

SLIDE PRAYER FOR EZRA BLACK

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

- Vince & Kirsten Black – The Town Church Ft. Collins
- Ezra Black – 17 years old
- Provisional elder
- Diagnosis: AML Leukemia
- Pray & Fast – 6 months

INTRODUCE

MATTHEW SLIDE Alright, if you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to Matthew chapter 13. Matthew 13. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to Matthew 13. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, Matthew 13 will be on page **819**.

INTRODUCTION: BOOKSTORE

I have been a Christian for 20 years.

- I got saved in the summer of 2001 in high school,
- So, this summer has marked 20 years for me.

And when I first got saved I ended up getting a job at a Christian bookstore.

And in the early 2000s there were some really strange things going on in the Christian bookstore:

First, apparently, a bunch of different kids went to heaven, and they'd like to tell you about it.

Second, there was a tremendous market for pink waterproof Bibles.

- I don't know what you gals are doing...
- weeping...
- or white-water rafting...
- or something.

Third, there are about a thousand Christian Movies on DVD...

- not Blu-Ray...
- not digital download...
- on DVD!

And yet...there are only three plots:

- One: a heartwarming tale about a dying kid and her horse.
 - The horse always has a name like Shadow.
 - And the movie is always called something like
 - *In the Valley of the Shadow of Death.*
- Two: a heartwarming tale about a really bad football team
 - that turns things around and wins the state title...
 - once they find out that the coach's daughter
 - was injured while riding on her horse named Shadow.
 - This type of movie always has a title like
 - *In the Shadow of the Goalpost.*
- And three: a heart wrenching tale
 - about the end of the world,
 - usually featuring Kirk Cameron,

- and...spoiler alert:
 - he plays the father of a dying girl
 - who has a horse named Shadow.

There was all this strange stuff...

ILLUSTRATION: WWJD

But the biggest seller

- at that time
- in the Christian bookstore
- was a little bracelet with four letters on it:
- W.W.J.D.
- Which stood for what? [PAUSE]

What would he do?

Cause is super simple to answer...until you actually read the Bible!

- Like, will he spit in some mud
- and rub it in some blind guy's face to heal them?
 - Try that next time you go to the mall.
- Will he flip over a table in church
- and kick everyone out?
 - Yo, we've got security for that!

Like, when you think about it, WWJD is not an easy question to answer.

But the whole point of those bracelets,

- and actually most of the stuff sold in Christian bookstores,
- was to really give Christians this kinda subversive way
- to share about the hope we have in Christ...

And I bought into it! Cause I got saved!

- And man, I had my Extreme Teen Bible,
- and my WWJD bracelet,
- and I went to my high school...
- and people were just gonna flock to me
- and ask about my bracelet,
- and I was just going to radically change my school.

And we laugh because it was weird and kitchy,

- but man, I kinda like the old weird way of doing things
- more than our modern way of not doing anything...right?

It was all about helping us spread this thing...the gospel...

- to get others to catch the same thing that got us...
- to get more people saved...

TRANSITION

I'm calling today's sermon: **SLIDE DELTA VARIANT.**

- How does this gospel thing spread?
- How does the kingdom of God move forward?
- How do we get the people around us to know Jesus Christ?
 - Is it a bracelet?
 - Do we need a new strategy?

Well, Jesus is very interesting in our text today...and it think it'll help us.

So, let's dig into our text. Matthew chapter 13, starting in verse 31.

BLANK SLIDE

MATTHEW 13:31a

[31] He put another parable before them,

EXPLAIN: PARABLES

Now, I've been gone the last two weeks,

- but we have moved into the next section of Matthew's gospel.
- Chapter 13 is called the Parable Discourse.
- And the last two weeks Kyle and Jon
- taught on two parables in this chapter:
 - the parable of the sower, or the soils.
 - And the parable of the weeds.

And Kyle and Jon did a wonderful job preaching those two parables...

- And I love them...but...they kinda cheated...alright?!?
- I mean, Jesus gave us the interpretation of those parables.
- But we have to do the work ourselves today.

And parables seem simple enough on the surface...

- but in actuality, they are complex and nuanced...
- and frankly, at times, frustrating.

Now, on the surface, these might seem like illustrations that Jesus is using, similar to how a preacher might use an illustration to drive home a point.

That would be nice...but that's not what Jesus is doing with parables. The great biblical scholar C.H. Dodd puts it like this:

SLIDE *“At its simplest a parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”* **BLANK SLIDE**

So, parables...

- aren't always straight-forward...
- they aren't, at times, clear...
- and they will often disturb the hearer.

Because they are meant to make the hearer dig deeper...

- to chew longer...
- to wrestle with what's being taught.

So, let's read the first of the two parables for today. Back to verse 31:

MATTHEW 13:31-32

[31] He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. [32] It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

EXPLAIN: UNDERDOG

Now, this story, on the surface, seems very simple... and to our modern American mindset we read it like this.

- There's this little seed...
- small and insignificant...
- and it proves everyone wrong...
- by becoming a mighty tree where birds nest.

It's the classic underdog tale.

- It's David over Goliath.
- It's Rocky Balboa over Apollo Creed.
- It's Kirk Cameron and Shadow over...the Apocalypse...?

But that's not really what this parable means.

I mean, it kinda means that.

- Like, this movement we are a part of that we call Christianity,
- yeah, it started small with just a couple hundred people,
- and over time it grows and grows and grows
- to become a much bigger thing.

And, yes, that is a correct interpretation of that parable.

- It doesn't mean LESS than that...
- but it certainly means MORE.

**You see, one of the major rules in Biblical interpretation:
is that it cannot mean for us what it did not mean for them.**

So, what did this mean for Jesus original hearers?

- Well, if you were a farmer in ancient Palestine,
- and you heard a story
- about a man who planted a mustard seed in his field...
- you'd think he was a complete fool.

EXPLAIN: MUSTARD SEED

Let's work through some of the details of this passage.

First the mustard seed. Do you know how big a mustard seed is?

- It's super tiny.
- Look, I have one here:
- can you see that?
 - Nah, I don't have one...
- but that's the point!
- You couldn't see it even if I did!

Jesus calls it the **smallest of all seeds**...

- which isn't actually true. Ok?
- But Jesus is not a liar or in error here.
- This was rabbinic hyperbole.

It was a very small seed...

- possibly the smallest seed known to most of these farmers.
- But his effort is to stress the difference between the seed
- and the growth that comes from that seed.

Now, that lends itself to the common interpretation of this parable.

But this week I found that in other ancient Hebrew writings,

- it was often said NOT to plant a mustard tree in a garden
- because it took up so much space.
- A mustard tree was considered dangerous and invasive.
 - It'd be like wanting flowers in your flower bed,
 - and planting a bunch of dandelion seeds.
 - Those aren't flowers!

- No matter what my 6-year-old daughter says!
 - “Daddy, don’t kill the flowers!”
- They’re weeds!
- And they’ll take over a yard with a vengeance!

And that’s how the mustard plant worked.

- It would eventually take over all the other plants in the field...
- and Jesus even mentions this.

Verse 32: **It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants.**

- That’s not talking about size.
- You know why?
 - Because it doesn’t actually grow that tall.
- A mustard tree is really more like a bush.
- And it really grows only 8-10 feet.
- There are much taller trees in the Near East.

So, this is why this parable would have been confusing to the original hearers.

No farmer worth his salt would plant a mustard seed in his field.

POINT 1

Now what in the world is Jesus trying to teach us, when he compares the kingdom of heaven with an invasive species of plant?

Well, this walks hand in hand with all that we’ve seen in the Gospel of Matthew these last few months.

And it's my first point: **SLIDE THE KINGDOM INVADES.**

- If you plant the seed of the Gospel in your life
- please understand that it is an invasive species.
- It will demand to become the biggest tree in your garden.
- In fact, it will spread. It will choke some other things out.

Jesus will not simply be an addition to your garden...

No, he takes over the whole field!

APPLICATION

You see, when I first became a Christian I thought,

- *"man, I need to do a few things better now that I'm a Christian.*
 - *I need to stop partying*
 - *and I need to stop chasing girls*
 - *and I need to stop cussing,*
 - *and then I'm good."*

But as I grew in faith I realized the utter depth of my sin.

- I realized I was much more of a wretch than I even knew.
- Like, you hear my preaching and you think,
 - *"This guy's kinda off!"*
- Man, all you can see is how crooked I am with a face mic!
- You don't even know the crazy that's going on in here!

Church, being a Christian isn't merely cleaning up behaviors,
but uprooting deep issues.

It's being completely invaded.

- This isn't, *"man, I've gotta stop cussing."*
 - It's, *"put to death all impurity in your life."*
- This isn't, *"I've gotta stop looking at porn."*
 - It's, *"Kill all sexual immorality in your heart."*
- It's attacking the reasons behind your need to tear down other people to make yourself feel better about you.
- It is attacking the reason behind
 - your manipulation of your spouse,
 - your frustration with your kids,
 - your slacking at your job.
- This isn't just a quick fix for your marriage.
- This isn't a five-step program to being a better parent.
- This isn't a program to make you a better person.

It is a complete overhaul of the very depths of your soul.

TRANSITION

The kingdom is like a seed that is planted...

- and it grows and grows and grows
- until it has invaded and taken over every corner of your life.

Have you been invaded? **BLANK SLIDE.**

Ok, now, to the next parable...which is similar, but has some nuances of its own. Verse 33:

MATTHEW 13:33

[33] He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like

leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

EXPLAIN: YEAST

Alright, now we move to the leaven or yeast parable, which is really interesting.

- Not so much to us,
- because we're like,
 - *“Alright, a gal is baking...*
 - *and puts some yeast in, obviously,*
 - *that's an ingredient to make the bread rise.*
 - *So, the kingdom, again, is like a small pinch of yeast,*
 - *and it will rise and grow*
 - *and eventually leaven the whole world.*
 - *It's small, but it has a big impact.”*

Nice. Tidy. And that IS a correct interpretation.

But again, the problem is it means more than that.

Remember, it cannot mean for us what it did not mean for them.

- And the thing about leaven
- is that in the ancient Hebrew mind,
- it is almost always connected
- with the spread of evil or the spread of sin.
- Yeast is a negative image!

In fact,

- leaven is mentioned 22 times in the Old Testament
- and 17 times in the New Testament,
- and it almost always represents sin or evil.

EXPLAIN: FUNGUS

Now, I Googled yeast. here's what Wikipedia says about yeast...

Wikipedia,

- where anyone
- can write anything
- about any topic
- so, you know you're getting the best information.

Wikipedia tells me that yeast is a fungus.

- A single celled,
- microorganism,
- fungal species.

Now, again, in the Old Testament,

- there are laws forbidding Hebrews
- from storing yeast in their homes.
- And there are laws all through Leviticus
- about what to do with fungal infections
 - in your home,
 - or in your pots or earthen ware,
 - or even in your bodies.

I mean, we think yeast and we think bread or beer...but what else comes to mind when you think yeast? Yeah...yeast infections.

- Oh, how I wanted to call this sermon “yeast infection”...
- but that got the elder veto.

POINT 2

Jesus just said:

- “the kingdom is like an invasive and obnoxious bush,”
- and now he’s like, “the kingdom is like a yeast infection.”

Great! Sign me up for that, Jesus.

What does he mean?

Well, we’ve already made the point that THE KINGDOM INVADES.

Let’s make point 2: **SLIDE THE KINGDOM INFECTS.**

ILLUSTRATION: THRUSH

So, when my daughter was born, she had what’s called thrush,

- which was a yeast infection in her mouth
- that was super painful,
- and incredibly hard to get rid of,
- and made those first months of infancy
- just a blissful and awesome experience!

No! It was awful!

- I always call the first couple months with a new baby
- a beautiful nightmare...
- throw a yeast infection in there for good measure!

And a yeast infection is incredibly difficult to get rid of...

- we tried many different treatments for Harper's thrush
- before we finally got rid of it.

APPLICATION

The kingdom...and people of the kingdom are the same.

- We are to be tenacious.
- We are to be resilient.
- We are to thrive in whatever situation we find ourselves in.

And that's why I called this sermon DELTA VARIANT.

- Because we don't have to stretch our imaginations
- in this cultural moment
- to understand the need to be careful with contamination.

The kingdom is infectious. Have you been infected? **BLANK SLIDE**.

Now one more angle on these two parables.

EXPLAIN: BIRDS

Back to the first parable:

- this mustard tree grows and grows and grows
- until it overshadows and takes over everything in the field.

And then the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

What is that?

- This is a reference to a number of Old Testament prophecies,
- and it refers to the gentiles coming to Israel...
- finding their home in the tree.

And this is what Jesus commissions the church to continue as their mission in Matthew 28:

SLIDE MATTHEW 28:19

[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

BLANK SLIDE

So, the result...

- of planting the mustard seed – the invasion
- and its growth – the infection
- is the great commission.
 - The gentiles are now a part of the family of God.

EXPLAIN: FLOUR

And then in the yeast parable, there is something going on similar.

The measurements mentioned are very intriguing.

- It says that the woman put the yeast in **three measures of flour**.
- Three measures (or an ephah in the OT)
- is about fifty pounds of flour.
- This is way more than a daily need,
- but more like the preparation for a banquet.
- It would feed 100-150 people.

So, just like the great commission in the first parable, now Jesus is saying that an insignificant amount of yeast could permeate an entire village.

POINT 3

And it's my final point for this morning.

- THE KINGDOM INVADES.
- THE KINGDOM INFECTS.
- And **SLIDE** THE KINGDOM AFFECTS.

There are effects of the kingdom coming into your life.

- Yes, it invades and infects your whole life,
- but it also begins to affect all those around you...
- and it does so in a disproportionate measure.

ILLUSTRATION: LAME YOUTH GROUP

So, I was in 8th grade a friend invited me to his youth group.

- And listen, this was no masterful evangelistic strategy.

It was one friend inviting another friend to church.

- And the youth group was small.
- It was simple.
 - It was a mustard seed.
 - It was a pinch of yeast.

But also...the youth group was lame!

Ok? The first time I went:

- It was like 15 kids and a few lame leaders...
- And they gave us fruit snacks...
- And there're hand-prints painted on the walls...
- And we played Red Rover...
- And we sang weird songs with hand motions...

- I mean, seriously...
- There's never been a teenager in the world who's said:
- "Play Pharoah Pharoah again!"

It was lame!

And I'm not joking!

- They asked about my interests,
 - so I told them I played guitar,
 - and I was in a band,
 - and I loved Metallica.

And they told me, THE FIRST TIME I WENT,

- that I should break all my Metallica CDs...
- because they were Satan's music.

This is a terrible evangelistic strategy!

- I mean, the whole night was incredibly lame.
- Like, not the group you would really want to invite friends to.

And at the end of the night my friend said,

- *"Hey Chris, you wanna come next week?"*
- And I was like, "Yeah man, can you pick me up?"

INVASION.

ILLUSTRATION: RICH

And those lame leaders became some of the most meaningful relationships in my life.

There was an older guy named Rich.

- Rich was pretty old for a youth group leader.
 - Like, big white beard.
 - Moved pretty slow.
 - Hiked his pants up real high.

And Rich was literally the worst dodgeball player I've ever seen...

Ok?

- When the time came for dodgeball
- Rich was the first one out...
- followed by the Jr. High girls...

There was nothing cool about Rich.

- But when Rich would get out in dodgeball,
- he'd sit down with whatever youth were also out,
- and he'd dive into a deep conversation.

He truly loved investing in students and had a deep impact on them.

INFECTION.

ILLUSTRATION: KEVIN

And then we had one youth pastor, Kevin.

- And Kevin saw something in me.
- And he disciplined me.
- And he gave me leadership responsibilities.
- And he gave me a job as an intern right out of high school,
 - which is akin to slave labor, but that's beside the point.

And he encouraged me that God might be leading me into ministry as a career.

So on his encouragement,

- I went to college to study theology...
- and then on to Seminary...
- and into vocational ministry.

EFFECTS.

ILLUSTRATION: EFFECTS

- And if it wasn't for my 8th grade friend inviting me,
- and dodge-ball-fail Rich investing in me,
- and then youth pastor Kevin encouraging me towards ministry.

If it wasn't for all that, we literally wouldn't be here at Fathom today.

The kingdom invades.

The kingdom infects.

And the kingdom affects.

BLANK SLIDE

CONCLUSION

Now, let's close this up with this: did you notice the word that was used in verse 33?

- The woman took the yeast
- and **HID** it in the flour.
- That's the Greek word egkryptō...where we get encryption.
- I think that's an intentional word here.

You see, in keeping with our DELTA VARIANT theme...think about this.

- I mean, we're coming into cold and flu season again,
- and don't think this year is gonna be like last year
- where no one got sick at all.
- Masks are gone people...get ready!

But,

- you can't see the flu,
- you can't see strep,
- you can't see the DELTA Variant.

There's this unseen thing that gets on the inside of you, a germ or virus.

- It is hidden.
- But then from the inside out...
- what do you begin to see?

Well, you still don't see FLU...rather, you see the symptoms.

And this is a picture of what the kingdom of God is like in your life.

You don't get the symptoms unless you get infected by it first.

A lot of us were taught that if you get all the symptoms right:

- loving others,
- sinning less,
- read your Bible,
- go to church.

If you get those symptoms...you'll get the kingdom.

But the scriptures teach the complete opposite.

- **The only way to get the effects of the kingdom,**
- **is to be infected by the kingdom.**

Have you been infected?

Have you been invaded?

Only then will you see the effects.

- Have you ever believed? Have you believed in Christ?
- If so, have you let that seed work its way through your whole life?
 - Only then will the birds come and nest.
 - Only then will there be enough bread to feed a whole village.

Church, these are the parables of the mustard seed, and the leaven.

To those who have ears, let them hear.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

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