

"It doesn't look like much, but ..." What follows that phrase is usually a sales pitch. *"It doesn't look like much, but it'll get you from A to B,"* the used car salesman promises. *"I know it doesn't look like much, but with a fresh coat of paint and some French doors over there, this space could really come to life,"* so say the HGTV expert house-flippers. "It doesn't look like much, but *"it is a diamond in the rough."* Think how many times we have used that phrase. Yet, do we sometimes think about the kingdom of God or the Word of God in the same way? *"It doesn't look like much now, but just wait till we get to heaven."* *"I know that there are better days that are coming down the road."* *"God has a plan for me."* Even though all those phrases are true, they may not bring comfort to the person who is going through that rough time and needs to hear promises and hope. In these words of Jesus, he wants us to see just how powerful the kingdom of God and the power that there is in the Word of God.

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." There is power in a seed. However, for the farmer, planting seed is really a leap of faith. He prepares the soil the best he can. He goes out tosses the seed on that soil, cover it up and goes to bed. You can water it. You can pull the weeds. You can try to take care of it the best you can. But finally, it all depends upon the power of the almighty God. The farmer may not know how the growth works. That is not necessary. He simply does his work, goes to bed, and rises each day. Once it is planted the seed does its thing. But the growth does not happen immediately. It comes in stages—first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain. Finally, when the grain is ripe, the man returns to bring home the harvest. Now there is much more to farming than just tossing some seed into the field and watch it grow. Yet, the germination of that seed is still somewhat of a mystery. It grows in a way that nothing else in the world.

Where else does that happen in life? Do you bring home some groceries, throw them down on the kitchen floor, go to bed, wake up the next morning, and, *"Oh look, a fully cooked meal!"* Do you buy a bunch of car parts, throw them in your garage and go in a week later, *"Oh look, my truck engine rebuilt itself?"* That kind of thing just doesn't happen in any other profession—just farming. That's the only profession in many ways where the work does itself.

Perhaps, the newly called disciples needed to know that the kingdom of God may seem to grow slow, but it will grow. Maybe there were some who may have expected the kingdom to come like a bolt of lightning—the final, glorious form all at once. But Jesus said, no, it begins like a seed, in fact, the smallest of seeds. A mustard seed. Those are really small. It takes about 20,000 mustard seeds to make an ounce. Looking at one, you would not expect it to produce the largest plant in the garden. The kingdom of God was to begin very, very small—12 guys and a story. Jesus is encouraging his disciples to have patience in the kingdom of God. Slowly, but surely, the kingdom will grow.

The Word of God will do some pretty amazing things. The prophet Isaiah speaks about that when he wrote: **"so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands."** (Isaiah 55:11-12) Look at how that seed has grown in your hearts. For some, that was done when the water of baptism was poured over your head. For some, that may have been when a parent or grandparent spoke the promises of God to you. He promises us that it will grow. All by itself, the soil will produce a plant. All by itself, the Gospel will plant a seed in your heart.

We have a God who is not small. We have a God who can look inside our hearts and see things that no one else can. We have a God who loves us anyway. We have a God who opens his arms around us and loves us in ways that no one else could. We have a God washes those sins away so he doesn't see them anymore. The remarkable thing is that he uses sinners like you and me to accomplish that task.

Look at the extent of that growth. **"What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the**

largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.” That mustard seed is so very small—much smaller than the other garden seeds. But Jesus says: *“do not be deceived.”* After it is sown and grows to maturity, this little seed surpasses all the other garden plants. Fully grown, it provides a home that is safe and secure for all the birds of the air. So, the Church is a place of rest and protection. Like a tree that provides a safe haven for the birds of the air to build their nests, the Church is a place for all people to gather in safety. Here you hear Jesus’ promises of forgiveness, welcome, and protection being proclaimed. The Church is far bigger than any single gathering of believers; be they a congregation or a church body. The mustard tree is **“larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches”** (Mark 4:32). In obedience to Jesus’ command, the disciples and their descendants took the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. In Christ, he uses us to help proclaim that Kingdom of God to others. Thirdly, His Church will keep themselves grounded in the promises of Jesus.



During the First World War, Allied soldiers needed a way to see without being seen. Concealment and deception had always been a part of warfare. But because of the proximity of opposing trenches and the beginning of aerial photography, it made it much easier to detect enemy troops. Armies on all sides needed to find new ways to hide from, observe, and deceive enemy forces. One of the solutions was the dead looking fake tree.

The fake tree would allow Allied soldiers to keep track of enemy movements from a concealed elevated position. They found a dead tree, blasted by a bomb, located ideally near the trenches was chosen. The tree was then photographed and extensively studied, measurements taken and sketches made. A hollow, steel replica was then made in the workshop far behind the lines. At night, under the cover of darkness and artillery fire, the real tree was felled and the fake one installed in its place. The artillery fire also drowned out the noise of the work. It didn't look like much, but appearances may deceive you. Look at the power of our God. Our Savior has defeated

As we look at the Kingdom of God and the Word of God, it may not look like all that powerful tool against the attacks of Satan. Don't let appearances deceive you. Let him rule your heart. Take comfort in Jesus knowing that he is our Champion. Praise God for that seed of faith that causes it grow leading up to eternal life. May God grant it. Amen.