“THE PARABLES OF JESUS”
The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

INTRODUCTION

- From the first two parables that Jesus taught and then explained, it is easy to surmise that the disciples may have been discouraged by what they heard...
  - In “The Parable Of The Sower”, only one soil of four would be truly receptive to the Word sown.
  - In “The Parable Of The Wheat And Tares”, they learned that Satan would be doing his best to undermine the efforts of the Sower.

- As early as Chrysostom (sometime between 349-407 A.D.), commentators have suggested that the next two parables in Matthew 13:31-33 were told by Jesus to encourage His disciples in reference to the kingdom.
  - The first parable is that of "The Mustard Seed" – 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. (Matthew 13:31-32)
  - The second parable is that of "The Leaven" – Another parable spake he 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. (Matthew 13:33)
    - Both of which appear to describe the kingdom as destined for remarkable growth.

I. THE MUSTARD SEED

- THE PLANT ITSELF...
  - The mustard plant is well known for its hot-flavored seeds.
  - Among seeds sown in a garden it was generally the smallest.
  - As a plant, it reaches ten, sometimes fifteen feet in height.
  - In the fall of the year, its branches have become rigid, and the plant often serves as a shelter for birds of many kinds.

- PROVERBIAL USES OF THE MUSTARD SEED...
  - The mustard seed was used frequently to describe anything that is small in its beginning.
  - Jesus used it on another occasion to describe one's faith. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matthew 17:20)

- When God is involved, something small can be transformed into something great.
- If you were to look at a mustard seed you would think that not much could become of it.
  - It is not something that exudes expectation
  - This is a kingdom principle.
    - What does it mean?
    - In God’s kingdom, people, situations, and circumstances are not limited to how they
appear in the natural.

- We see God using Gideon and 300 men.
- Moses a man of stuttering speech.
- Jesus feeding 5000 with 2 fish and 5 loaves.
- I could go on and on.
- These circumstances and situations seemed small and destined for insignificance but they all had one common factor, god was involved.

Apply:
- We are living as members of God's kingdom here on earth.
  - The things we do and say and our circumstances, when done according to the will of God are subject to this principle.
    - This is applicable for us and the church in general.

- With this understanding of the mustard plant and its seeds, perhaps we are better able to appreciate the meaning of the parable itself.

II. THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE

- THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WOULD HAVE A SMALL BEGINNING...
  - Old Testament prophecy foretold this:
    - Concerning the Messiah.
      - And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: (Isaiah 11:1)
      - 2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:2-3)
    - Concerning the kingdom.
      - 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. (Daniel 2:35b, 44) (Starting out as a stone, becoming a great mountain)
  - Consider this description of the beginning...
    - "The Son of Man grew up in a despised province; he did not appear in public until his thirtieth year; then taught for two or three years in neighboring villages, and occasionally at Jerusalem; made a few converts, chiefly among the poor and unlearned; and then falling into the hands of his enemies, died the shameful death of the cross; such, and so slight, was the commencement of the universal kingdom of God." (R. C. Trench, Notes On The Parables Of Our Lord)

- BUT ITS TREMENDOUS GROWTH WOULD BELIE ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS...
  - Just as the "small stone" of Daniel 2:35 "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth"
  - The growth of the church in the first century A.D. certainly confirmed the truth of Jesus' parable.
    - The 120 disciples grew to over 3000 just in one day – 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)
• It was soon about 5000. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. (Acts 4:4)
- The number of the disciples continued to "multiply"
  • In Jerusalem. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)
  • Throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. (Acts 9:31)
  • Years later, there were "myriads" of believers just in Jerusalem alone. And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. (Acts 21:20)
    o Even today, we see the growth and influence of the kingdom of heaven in lives of believers around the world!

• ITS GROWTH WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO THE WORLD...
  o In the parable, Jesus spoke of how "the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."
  o What does Jesus mean? He does not say, but the kingdom of God is certainly a blessing to all who take refuge in its "branches."
    ▪ "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17)
    ▪ To those seeking rest for their weary souls, the King offers His tender invitation to come to Him and enter His kingdom of rest. 28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

• With this simple parable, Jesus offers encouragement to that small band of disciples following Him over the hills of Palestine.
  o They would be a part of something that would grow and bless the world immensely!

• What about today?
  o The kingdom of heaven continues to grow and spread out is branches to those who will accept it, certainly. But can we ever expect similar growth to that witnessed in the first century?

• Before a seed can grow it needs to be planted
  • Explain: The field was the mans area of influence.
    o He decided what was to be planted there.
    o The man didn’t just go out and wait for something to grow.
    o He made sure that the seed was planted in the correct way.

• Our own gardens would be your area of influence.
  o You have control over what you plant.
  o If you want something to grow that looks nice you have to chose to plant it.
  o If you want your garden to bear fruit like strawberries, you need to plant and look after them.
  o In due time you can pick the fruit and enjoy it.

Apply:
• Just like our gardens each of us have our own area of influence in our lives.
  o Think of the people you deal with.
  o Family, friends, church, and work mates, these are our areas of influence.
  o Each time we see them we have the opportunity to sow into their lives.
  o We need to make sure we follow the farmers example of planting the seed in the correct way.
  o How do we do this?
  o By ensuring our actions, words and attitudes are biblically based.
  o If we do this the potential is there to see Godly fruit in these peoples lives.

Consider a few thoughts about...

III. THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM TODAY

• THERE IS THE "MATHEMATICAL POSSIBILITY"...
  o Beginning with just twenty disciples, each converting just one person a year, and their converts doing the same...
  o ...The growth would be like a mustard seed!
    ▪ End of year 1 – 40
    ▪ End of year 5 – 640
    ▪ End of year 10 - 20,480
    ▪ End of year 15 - 655,360
    ▪ End of year 20 - 20,971,520
    ▪ End of year 25 - 1,342,177,280
  o All it takes is for each person to bring one soul to Christ each and every year!

• THERE IS CERTAINLY THE "SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITY"...
  o We have the same "seed" of the kingdom, the Word of God!
    ▪ A "seed" which is incorruptible, that lives and abides forever.
      • 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (I Peter 1:23-25)
    ▪ A "seed" capable of producing what God intends.
      • 10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)
    ▪ While the first two parables remind us that not all will accept the Word of God, this parable declares that the kingdom will grow!

• WHAT IS NEEDED IS PEOPLE...
  o People with vision
    ▪ Who have the vision of Christ, as expressed in His parables.
    ▪ Who look not at an apple and count the seeds, but looks at a seed and counts the apples (with their many seeds)!
    ▪ Who look at converting and developing disciples in the same way.
People willing to put the kingdom of God first in their lives

- The seed of the gospel will produce fruit, but only if it falls on good soil
- If we allow...
  - The cares of this world
  - The deceitfulness of riches
  - The pleasures of life...to "choke" us, we cannot bear good fruit
- Therefore we need to put the kingdom of God first.
  - But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

People willing to abide in Christ.

- For apart from Christ they can do nothing.
  - 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches... (John 15:4-5)
  - For only they are able to bear “much fruit.”
  - I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)
  - And only they will be able to glorify God and be His true disciples.
    - Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:8)

- Farmers can’t make it grow.
  - God causes the smallest, most insignificant seed to grow into something that is the biggest and greatest tree.
  - There is no limit with God. This plant doesn’t stay a plant it becomes a tree.
  - Reminds me of 1 Corinthians 3:6 “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

- Charles Spurgeon the famous theologian once said “Do what you do thoroughly, pray over it heartily, and leave the result to God.”
  - He believes that God can take whatever we do as Christians, no matter how small and turn it into something great.
- Charles Spurgeon converted in 1850 at a small service of 10.

Apply:

- We each have our parts to play. As Christians we become anxious over things that are not our responsibility. If no one responds to an evangelistic message we give we can get down and think “where did I fail?” or we might offer to pray for someone and if they don’t get healed we might be hesitant to pray for someone again.
- That’s not how it works.
- In the kingdom of God we have our part and God has his part.
- God calls us to preach evangelistically so we do – we then leave the results up to Him, it’s the holy Spirit’s job to convict of sin.
- God tells us to pray for people – if they don’t get healed it could be for a number of reasons, its not because you don’t have enough faith because how much faith does the Bible say you need? Mustard seed!

CONCLUSION
• The potential for the kingdom's amazing growth rests in the Person who reigns as its King...
  o Those who will abide in Christ can be used by Him to produce the remarkable growth in the kingdom illustrated by this parable
  o As Paul wrote to the Philippians: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13)

• Allow "The Parable Of The Mustard Seed" to serve as...
  o An encouragement - The kingdom of heaven is destined for great things, though it’s beginning was small.
  o A reminder - That if we are going to be useful to the Master in this ever-growing kingdom, we must "abide in Him" so we can "bear much fruit."

• I need to state here: The seed has grown into something great that brings life
  o Question: why would birds flock to the tree?
  o Answer: Provides shade and protection – we could stretch this to say that the tree brings life because without it they would die due to exposure from the heat.
  o Explain: If a bird is in a situation where it's hot they are going to look for a tree that is big enough to protect them from the shade, this tree does – Is it not ironic that something so small and insignificant now is the thing that brings shelter and life?

• That’s how God works:
• For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: (1 Corinthians 1:26)

• As ministers lets not lose sight of the fact that we serve a big God.
  o There is a part that we play and a part that God plays.
  o As long as we are doing our part, sowing seeds in our sphere of influence, God can bring about the transformation and growth.

• I want to encourage us to continue to be part of God's plan to bring life to those around us.

• Have you rested your weary wings in this great tree called “the kingdom of heaven?” 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:3-5)