

The Mustard Seed

Mark 4:26-29; Matthew 13:31-32

The Context

a. Context of the Parable

- Matthew 13:1-23 – Parable of the Soils – Responses to the Message of the Kingdom – doesn't say: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto..."
 - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 – Wheat and Tares – Corruption of the Mystery form of the Kingdom.
 - Mark 4:26-29 – The parable of the growing seed precedes this parable of the Mustard Seed.
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A. The Parable of the Growing Seed – Mark 4:26-29

a. The Planting

- i. V26 – "...*cast seed into the ground...*" A sower whom we cannot exactly identify, possibly the Lord.
- ii. V27 – "...*sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.*" Much time, not much initial progress, and MUCH uncertainty.
 1. "He knoweth not how..." – Jesus is the King of the Kingdom He knows it better than any other.

b. The Process

- i. V28 – "*For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself...*" – the words *of herself* is the word "automatos" where we get the word *automatic* from. Literally without human intervention.
- ii. The earth has its own part to play in the process. This is the part which is outside of the "sowers" power and control.
 1. Blade – first shoots from soil
 2. Ear – the covering of the grain
 3. Full Corn – the grain itself now ripened.

c. The Harvest

- i. V29 - "...*when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*"
 1. The harvest is time is the completion of the process. The end of the kingdom or at least the mystery form of it.

The application: The Kingdom of God is as a *growing seed* it begins with much uncertainty. However there is an unseen force which *automatically* enables the seed to grow and progress right up until the end. The intervention of God in building His kingdom far surpasses the work of man. The Kingdom of God will grow apart from man's intervention God has purposed it to be so.

B. The Parable of the Mustard Seed– Matthew 13:31-32

- There are *two* main views concerning the Parable of the Mustard Seed:
 - (1) The **Infiltration** of the Kingdom
 - i. Black Mustard seed – *Brassica nigra* -1-2mm – annual plant (a year life-span), grows to an average of 4-9ft and a maximum of 15ft (5m).
 - ii. V32- “...*least of all the seeds...*” – That a man would sow in his field especially to the known audience then to whom Christ was speaking. It was a proverbial saying amongst the Jews that the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds.
 - iii. The mustard seed is then sown and it being the “least of the all seeds” indicates that the kingdom was to have small beginnings.
 - iv. V32 – The grain of mustard seed grows and it “...becometh a tree...” Luke 13:19 says: “...and waxed a great tree...” therefore the birds of the air came and lodged in the branches thereof.
 - 1. The fact that it became *a tree* and *waxed a great tree* indicates the abnormal growth of the kingdom. The infiltration of “over population” and “rapid growth” welcomed the fowls of the air to lodge in it.
 - a. Herbert Lockyer: “*The growth of trees is slow, but that of a herb, like mustard seed, is abnormal, developing without the strong wood-issue of a tree...thus a herb becoming a tree suggests an expansion entirely foreign to its very nature and constitution.*”
 - v. The fowls of the air represent *Satan* and the *false teachers* and *religions* of Christendom which have lodged in the kingdom. This is believed in accordance to the fowls of Matt. 13:4, 19 – “...the wicked one...” who is said to “...catch away that which was sown in his heart...”
 - 1. Also a reference to Revelation 18:2 – “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the **habitation** of devils, and **the hold** of every foul spirit, and **a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.**” End time Babylon representing the false religious system of Rome has now become the *cage* or *prison* of people of religious apostasy.
 - vi. It is also argued that the *context* supports this interpretation because of the parable of the *Wheat and Tares*.

(2) The **Influence** of the Kingdom

- i. Mustard Tree seed – 3-4mm - *Salvador Persica* – grows up typically 6-7m and even up to 10m. It was commonly found in Israel and in the Middle Eastern region. It was common that birds will make their homes there and nest.
 1. Edersheim states: “*Such growth of the mustard seed was also a fact well known at the time, and, indeed, still observed in the East.*”
 2. J. F. Royle: “*...Mr. Amueng...stated that he had often stood on horseback under the tree, which was in Syria considered to be the mustard-tree of Scripture, and that it was commonly called khardal...the seeds were used for the same purposes as mustard...the berries red and juicy, and much smaller than a grain of black pepper, having a strong aromatic smell and flavour much like garden cresses...Dr. Royale felt convinced that the Salvadora Persica was the mustard tree of the Scripture.*”
- ii. The meaning of the *mustard seed* in relation to the kingdom is that the Kingdom of God in its mystery form will have an *unnoticeable almost invisible beginning*. It will start *small*, and have very humble beginnings. Similar to the *growing seed* which was sown in much *uncertainty* and globally it forecasted *very little* progress. This is opposite of what the Jews expected. They expected the Kingdom of God to come with initial great power as we see will happen at the beginning of the Millennium. Yet Jesus teaches that this *mystery form* of the Kingdom will start small and will grow to eventually impact entire societies, culture, and the world.
 1. **Note:** Jesus is not teaching *postmillennialism*. Postmillennialism teaches that the vast majority of people will be saved in this age. The gospel will have increasing success and will produce a world of peace, righteousness, and prosperity before the return of Christ.
- iii. The ***Birds of the Air***: Birds in the Bible are not always looked upon negatively. There are three main passages where they are considered negatively (Rev. 18:2; Gen. 40:17, 19; Mark 4:15) the rest are either *neutral* or *positive*. Some things to consider about *birds* and *trees*.
 1. Birds belong in trees
 2. Kingdoms are *trees* and *birds* are the Nations:
 - a. Babylon: speaking of *Nebuchadnezzars expanded Kingdom* - “***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.”

Daniel 4:11-12

b. Assyria: “*Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. 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.*” Ezekiel 31:3-6

c. Israel: “*Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.*” Ezekiel 17:22-24

3. Birds find their *sustenance, shelter, and security* in the trees. The Birds become very *dependant* upon the *trees*. They are NOT the kingdom but they benefit from the kingdom. Just like the *other nations* are not Babylon they just benefited from Babylon.

iv. The Application:

1. The disciples of Jesus have just heard of the *opposition* of the kingdom. The message is not readily received and amongst those that receive it are a multitude of counterfeits. However Jesus now gives them some hope. Despite these realities there is still hope for the Kingdom of God – it will not fail, it will *influence* the world.
2. It will start small but will grow to a point of influence upon the world and eventually the Kingdom of God will impact the whole earth. He is not talking about the *subjects* of the mystery form of the Kingdom but the *impact* of it.

- a. Started with 120 disciples – upper room
 - b. 3,000 day of Pentecost; then another 5,000.
 - c. Gospel goes to the Gentiles, than to the whole world.
 - d. The Nations of the World have benefitted of the Kingdom of God.
 - i. The Value of Human Life
 - ii. The Opposition to Slavery
 - iii. The Family Unit – Marriage etc.
 - iv. Law and Order – Education
 - v. Abolishment of Cannibalism
 - vi. The Bible is the most sold and translated book. Even all the false religions of the world have in some form been “impacted” by it. They make mention to it.
 - vii. Many nations consider themselves as “Christian Countries” – Europe, The South Pacific Islands, even now China and India. Christianity is having an *impact*.
 - viii. Christianity has become a great *refuge* for the world. It has led most the mainline *humanitarian* services: food, shelter, drug & alcohol reform, safe haven for Islamic refugees, Communism etc. The Kingdom of God has had a great influence upon the nations.
3. From the beginning of history until now the Kingdom of God has had a major impact on our world. It is like a *growing mustard seed*. Although we know the *great apostasy* is before us let us never forget that at the end of the *mystery form of the Kingdom* JESUS will REIGN! He wins and we are on the winning side!
- a. “In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.” Psalms 72:7-11
 - b. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. Revelation 11:15
 - c. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14

- d. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. Zechariah 14:9, 16

Conclusion

As the Jewish people did not expect, the Kingdom of God starts small and it grows to a place of influence. Even though *nature* of the Kingdom will be filled with corruption its *influence* upon the nations is presently undeniable and will climax in the Millennium. That which is smallest among the seeds becomes greatest among the herbs!

Memory Verse:

Matthew 13:31-32: *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 air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*