

Parable of the Mustard Seed

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[0 : 0 0] Seeking the Lord's blessing, let us turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together, the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 13, and we shall read verse 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, which indeed is the least of all seeds.

But when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and become of that tree, so that the birds of the year come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable speaking unto them, The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

When we come to the 13th chapter of Matthew, seven parables are recorded for us, and they all have one theme, the kingdom of God.

And so they have come to be called the parables of the kingdom. Four of them are only found in this gospel, namely the parable of the weeds, the pearl, and the hidden treasure, and the dragnet.

[1 : 3 0] The other three are shared with other gospels. In the first set of four parables, that is, the parable of the sower and the seed, the enemy who sowed tares, the merciless seed, and the leaven, Jesus speaks these parables before the multitude.

But in the second set of three parables, that is, the hidden treasure, the pearl, and the dragnet, they are spoken before the disciples only, because we read that Jesus sent the multitudes away, and then he entered into a house.

We may ask why all these parables are set upon the one theme, the kingdom of God. Well, not one parable can tell us all that we need to know about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven.

Each parable that is given teaches us a very important principle regarding the kingdom of heaven in this world. We have recently considered the first two parables, namely that of the sower and the seed, and the enemy who sowed tares.

And this morning, we are going to look at the parable of the mustard seed. And this evening, we will look at the parable of the leaven.

[3 : 0 6] Both of these parables are also recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke, and Mark only records for us the parable of the mustard seed.

But I think both parables fit well together. The parable of the mustard seed and that of the leaven are growth parables.

The mustard seed grows to be a tree, and the leaven makes the bread to grow or rise. The one speaks of growth outwardly, while the other speaks of growth inwardly.

Now, where Luke records these parables for us is very interesting. It is after Jesus healed the woman who had been crippled for 18 years, who was bent double and unable to straighten up.

And Jesus goes out of his way to help this woman, and he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was able to straighten up.

- [4 : 20] And the first thing she did was to glorify God. However, the ruler of the synagogue became very angry because the healing was done on the Sabbath day.
- And Jesus rebukes him for his hypocrisy. He says to him, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath lose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering.
- And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound these 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?
- Now, when he rebuked the ruler of the synagogue, along with all his opponents, with these words, we are told that they were ashamed, they were humiliated.
- But the people were delighted and rejoiced with all the wonderful things he was doing. And this was common to wherever Jesus talked or healed, the reaction of the people were mixed.
- [5 : 40] Even as John reminds us in his gospel with the raising of Lazarus from the dead, there were people who wanted to return him back to the grave.
- And this is always true that whenever or wherever the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed, there will always be a mixed reaction.
- There will always be opposition to the gospel. Soon, he was going to commission his disciples to go out into all the world to spread the gospel.
- And they would face opposition and even death for the sake of the gospel. Believers have always been blamed for this and that.
- In the Old Testament, you will recall that when Elijah came before King Ahab of Israel, he said to him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?
- [6 : 43] And when we come to the book of Acts, we see the violent opposition that was set against believers and that has continued down throughout history down to this very day.
- I suppose the writer of the Hebrews sums it up for us regarding the people of faith when he says, others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment.
- They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy.
- they wandered in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. But nevertheless, even with all that persecution, the word of God grew and multiplied and added to the church daily was such as should be saved.
- Jesus knows the difficulty of being a follower of his in this world. The pressures that can be put upon the believer to compromise the gospel of truth.
- [8 : 09] It can be pressure in the home, in the family or in the workplace, in the university, in college, in our communities. how the believer can be tempted to give in or to give up in such circumstances, to surrender to the pressures of the people around them.
- And the Christian always finds themselves so often in a minority. What can so few people do?
- When we look at the gospel and the little effect it is having on people, we can easily get discouraged and depressed. And in these two parables, which really we could link together, we can see that the kingdom of God has the power to grow and to enlarge to great proportions.
- Matthew places this parable and the following one, after that of the sower and the seed and the enemy who sowed tears.

These first two parables bring before us the work of the enemy. He plucks the seed away. He brings persecution and so on.

[9 : 34] but despite all that the kingdom, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the gospel cries, and that is brought before us in these two parables of the mustard seed and that of the leaven.

So we read 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 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 year come and lodge in the branches thereof.

This parable comes like the ones before it from the agricultural world a sower sows seed. This time it was a mustard seed and the mustard seed was the tiniest seed that the farmer sowed in ancient Israel.

However the mustard seed that was the tiniest of all was sowed by this man or this farmer and from that mustard seed there comes the mustard plant that could grow to a height of anywhere between 8 and 12 feet.

From this small and insignificant beginning would come a plant where birds could lodge on its branches on its branches.

[11 : 27] This mustard plant began to grow from one tiny little seed. Who would have imagined that the tiny seed would become a tree?

How insignificant it all seemed at the beginning. And the kingdom of heaven the preaching of the gospel may seem so insignificant.

Yet there had been over 2,000 years of growth and the kingdom of heaven has spread throughout the world.

From small beginnings just a handful of men it sped throughout the world. The apostle John was on the island of Patmos and he was there as the last of the apostles and he writes I John who also am your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ was in the is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And he might have been feeling quite lonely but then he is given the vision of the kingdom of heaven. After this I beheld and lo a great multitude which no man could number of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues stood before the throne and before the Lamb clothed with white robes and palms in their hands and cried with a loud voice in salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb and one of the elders answered saying unto me what are these which are arrayed in white robes and whence came they and I said unto him sir thou knowest and he said to me these are they which came out of great tribulation and I washed the robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb therefore are they before the throne of God and set him day a vision it all began so small but it grew up to be a multitude that no man could number it is easy for us to surrender to the overwhelming sense of powerlessness however

[14 : 32] Paul reminds us that our responsibility is to sow and to water that it is God alone that gives the increase we may at times feel that everything is against us as we go out to sow the seed of the kingdom of heaven but we are reminded by Solomon in Ecclesiastes where he says cast thy bread upon the water for thou shall find it after many days he warns us that he that observeth the wind shall not sow and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap and he goes on to tell us as thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all and then he exhorts us and he says in the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand for thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that or whether they both shall be alike good

J.C. Ryle he describes Christianity as follows a religion which seemed at first so feeble and helpless and powerless that it could not live its first founder was one who was poor in this world and ended his life by dying the death of a malefactor on the cross its first adherents were a little company whose number probably did not exceed a thousand when the Lord Jesus left this world its first preachers were a few fishermen and publicans who were most of the unlearned and ignorant men its first starting point was a despised corner of the earth called Judea a petty tributary province in the vast Roman Empire its first doctrine was eminently calculated to call forth the enemy of the natural heart

Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness its first movements brought down on its friends persecutions from all quarters if ever there was a religion which was a little grain at its beginning that religion was the gospel among the things that Ryle mentions there was this its first doctrine was eminently calculated to call forth the enemy of the natural heart Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness the first thing that the farmer did with the tiny mustard seed was to have it buried underground Jesus used a similar image to describe his own death and resurrection what Jesus says verily verily I say unto you except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit the mystery of the growth lies in the fact that the seed falls into the ground and that it dies it must die before it brings forth much fruit and the growth of the kingdom and the success of the growth of the gospel lies in the fact that the seed of the woman has been crucified and buried the seed of the woman

Jesus Christ he was crucified and buried and rose again this is the way that Paul sums it all up for us but we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men Jesus taught in another parable which Mark in his gospel places just before the parable of the mustard seed a parable that shows the mysterious growth of the seed and how it grows as it were in secret the unnoticeable growth of the seed so is the kingdom of

God Jesus says as if a man should cast seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how for the earth bringeth forth first of herself first the blade then the ear and after that the full corn in the ear but when the fruit is brought forth immediately put in the seagull because the harvest is come the seed dies but out of that death comes life the seed of the woman died but out of his death came life we're told here that the mustard seed was the least of all seeds but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and become of a tree so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof the image of birds coming to lodge in the branches of a tree that goes back to the old testament there are at least three places where this type of image is given to us we have it in

[21 : 04] Daniel chapter 4 we read of a dream that king Nebuchad Nessar had and only Daniel was able to give its interpretation and part of the dream was this I saw and behold a tree in the midst of the earth and the height thereof was great the tree grew and was strong and the height thereof reached unto heaven and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth the leaves thereof were fair and the fruit thereof much and in it was meat for all the beasts of the field had shadow under it and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof and all flesh was fed of it now what that dream that part the image of birds nesting in the branches of a tree it speaks of greatness we have it also in ezekiel chapter 31 where we read of assyria and it says there all the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young and under his shadow dwelt all great nations again there we have the idea of greatness we know in both cases that they were going to be brought to nothing as syria and babylon but that does not distract from the image that is brought before us here this image of greatness the third reference is also in ezekiel this time it speaks of israel and it says at the mountain of the height of

Israel will I plant it and shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit and be a goodly seeder and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell there we have this image again of birds coming to dwell on the branches of a tree the image speaks of greatness the image speaks of shelter the image speaks of refuge and rest we are told that in some ancient Jewish writings that the birds of the heaven refer specifically to Gentiles and that brings before us the global reach of the kingdom of heaven the global reach of the gospel Jews and Gentiles will come and find refuge and shelter and rest in the kingdom of heaven the birds of the year come and lodge in the branches thereof bringing before us this greatness of the kingdom the vastness of the kingdom wherein

Jews and Gentiles will come and they will find refuge and shelter and rest in the kingdom of heaven in spite in spite of all the persecutions in the early centuries and even now as people attempt to trample the gospel under their feet as they attempt to destroy the kingdom as they attempt to destroy the gospel in spite of all the opposition both then and now in spite of all the violence against the kingdom both then and now the kingdom continues to spread it continues to increase it is so easy for us to get discouraged when our expectations are not met when we may seem so small and so struggling when we feel that matters are in decline when we see such great apathy and indifference shown to the things of God when we feel that we are having no impact at all maybe we are tempted to give up all together maybe we are tempted to cry out well what's the use jc royal says let us learn from this parable never to despair of any work of christ because its first beginnings are feeble and small from small beginnings from the tiniest seed we are told here that it grew to be the greatest among herbs that it became a tree so that the birds of the air would come and lodge in the branches thereof john calvin went to geneva and he transformed an entire city through the preaching of the word of god because the seed of the word it has life in it that is the mystery of the seed is it not that although it has life in it it still has to die for that life to come to fruition the writer to the hebrews says for the word of god is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart jesus told his disciple in the last words to them as he departed from them and as he was received in the cloud he said to them ye shall be witnesses unto me both in jerusalem and in all judea and in samaria and into the uttermost part of the earth they were just tiny just like the mustard seed but like birds flocking

to a mighty tree the gospel of the kingdom was thriving in the vast Roman empire reaching Europe and Asia and all nations of the earth and it will continue to grow despite man's futile efforts to destroy it it will continue to grow and here then is Jesus and he has given them two parables he has told them how the seed has fallen to various places and how maybe it looked so small those who responded in a positive way he speaks of the seed that was sown and how tears were sown among the wheat and both these parables may look to be so discouraging and yet here he reminds them that the kingdom of heaven shall thrive that the kingdom of heaven shall prosper against all its opponents against all that is done against it it shall thrive the enemy can try and do his utmost to try and spoil and destroy he can sow tears among the wheat but the kingdom of heaven shall survive and the kingdom of heaven shall thrive it will continue to grow despite man's efforts to destroy it until the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our

Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever that is part of the vision that was given to John on the isle of Patmos and the lonely isle of Patmos where he must have been thinking well what is going to happen what is going to happen to the gospel what is going to happen to the kingdom of heaven what is going to happen to the kingdom of God and he is reminded that no that nothing is going to destroy it that there is nothing that there is no instrument of man that can destroy the kingdom and that it shall grow until it becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of Christ and he shall reign forever and ever so this parable here speaks of that growth outwardly and it is given to us in order to encourage us in the work of the gospel in the witness of the gospel a reminder that the word of

[31 : 34] God and that the kingdom of heaven shall prosper despite man's effort to destroy it the kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field which indeed is the least of all seeds but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and become a tree so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof they'll come from all nations in order to shelter in order to find refuge in order to find rest in the kingdom of heaven and perhaps before we leave it there is one challenge to me and to you and it is this how we found rest how we found shelter how we found refuge in the kingdom of heaven how we come to find refuge under the gospel to find shelter under the

Christ of the gospel because the gospel is Christ and Christ is the gospel may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray