DAY 4:

It's Like This

Mustard seeds are usually about 1 or 2 mm in diameter. In the New Testament, the mustard seed is used by Jesus in the parable of the Mustard Seed as a model for the kingdom of God which initially starts small but grows to be the biggest of all garden plants. Faith is also spoken about in the context of a mustard seed.

Main Text

"So He was saying, 'What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it?" **(Luke 13:18).**

NOTE TO PRESENTER:

Today's presentation will feature several different views of the kingdom of God. The objective is to give your audience a sense of the nature of God's kingdom. This is essential since the kingdom of God is only partially experienced on earth. As we'll learn later in the week, the true fulfillment of the Kingdom will only be realized when Jesus returns to earth. Also, when discussing the parables of Jesus about the Kingdom, feel free to show pictures or videos of the things Jesus mentions. Assemble these ahead of time.

Some things are really hard to explain. Do you believe that? The October 1991 edition of *Bits and Pieces* magazine carried the following true story that makes the point.

> "A woman's red station wagon was crushed by an elephant at a circus. The owners of the animal apologized, explaining that the animal, for some reason, simply liked to sit on red cars. In spite of the damage, the woman's car was still drivable. But on the way to the garage she was stopped short by an accident involving two other cars just ahead of her. When the ambulance arrived a few minutes later the attendants took one look at her car, then ran over to assist her. 'Oh, I wasn't involved in this accident,' she explained. 'An elephant sat on my car.' The ambulance attendants quickly bundled her off to the hospital for possible shock and head injuries, despite the lady's vehement protests."

Some things are just really difficult to explain. Try explaining how a black cow can eat green grass and produce white milk. Ask a scientist near you why human beings yawn. In fact, while you're at it, ask him or her why nine out of ten people in the world are right-handed. Some things are really, really difficult to explain.

This is one of the problems Jesus faced when trying to explain the origin and nature of the kingdom of God. Now let's be clear, Jesus was not having a problem in understanding the kingdom. After all, He was from this kingdom. He was an emissary sent from God to earth to show us what the kingdom of God—also referred to as the kingdom of Heaven by Jesus—was like. So, Jesus knew all about the kingdom. Explaining the message to fallen human beings, well, that was a different story.

A 1908 statement by Ellen G. White may help to explain why Jesus' task was so difficult: "The government of the kingdom of Christ is like no earthly government. It is a representation of the characters of those who compose the kingdom. 'Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God?' Christ asked, 'or with what comparison shall we compare it?' He could find nothing on earth that would serve as a perfect comparison. His court is one where holy love presides, and whose offices and appointments are graced by the exercise of charity. He charges His servants to bring pity and loving-kindness, His own attributes, into all their office work, and to find their happiness and satisfaction in reflecting the love and tender compassion of the divine nature on all with whom they associate" (*Review and Herald*, March 19, 1908).

Jesus wondered what He could use to explain the nature of the kingdom of God. The answer was found in a tool that He used often. He looked for common things that He knew His listeners would know and understand, and He used these things to share truth. We call these things parables or stories—metaphors that are used to teach deeper truths.

A Mustard Seed

In Matthew 13, Jesus uses several images to show what the kingdom of Heaven is like. Let's look at a few of those together. Go with me to Matthew 13: 31-32. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (NASB).

[Show picture of mustard seed. Then show picture of a mustard tree.]

Have you ever seen a mustard seed? How big is it? A mustard seed is one of the tiniest seeds. The people listening to Jesus grew mustard trees. They had seen mustard seeds many times. When Jesus likened the kingdom of Hheaven to a mustard seed, their eyes widened and their ears perked up.

Jesus then took them to a higher level of understanding. The kingdom of Hheaven is small but it grows in the hearts and lives of all who accept it. The Jewish leaders who watched Jesus intently dismissed He and His small band of followers as "nothings." He couldn't possibly be the Messiah because His followers were a tiny speck, not much to look at. That's precisely why Jesus chose a mustard seed to be the center of this parable of the kingdom.

According to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: "The *sinapis nigra*, or black mustard, of Palestine commonly reaches a height of 6 to 12 feet, with branches an inch or more thick. Here the figure of a tree represents the triumph of the gospel message throughout the world. The kingdom and its subjects might appear insignificant now, but, says Christ, this will not always be the case." (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 5, p. 409)*

In this seemingly simple parable, Jesus was communicating multiple truths about the nature of the kingdom of God. What are some of those truths? Here are but two of them:

1. The kingdom of Heaven grows. People who follow Jesus may appear to be insignificant or easily overlooked, but their ranks will continue to grow as long as time shall last.

2. It's worth it to be a member of the kingdom of Heaven, even if it may not yet appear in all its fullness.

But Jesus didn't stop at the mustard seed. He told more parables about the kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew 13, He said it was like:

1. **Yeast** (verses 33-35). While the mustard seed represented the kingdom's growth in size, yeast represented the growth that would happen in people who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord and live according to kingdom principles.

2. **Hidden Treasure** (verse 44). This parable represents the search for the gospel message at the heart of the kingdom of God. Where is it found? It is found in a field called the Bible. The Scriptures are where we find the good news of salvation. The man in this parable stumbles across the treasure, and nothing will stop him from owning it. That's how precious the truth of the kingdom is.

3. **A Costly Pearl** (verses 45-46). In this parable, a businessman goes looking for a priceless pearl. He represents those who are searching for the gospel of the kingdom of Heaven and will do all within their power to obtain it. That's the effort needed to seek after God (Jeremiah 29:13).

4. **The Dragnet** (verses 46-49). A dragnet was a type of weighted fishing net used in large bodies of water. When pulled up it would draw in everything that it covered in the sea. Jesus used this parable to explain that the kingdom of Heaven was open to all people, no matter their ethnicity, personality, attitude, or economic status. All would be welcomed. Isn't that amazing?!

Appeal

What an amazing kingdom God has for us! It's a place where all are welcomed. It's a place that grows bigger and bigger, and the people who enter it also grow in their walk with Jesus. Its message is like treasure that is worth wagering everything to obtain. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven, is the place where God wants all of us to be citizens.

My appeal today is for those who may not feel the urgency to be a part of God's kingdom. Maybe you're bored with church, or unmotivated to have a walk with God. Maybe you don't really pray as much as you used to, or you're on the verge of giving up on God. If you just want to reconnect with Jesus, stand to your feet and repeat these words after me:

"Jesus, I want to be closer to you. I want to be more passionate about my relationship with you. I want to love your Holy Word, and live it every day. You have promised that if anyone opens the door to You, You would come in and make a home with them.

"We ask you now to come into our hearts right now, dear God. Through your Holy Spirit, renew our commitment and make us hungry for a deeper relationship with you.

"Thank You for hearing and answering our prayer. Amen."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus use parables? Why didn't He simply explain Himself in some other way?

2. What prevented Jesus' listeners from fully understanding His teachings? What prevents you from grasping the meaning of Jesus' teachings? Does one need to have a relationship with Him in order to understand truth?

3. If the parable of the dragnet means that all people are welcomed into God's kingdom, why do some Christians erect "barriers" that keep people out? What are some of those barriers?

4. Are all Christian denominations part of the kingdom spoken of by Jesus? Explain your answer.

5. Write a modern-day parable to explain the kingdom of God to someone who has never heard of it. Finishing these words: "The kingdom of Heaven is like . . ."