

Parable Of The Mustard Seed

Intro: Jesus took common expressions and illustrations of His time to reveal to us the mysteries of the kingdom. He would turn an ordinary observation of human existence into great lessons of Christianity. He did so with this parable of the Mustard Seed. One expression was “small as a mustard seed” which Jesus used to teach a great lesson. He was not giving a science lesson but much like our expressions (“big as a barn,” “quiet as a mouse”) to graphically illustrate our point.

I. THE PARABLE

A. It is recorded for us in the synoptics.

1. Mat. 13:31-32 ³¹ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: ³² Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”
2. Mark 4:30-32 ³⁰ And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? ³¹ *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: ³² But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”*
3. Luke 13:18-19 ¹⁸ Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? ¹⁹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.”

B. It is about the kingdom.

1. Jesus wanted people to understand the kingdom.
2. He often spoke of it in parables, each one revealing a different truth about it.
3. The kingdom was a priority in Jesus’ life as it should be ours.

C. A contrast is being drawn.

1. The smallness of the mustard seed to the large growth which is produced.
 - a. In Jesus’ days, the mustard seed was a symbol of smallness.
 - b. Rabbis spoke of “a spot or blemish as small as a mustard seed.”
2. The kingdom would have a small and insignificant beginning.
3. The kingdom would grow into something much larger in comparison to what it was when it began.

D. Let us make some applications and learn some lessons from this parable.

II. THE CHURCH (KINGDOM) WOULD BEGIN SMALL AND GROW.

A. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

1. Dan. 2:34-35 ³⁴ Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. ³⁵ Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”
2. That stone is the kingdom; Dan. 2:44-45 ⁴⁴ And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. ⁴⁵ Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake

in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

B. God’s kingdom started small almost invisible.

1. During the first century, almost no one noticed Jesus and the church.
 - a. Jesus:
 - (1) Born in an obscure village 5 miles outside of Jerusalem.
 - (2) Almost nothing is known of his early life.
 - (3) Comes on the scene and begins teaching.
 - (4) He appoints 12 men who are apostles.
 - (5) After about 3 ½ year ministry, He is arrested, tried quickly, and crucified on a cross.
 - (6) He is taken off the cross and placed in a borrowed tomb.
 - b. His apostles:
 - (1) 50 days after His resurrection, and 10 days after His ascension, they began preaching.
 - (2) They preached that the events of Jesus death and resurrection was God’s plan.
 - (3) They tied all the events of history to Jesus claiming that God made Him both Lord and Christ; Acts 2:36 “³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
 - (4) They called upon people to repent and be baptized for salvation; Acts 2:38-40 “³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ³⁹For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. ⁴⁰And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”
2. The church grew to the point thousands obeyed the Gospel.
 - a. Acts 2:41 “⁴¹ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.”
 - b. Acts 4:4 “⁴Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”
 - c. Acts 5:14 “¹⁴ And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)”
 - d. Acts 17:6 “⁶ And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;”
3. Those converted realized the need to teach others.
 - a. Acts 8:4 “⁴Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”
 - b. Resulting in everyone having heard the Word:
 - (1) Rom. 10:18 “¹⁸ But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.”
 - (2) Col. 1:23 “²³If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;”

C. From that small beginning to now:

1. Millions have in the same manner obeyed the Gospel.
2. Millions have dedicated their lives to God and the church.

III. GOD'S PLAN WORKS

A. The mustard seed grew.

B. The church grew.

1. The structure was not conducive to growth.
 - a. It was not based upon military or governmental might.
 - b. It was based upon its teaching.
 - (1) The ideals, principles, morality.
 - (2) Golden rule:
 - (a) Mat. 7:12 ^{“12}Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”
 - (b) As opposed to the iron rule, silver rule, ulterior motive rule, etc.
 - (3) Love your enemies.
 - (4) Compassion, tenderheartedness, and kindness.
 - (5) Speaking with grace, eliminating profanity, and speaking truth.
 - (6) Doing good and staying away from evil.
 - (7) Seeking peace.
 - (8) Submissive to the government.
 - c. Contrast the Muslim religion that grows by military power and kill all infidels.
 - d. It relied solely upon men.
 - (1) 2 Cor. 4:7 ^{“7}But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”
 - (2) 2 Cor. 5:11 ^{“11}Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.”
2. The persecution was designed to destroy it.
 - a. First by the Jews.
 - (1) Acts 4:17-18 ^{“17}But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. ¹⁸And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”
 - (2) Acts 5:40 ^{“40}And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”
 - (3) Acts 8:3 ^{“3}As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison.”
 - (4) Acts 9:1-2 ^{“1}And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, ²And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”
 - b. Then by the Romans, their representatives, or governmental powers.
 - (1) Acts 16:20-24 ^{“20}And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, ²¹And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. ²²And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. ²³And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: ²⁴Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

- (2) Peter's first epistle was written upon the background of the Neronian persecution (64-67):
 - (a) 1 Pet. 1:6-7 ⁶Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: ⁷That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:"
 - (b) 1 Pet. 3:14 ¹⁴But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;"
 - (c) 1 Pet. 4:15-16 ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. ¹⁶Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."
- (3) Revelation was written amidst the background of persecution:
 - (a) Rev. 2:10 ¹⁰Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."
 - (b) Rev. 6:4-6 ⁴And there went out another horse *that was* red: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. ⁵And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. ⁶And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and *see* thou hurt not the oil and the wine."
 - (c) The Sea Beast in Rev. 13 represents governmental persecuting power.

C. Smallness was temporary and physical.

1. As we have seen, the church grew and filled the earth.
 - a. God gave them a plan:
 - (1) The Great Commission.
 - (a) Mat. 28:19-20 ¹⁹Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen."
 - (b) The apostles would teach others who would then teach others: 2 Tim. 2:2 ²And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."
 - (2) Acts 1:8 ⁸But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."
 - b. They did what He commanded so the church's smallness was temporary.
2. It had the power of God, the Gospel.
 - a. Peter used the keys of the kingdom to open its doors of salvation.
 - (1) Mat. 16:18-19 ¹⁸And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
 - (2) Acts 2:38, 40 ³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ³⁹For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. ⁴⁰And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation."

- b. Peter preached the Gospel: God's power to save.
 - (1) Mark 16:15-16 ¹⁵And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."
 - (2) Rom. 1:16 ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."
- c. The smallness was physically but not spiritually.
- 3. We must allow God's Word to work; 1 Cor. 3:6-9 ⁶I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. ⁸Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. ⁹For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building."

IV. MANY UNDERVALUE THE WORTH OF THE KINGDOM

A. The mustard seed was not worth much.

B. Many view the kingdom as not being worth much.

- 1. They will speak despairingly regarding it.
- 2. They will not join in the work of the church.
- 3. Will not attend all the services of the church.
- 4. The church takes a backseat to other activities.

C. The kingdom is of great value.

- 1. It was planned by God; Eph. 3:10-11 ¹⁰To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- 2. It was built by Christ; Mat. 16:18 ¹⁸And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
- 3. It was purchased by the blood of Christ; Acts 20:28 ²⁸Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."
- 4. Has Christ as its head, and is the body of Christ; Eph. 1:22-23 ²²And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, ²³Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."
- 5. It houses the saved; Eph. 5:23-27 ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

D. The seed of the kingdom is of great value.

- 1. It has great power:
 - a. Mat. 22:29 ²⁹Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."
 - b. Rom. 1:16 ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."
 - c. Jam. 1:21 ²¹Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."
- 2. Directs us so we will not sin.
 - a. Psa. 119:11 ¹¹Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

- b. Psa. 119:105 ¹⁰⁵“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
- 3. It directs our steps to heaven:
 - a. Gives us hope: Col. 1:23 ²³“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;”
 - b. Acts 20:32 ³²“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

V. BIRDS LODGING IN THE BRANCHES

A. Various interpretations through the years (many of them false):

1. Scofield taught the birds symbolize pagan world power.
2. J. D. McFadyen stated the growth of the tree and birds nesting there shows the gradual revelation of God’s Will to man and it still continues to this day (*The Message of the Parables*).
3. Warren Wiersbe said that it represented Satan and world power.
4. William Barclay said the birds represent all the different denominations in the world.

B. The safety and blessings of the kingdom.

1. The kingdom is a safe place.
 - a. Psa. 27:4-5 ⁴“One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple. ⁵For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.”
 - b. Isa. 4:6 ⁶“And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”
 - c. The cities of refuge were types of the church.
 - (1) They were 6 cities where the person who accidentally killed someone could flee for safety.
 - (2) The church is where we have safety.
 - d. It is a place where love, care, and concern for one another reigns.
 - e. It is the location of all the saved:
 - (1) Acts 2:47 ⁴⁷“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
 - (2) Eph. 5:23, 25-27 ²³“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”
2. The spiritual blessings found in the kingdom.
 - a. Eph. 1:3 ³“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:”
 - b. Many of those blessings being found “in Christ.”
 - (1) A new creature; 2 Cor. 5:17 ¹⁷“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”
 - (2) A child of God; Gal. 3:26 ²⁶“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”
 - (3) No condemnation; Rom. 8:1 ¹“*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

- c. Consider Ephesians 1 and the blessings “in Christ”
- (1) Saints and faithful; Eph. 1:1 ^{“1} Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:”
 - (2) All spiritual blessings; Eph. 1:3 ^{“3} Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:”
 - (3) Chosen; Eph. 1:4 ^{“4} According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”
 - (4) Adopted; Eph. 1:5 ^{“5} Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,”
 - (5) Given grace and Accepted; Eph. 1:6 ^{“6} To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”
 - (6) Redeemed and forgiven; Eph. 1:7 ^{“7} In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;”
 - (7) Gathered together in one all things; Eph. 1:10 ^{“10} That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:”
 - (8) Obtained an inheritance; Eph. 1:11 ^{“11} In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”
 - (9) The praise of His glory; Eph. 1:12 ^{“12} That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”
 - (10) Sealed with the Spirit of promise; Eph. 1:13 ^{“13} In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,”
 - (11) Faith; Eph. 1:15 ^{“15} Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,”
 - (12) Spirit of wisdom and revelation; Eph. 1:17-20 ^{“17} That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,”
3. God will never leave us; Heb. 13:5-6 ^{“5} *Let your conversation be* without covetousness; *and be content* with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. ⁶ So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”
- a. God’s presence
 - b. God’s help

Conclusion: The potential for the kingdom’s amazing growth lies in the Person Who reigns as its King. Those who will abide in Christ can be used by Him to produce the remarkable growth in the kingdom illustrated by this parable.