universe, it's kind of a little thing. And what was chosen to do that to bless children, like that's amazing because now our team is going to go visit the very children that are being blessed by this testimony this morning. And that's the kind of like small things that make giant impacts that we're going to be focusing on in today's teaching.

And I want you to just close your eyes for a moment and think of the most dominant looking basketball player that you could think of. Now, you're probably thinking of somebody who's like, what, at least 6'6", maybe taller, very muscular, like really athletic looking. All right, open up your eyes because I want to show you my favorite NBA player. Now, I'm not going to say this is the best basketball player of all time, just my favorite because number one, his Hornets jersey was amazing. Everybody had a starter Hornets pullover in the 1990s. This is my favorite player. Now, I like to stand right here. Short king, short king, tall guy. Tyrone Mugsy Bugs gave me hope that maybe someday this guy could ball like him. Little guy, huge impact.

Now, you look at Mugsy Bugs, he's 5'3". He has gone down as the shortest player ever to play in the NBA. And then you put him next to, on that same team, the tallest player to have ever played in the NBA, Manute Bull, who was about 7'7". There was more than two feet of difference between these players on the exact same team. But Mugsy Bugs played over 900 games. Mugsy Bugs played for 14 seasons. People would watch him play because of how he used that small little like stature to make a huge impact. He could pass to people that nobody else could see because he could see through people's legs. Small player, huge impact. And that's what we're going to learn about in our value for today in We The Kingdom. Something small making a giant impact. And in this case, it's a mustard seed.

Now, I was going to bring a mustard seed, but I don't know if you've actually seen a mustard seed. There is not a high enough resolution camera in this space where Fremont and Northwest could even see what was in my hand if I brought it. But if you want an idea of how effective a mustard seed is, if you eat summer sausage and you cut through it and something gets stuck in your teeth, that's ridiculously hard and you can't get out, that's a mustard seed. And if you're thinking about a small thing making a huge impact, just think about your dental day as the mustard seed is stuck in there and you can't get it out. That's a small thing, big impact. That is the mustard seed.

And our reliance, that's how it needs to start in the Lord. And our reliance is our value for today. But I want to be able to kind of go through all of the values of King of Kings because that's what this sermon series is all about. It's about going through our values through the kingdom parables of Jesus so that we know who we are in his kingdom, at least in our area of his kingdom.

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So let's take a look at all of our values. And it spells an acronym called GRACE. So the G stands for generous. That's right. We learned last week that our God is incredibly generous. He donated his son, Jesus, to die a terrible death on the cross to take our sins away. That is his generosity. And on top of that, he provides for us daily bread. He is generous in caring for us, even in common grace. Our God has a value of generosity.

Now the R for today is reliant. Exactly. Reliant. That is, we rely on the Lord to take care of our lives. So it's not just like our relationship with him is a past event. He saved us from sin and that's good enough. No, now we are reliant on him for forgiveness of sins in the day-to-day. We're reliant on him still for our daily bread. We're reliant on him so we can speak with him one-on-one in prayer. The kingdom is reliant.

Then we have two more values that we're going to just talk about today, but we're going to actually explore much deeper later on in the series. That's A for authentic and C for courageous. All right. Those are our four values at King of Kings, but we also have this E at the end to kind of cap off the word grace, but it's going to show who should we be speaking to and for how much time. And that E means every person, everywhere, every day. That's right. That is the grace, G-R-A-C-E, of Jesus coursing its way through all of our values here at King of Kings as we study his kingdom parables.

Now, let's get into God's word. We're studying the kingdom parable of the mustard seed, a small thing making a big impact in Mark chapter four, verses 30 to 32. So open up your Bibles everywhere, Mark 4, 30 to 32, because you and I have something where we can actually speak this word together. And Jesus said, with what can we compare the kingdom? That's right. The kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It's like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. Yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make their nests in its shade.

Jesus is teaching us about his kingdom, and Jesus is teaching us that the smallest of things can make the biggest of impacts, and that this is how his kingdom operates. Oftentimes when we see church, we see the giant impact that churches can make. But what we don't see is the individual faith-filled actions and reliance on Jesus that it takes for the Lord to work through so many within the church to make that giant impact.

And sometimes it's really intimidating to look at the giant impact of the kingdom and think, how do I fit in there? I have a hard enough time just like managing my family. So Jesus is going to draw us back to starting small, focusing on little things so that that big difference is made. And so you and I are a part of his kingdom.

So let's take a look at the first verse in our text for today. Mark 4, verse 30. And Jesus said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? See, this is a wonderful thing for him to do. Not only is he teaching us about the kingdom, but he's teaching his original listeners what a kingdom is supposed to be like. And as he addresses them, he is going to invoke certain ideas of what kingdom looks like based off of his listeners.

So when you're actually studying the Bible, here's like a pro tip as you're like studying, think about what did this mean then and there to the original listeners, before I can faithfully apply it to the here and the now. What I mean by that is, when Jesus is speaking to Galilean listeners, and he's saying, what

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should we compare a kingdom to? The thing that's automatically going to come to mind is the Roman Empire, like where the Roman Empire basically has their foot on the necks of these Galileans who follow in a Roman territory. They're going to focus on the Caesar who stands in front of everybody with a giant chest plate, with a really like 12 pack ribs and abs and such, with the giant like biceps, but there's not real biceps. It's just molded metal over top of like a really weakling looking guy. That's how most of the Caesars were.

But also they're thinking about a kingdom where the Caesar presents himself to all of those in his kingdom as his son of God, ruling by divine right, taking what's his rather than doing what's best for the kingdom. And now it's not just what did this sound like in terms of a kingdom for like a Galilean, but also these were Hebrews that knew their Old Testament, well, what we call the Old Testament very well. And so what ideas of a kingdom would this conjure up? It would be very, very similar. So on the one hand, the Roman kingdom was in it for themselves, in it for their own growth, for the growth of the Caesar and all that he wanted in his own castle. But in their minds, these faithful Hebrews would go back to Daniel and they would know that there was a king that spoke in a vision that is talked about in the book of Daniel, where Nebuchadnezzar goes out and he looks upon all of Babylon, which was his territory. And he says, my kingdom is like a mighty tree. Is this not Babylon, this mighty tree in which birds of the air rest, which I have created in my mighty power.

So as Jesus is talking about kingdoms, this is what these Galileans, these faithful Hebrews are thinking of these kingdoms that are just made to benefit the ruler. And it's made to think about the physical real estate of the kingdom, but not the reign and the authority that is a blessing to those who are under this kingdom care. And these kings, these rulers, like they have to hold everything together with a tight fist so that everything fits exactly how they desire it to be, exactly how they want it to be. So they can look on and say, look what I've created with my mighty power.

And as I stand here with my hands closed and tight fisted like this, this is where I think your concept of kingdom and definitely my experience of me trying to run my own kingdom really comes into play. Because I look at my household and how I want to try to control everything in my household, not necessarily because I want it to be a kingdom, but because I would love for it to turn out the way that I want it to turn out. I have good plans for my family. It takes a lot of work. The Lord has placed in my spirit, like a deep sense of responsibility. And so I want to make sure my household is run the way that I want it to go.

It's also hard too, as a servant and leading in a church, because I look at everything that could happen here and all of the great impact we could make. And if we just did maybe what my plans for ministry would be, and I just hold on tightly and I do it all by myself because I don't know if anybody could do it as well as I could. Maybe just maybe this kingdom will continue to expand. And how are you in your house? How much joy have you forfeited in your home because you've tried to control your relationships with your family? Because you've tried to control the way your children interact with their spirituality. I don't mean like gentle guiding and good discipleship. I mean, you're telling them you're going to church or else you're disinherited. I used to walk to church both ways in the snow. It was terrible, but I did it. Tight-fisted.

It doesn't matter if you're trying to run a household or lead in ministry in a church. What about work? The responsibilities that you have? How exhausted has this mentality of maintaining your own kingdom by your own control made you? How many hours of sleep has it cost you? How much joy is

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sucked out of every day? Because you wake up thinking you're serving a sentence of tight, controlled responsibility. That's all you. And you're the only one that can be trustworthy to take this on. This is what it feels like inside of my own heart and my own head. I think you guys know what that feels like too. It feels like a kingdom that we want to control by ourselves.

And so we think about how much has it cost us to live like this? How much does it cost you? How much joy do you not get to experience? How much deep Sabbath rest do you not have access to? Because you're really trying to wrestle control away from everyone else, including the Lord. And you wonder why your faith feels small. Your faith feels small and my faith feels small because we're not trusting it and relying on Jesus for our life. But this is not what Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom.

Remember, he doesn't say any kingdom. He says the kingdom of God gives us something different. So then what is he going to teach us in Mark 4, 31? He says this, the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. Now, when Jesus is speaking, there's just a little bit of an aside. When Jesus is speaking, he's not speaking as a botanist. He's not saying, oh, you need to now go look and see if there's a seed that's smaller than a black mustard seed, which that's the more indigenous mustard seed to Israel. Because if it is, then the word of the Lord is incorrect. No, Jesus is speaking to a specific audience. He's speaking to Galilean, agriculturally minded farmers. So he's saying, look, there's a lot of seeds that are out there. The ones you commonly interact with and plant into the earth that you know, this is the smallest one.

And we know that Jesus knew a ton about agriculture. He would rail against the Pharisees. He said, you tithe the dill and the cumin from your own gardens. And yet you don't take care of the poor amongst you. So Jesus knew agriculture. He also knew his audience, which is why he's saying, look at that mustard seed. It is the smallest of all of the seeds on the earth. You're even going to see a picture of how it compares to the other seeds that these farmers actually were able to interact with on a daily basis, which is why I love Jesus's teaching, because he uses things that people use on a daily basis to teach them about how to live their lives in a daily way.

And so maybe rather than focusing on the big bigness of everything in a kingdom, Jesus's wisdom for you and for me is to focus on that, which is very small. I noticed the tense in which he speaks of the seed being sown. He said, the seed is sown. He's not giving you one more task to do. He's like, okay, sow the seed. He's not giving you one more task to do. He's like, okay, step number one on being more relaxed in life and growing in reliance, start doing a bunch more stuff, including learning about botany and maybe playing basketball for the NBA. No, he said a seed is sown. That is grace has been given to you. It's not a work that you did. It's something he did for you. So our relationship with Jesus actually begins in rest with a seed, actually making its way into our heart. And it does its work. And as that seed of faith is watered by the ministry of the Lord, it begins to sprout up.

And it reminds us of Jesus. In the book of Isaiah, it talks about Jesus. It says that he is going to be the shoot or the sprout off of the stump of Jesse. That is, there was an actual real man named Jesse, the great grandpappy of King David. And from that line, Jesus would come and it would be something that wouldn't necessarily be expected in the big, bigness of the world. It's going to start really, really small, but it's going to grow to a great, big difference.

Think about the entire ministry of Jesus as we're thinking about the seed of ministry that's sown in all of our lives. Does it start in the big, bigness of the world? No. It start as this baby in the womb of a

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peasant girl. And his first throne is a feed trough for animals. And as he continues to move in his ministry, it's not something that people normally see or they recognize. No, instead they're like, is this not the carpenter's son? Like, no, I couldn't expect that this would be it. He comes from Nazareth. Can anything good come from Nazareth? His friends and family look at his ministry and they say, I think he's out of his mind. See the ministry that Jesus was doing, thousands of people might accept it initially, but many thousands walk away as well. And so the ministry of Jesus begins in a very hidden, quiet place.

And then it makes its way to a garden. One in Gethsemane. So you probably know the Garden of Gethsemane story. And you probably know how this is going to tie together with reliance. Jesus has his own will. The father has his own will. And yet Jesus and the father's will line up and he's in this garden, this sprouts that is Jesus and his promises of grace. He's in this garden and he knows what's coming before him. He knows that he is going to wrestle control away from you, wrestle sin away from me. And he says, father, I know that this cup is on its way. Please take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours be done. And so in this, Jesus illustrates reliance in the garden, reliance in the small things that almost seem hidden.

And then it's the same Jesus who actually takes his life and takes your sin and my sin and our control and our lack of trust. And he buries it into the ground after his work on the cross to take that sin away from each and every one of us to wrestle each and individual finger open of every last thing we think we could do to contribute to the kingdom. He takes all of that down into the ground, into the dirt.

And it's an interesting thing that it's in this sacrifice for us in this almost hiddenness. That we see how benefited we are from Jesus himself being reliant on the will of the father. And this is where we learn that small things are incredibly important to the father. That reliance on his will is critical as we're developing our connection with him. And so maybe it's good for us to be able to think about our value in this kingdom, because in this kingdom, as Jesus is teaching it, we are reliant.

So what happens as we are reliant in this kingdom? Well, this is the last verse for our text for today. In Mark 4.32, Jesus says this, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger. And then all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. The small quiet things happen first. The mustard seed gets planted in the ground. Our old selves get planted into the ground. The grace of Jesus nourishes the soil. And all of a sudden, then we see the giant impact that Jesus has made for you and for me in his kingdom, in his garden.

And we know all about the garden, because when Mary is in a very specific place, when she thought that her Jesus had died, and that was the end of the story, she starts to sob and she starts to cry. And off to the side, she sees a man. And what does she call him? A gardener. The story about all these small little seeds being planted, including the body of Jesus into the ground, then begins anew in a garden.

My prayer for you today is that wherever you're at, whether you are a person who's followed Jesus and you're exhausted, and you didn't know it was okay to like, just let go of all of that control that you had in your hand. Whether you don't know who Jesus is, and you're a guest here today, I want you to know that he is for you. He has been planting seeds in your life that you didn't even know were there. But now you get to hear today that Jesus loves you. He has taken your sin away. He's died for that. He has given you brand new life in him.

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Whether you're de-churched because the church hurt you at some time, they started pruning you too hard, too fast, and it wasn't right. It's not okay. This is a good spot for you. This is a healthy place for you to grow. And it doesn't matter if you're here, you're in Bennington, you're in Fremont. These are all places where the word of the Lord will continue to nourish your connection with him.

There's a passage in the scripture that people should have been referencing to. It's not hidden, but it's not very well known. It was something that painted this beautiful picture of what the kingdom of God actually is, what the Messiah's rule and reign should look like as it benefits those in his kingdom, not for himself. It's from Ezekiel 17.23. It goes like this. On the mountain height of Israel, this is the Lord speaking, I will plant it, that is his kingdom, that it may bear branches and produce fruit. It will become a noble cedar. Under it will dwell every kind of bird. In the shade of its branches, they will rest. They will nest. What Jesus is speaking about in Mark 4, is the embodiment of Ezekiel 17, a small text that was planted in the history of God's people's lives, a promise of rest from exhaustion. It's a promise for you too today.

So if you are newer to the kingdom, or you're just wanting to reconnect with a healthy version of what the kingdom of God actually is, if you are newer to the kingdom, or you're just wanting to reconnect with a healthy version of what the kingdom looks like, and you no longer rely on the Lord, I pray there are three things that you learned about today that will help you connect with him. Number one, whether it's Ezekiel or Mark, start small. First be a bird, before you're going to be a branch. The promise of God's mustard seed is that it grows up a little bit bigger, but there's a purpose that the birds of the air will nest in it, and it will give them rest. If you haven't been connected to Jesus, baptism is you being a bird and just receiving the great gift of new life that he has for you. The old self goes away and is drowned in the waters. The new self gets risen in Jesus's resurrection. That's a great gift of baptism. That's you being a bird. You being a bird is taking the Lord's supper. Think about how small that bread is and how little the amount of wine is, how many ounces that is, but how great of an impact that has in the presence of our gardener being in our hearts and souls. So first, be a bird before you try to be a branch.

Number two, second, start small. Sprout. Just start small. Everybody's intimidated by the end result. Don't look at the end result. Start small. If you want to actually have an effect in your family, here's just one little tip. When you get in the car, when you get in the van, and all the kids are yelling, and you're going through the mental checklist of, do I have somebody's lunch? And who am I gonna pick up? And where's the practice today? Before any of that, just say a little bit of a prayer, giving your family over to Jesus. And I tell you what, those little prayers compound, and they make a giant, big difference after years and years of faithfully relying on Jesus to take care of your family.

Or maybe you're not in that situation where you got a family right now, you're still getting in your car, you're still going to work, and you may dread every second of it because you're still trying to hold it like this. Start small, sprout by just a little prayer of reliance on the Lord giving people to you that you can trust, that can carry out the mission together. Those are just a couple of practical things that you and I can do to start relying on Jesus more. And they're just small, but they can have a huge impact.

Third, when the sprouts grow, let's grow our branches together. We have this thing in Christianity that as we begin to mature in the faith, for some reason or another, instead of drawing community in, we kind of go out on our own, and we perpetuate that same kingdom stress and pressure, even in here in the church. Think about a mustard seed. Think about a mustard bush. The way it processes all the

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nutrients it needs from the sun is by growing all of the branches together so it can actually receive all of the blessing and create a space for those nests to go. And that's where I'm going to work in an idea about this pledge card. This is our opportunity to kind of just branch out together. Like, this is what we're going to do together to continue to grow, to see the impact being made in the kingdom here in Nebraska. Because maybe you're a first-time giver, and you're like, this is my small step. Great, wonderful. Pray over that. But maybe you're like, no, I did that already. I'm growing in my reliance, and so now I'm going to be an intentional giver. I'm going to set aside some of my income that I try to control so strictly, and I'm going to set it over to the gifts of the Lord so we can keep seeing more baptisms occurring. We can keep sending missionaries to Guatemala and in Chile pretty soon.

Here's the cool thing about mustard bushes in this area of the world where Jesus is speaking. After they take root, they take root hard, and they are hardy, and they are like a weed to try to get out. That is what the kingdom of God is like. It spreads long, and it spreads far, but it just starts with little reliance to change a community. It's very similar with Muggsy Boggs. Now, I don't know what he's like off the court. I only can read what I can read, you know, online and through, like, press articles. But here's what I've learned. Yes, he made a big impact for his team. Like, I just heard this week, this past week, I believe the Hornets are going to retire his jersey because he made such an impact on the court.

But he also has the Muggsy Boggs Family Foundation, and he took this little guy, five foot three, to make a big impact in Charlotte. He's allowed students to have scholarships so that they can go to school. It kind of throws back to all the people he had to rely on so that he could actually get to the point where he got. He wants others to be able to have that same experience. He's made sure that families can have meals. He's cared for Charlotte. He's a small guy who made a big impact in his community. And you and I can do the same because we are the kingdom.

Across all campuses, would you please stand with me? As we say together, we are the kingdom. Ready? One, two, three. We are the kingdom. One more time. We are the kingdom, and we are reliant. Let's pray. Jesus, we're thankful for your great blessings. We're thankful that you're generous, but we're also thankful that you have called us to be reliant, to trust in you. So, Lord, I would ask that you would give every person in each room who's hearing this message from your word one small opportunity to be reliant on your promises and to trust in you. We ask this, Lord, in your great name. And all God's people said, amen.

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