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Parable of the Mustard seed Matthew 13:31-32

Matthew 13:31-32, *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³²which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."*

The parables of Matthew 13 are given by our Lord to describe the character of the kingdom between His rejection and His return.

These parables describe the church age, our Lord called the mystery form of the kingdom.

Small things can have, ultimately, very large effects.

All music, all symphonies, concertos, oratorios, hymns, songs, all music comes basically from eight notes.

All the profound words that have ever been uttered or written in the English language come from 26 letters.

Small beginnings; profound, extensive results.

Lord Kelvin provides us with an interesting insight into this by an experiment which he once made. He suspended a large chunk of steel weighing many, many pounds. It was hanging there in his lab to prove a point. He then proceeded to wad up little bits of paper about the size of a pea and systematically throw the wad at the steel.

At first, that rather gentle tap had no effect at all. But eventually, the steel was swaying back and forth and back because of the relentless tapping of the little piece of paper. Small things, profound results.

That's really the lesson of these parables.

Background.

The disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the King. Messiah means anointed one and that implies King, that He was the greater Son of David, that He was the promised King who would set up the kingdom.

For them, the kingdom had very clear definitions.

It would come in glory.
It would come in power.

There would be great catastrophic events.
There would be the punishment of evil doers.
They were looking for the music, the horses, the triumph, the wonder, the glory, the show, and the publicity.

They really anticipated a blazing display of power and glory and majesty and might as the Messiah establish His kingdom. But it didn't happen that way.

Was this the Messiah?

They struggled with that all the way along.
Jesus would tell them again and again that He was, and they would still struggle with it. All the way into the book of Acts they are still asking, "Will You at this time bring the kingdom?"

They never quite understood because their expectations were so different from what they were seeing.

Because they had read Ezekiel and other prophets that when the Lord came, all the rebels and rejecters who turned their back on God would be face the fury of God's judgment, and the kingdom would come.

But the rejecters kept mounting and getting more flagrant.

Instead of Jesus talking about what He would do to them, He started talking about what they would do to Him.

Instead of Him saying He was going to kill them, He started saying, “They are going to kill Me.”

Very hard for them to handle.

When Jesus said to them, “I must die,” they violently responded as Peter, “Lord, let not this be so.” It can’t happen.

The very day that they were throwing palm branches at His feet, and He was coming into the city of Jerusalem. They were crying, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” and it looked like this would be the moment.

The disciples must have excited, and their heart must have been beating fast and the anticipation rising.

When it was all at its peak, Jesus said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone.”

He started to talk about His death again.

They were looking for a kingdom of glory, power, majesty, worldwide wonder. A kingdom where the unbeliever and the rejecter was immediately devastated and destroyed. It didn’t happen.

So Jesus teaches them why in Matthew 13.

He calls it the mystery form, verse 11.

It was not laid out so clearly that you would understand.

It was hidden.

This is a form of the kingdom you never really understood. He gives them eight parables which explain to them the kingdom in its mystery form, prior to the millennial blaze of glory that they were anticipating.

The first parable He gives them is about four kinds of soil.

Three of them do not receive the message of the King.

This form of the kingdom will include rejection.

The immediate question that would come into the mind of the disciple would be that what is going to happen to the rejecters? How should we treat the rejecters?

What are we going to do with these blaspheming rejecters?

The Lord tells them a second parable.

The wheat and the tares, the kingdom citizens, and the rejecters, are going to grow together until the judgment.

Jesus is saying it's not your job to be the executioners.

That is for the angels in the judgment.

Our job is to keep on being the wheat in the midst of the world so that you will influence the tares or the darnels that are all around you.

Our job is evangelism. They will grow together until the end.

What would be the obvious next question?

If the wheat and the tares are going along together, isn't that going to choke out the life of the kingdom?

The Lord gives them next two more parables.

We are the kingdom of God in the world.

Are we going to be wiped out in this?

Jesus teaches them these two parables that show from very small beginnings, very insignificant, the kingdom is going to grow, in spite of the opposition, to ultimately influence the whole wide world.

The first two parables talk about the conflict.

They talk about the antagonism of evil and good in the kingdom. They talk about the right and the wrong fighting one another.

But the next two talk about the victory of the right.

The little, tiny mustard seed fills the earth, the little piece of leaven, leavens the whole loaf of bread.

The two parables that describe the nature of the kingdom. It will be with believers and unbelievers, side by side, to the two parables that describe the power of the kingdom.

The Lord does not explain to us these two parables, but don't feel bad. The Lord gave us somebody to explain them to us the Holy Spirit.

He explained them to the disciples. The Bible tells us He explained all these things to them. But for us, we have the resident Holy Spirit and we, because we understand the mind of God as revealed in the Word of God, can fit this in with His plan.

The mustard seed which describes the external power of the kingdom.

V 31, *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,*

Again, a farmer.

He is going to plant a crop. He plants a crop of mustard.

Why?

It was used for many things.

It was used for its oil, by the way, was used for many things as well, one of which was medicinal use.

Mustard oil boosts immunity and is beneficial to those who with heart diseases and diabetes.

It acts as a preservative when added to pickles and chutneys.

To clear our respiratory system from congestion, inhale steam containing mustard oil.

It was used also for flavouring. Even today, mustard seed is valuable commodity.

They raised it as a crop, as we still do.

Mustard plant.



Mustard field in United Kingdom.



Mustard Tree



Where did he plant?

In his field.

What did he plant?

Mustard seed.

V 32, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

The smallest of all seeds.

A little botany lesson.

Mustard seed causes to grow a bush, a shrub we would call it, like a garden plant. Normally it grows to about **7 to 8 feet** in height. A good size garden plan/ size herb.

It is put in the herb family, *lachanon* in the Greek.

But very frequently it will grow to **12 to 15 feet** in height. There are many testimonies that have been written by eyewitnesses in the east who have seen these fields, both now and in past generations, who have testified to the fact that they get to be 15 feet high.

One writer talks about them being higher than a horse and rider.

Another writer says that the horse and the rider can ride under the branches of the mustard bush.

What the Lord is saying is you have no real connection apparent between the smallness of the seed and the largeness of the end result.

We have the very smallest seed giving a new life as very largest bush that can grow.

- We can plant a barley seed and we will get a barley plant that's fairly good size.
- We can plant a seed of wheat or of corn and you get a fairly good size thing.

But you plant this seed, and you get a 15-foot-high bush big enough to ride a horse under.

So, the parable is not an exaggeration.

It is statement commonly understood as are all the parables.

They commonly understood.

This is the least of all seeds.

The mustard seed was so small that it would take almost twenty thousand seeds to make one ounce, 28 grams.

The critics who want to attack the Bible pounce on that statement. They say that the Bible is not inerrant, because anybody knows that an orchid, a wild orchid seed is smaller than a mustard seed.

Jesus didn't know, and if He didn't know then He is not God." Or "He knew they were wrong, but He accommodated their ignorance."

Wild Orchid seeds.



The critics say that Jesus is wrong. Now either He's wrong because He's ignorant, or He's wrong because He's going along with their error. Either way Word of God is in trouble.

Can we prove that?

V 32 the word herbs in Greek is ***lachanon***.

That word refers to garden vegetables, garden greens that are grown purposely to be eaten.

It is used in **Romans 14:2**, *For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.*

Refers to that which is planted as a crop to be eaten, in opposition to wild plants. These are plants sown purposely.

So, the seed sown, agriculturally, to produce edible vegetables and greens.

Of all the seeds that were sown in the east, or are sown there today to produce edible products, the mustard seed was and still is the smallest.

Jesus is speaking within a framework in which what He says is exactly correct.

This was affirmed by a man by the name of **Dr. L.H. Shinnery**, **Director of the herbarium** at **Southern Methodist University** in **Dallas**, a regular lecturer at the **Smithsonian Institute**.

They have the largest herbarium in the southwest, **318,000 botanical specimens** from all over the world.

“The mustard seed would indeed have been the smallest of those to have been noticed by the people at the time of Christ. The principle field crops, barley, wheat, lentils and beans, have much larger seeds as do other plants which might have been present as weeds and so forth. There are various weeds and wildflowers belonging to the mustard, amaranth, pigweed, chickweed family with seeds that are small or smaller than

mustard, but they would not have been known or noticed by the inhabitants. They are wild and they certainly would not have been planted as a crop.”

When Jesus spoke about seeds, He is right.

If I can trust Him with seeds, I can trust Him with eternity.

V 32, *but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree,*

Jesus is not talking about a timber tree, but a shrub so large that it has the properties of a tree.

What is the property of a tree where birds can live in it?

There are a lot of bushes birds can't live in.

V32, a very intense Greek term that means to make their home there, build a nest and stay.

When the birds try to build its nest on a little bush in our yard what would happen?

It would bend over and drop them on the ground and all the eggs would fall out. This one get big.

Certain time of the year the branches become rigid, and birds build their nests there. Very accurate.

Jesus was also speaking proverbially.
He wasn't trying to give a lesson on botany.

He is basically speaking proverbially to the Jew, because the smallest seed he ever dealt with was a mustard seed. Mustard seed became proverbial for something small.

A person is as wise as an owl. Now we don't mean that the smartest thing in the world is an owl.
But we use proverbs like that.

Jesus just picked on one of their proverbs, it happened to be that this one was right. But it was proverbially used.

- The Jews talked about a drop of blood as small as a mustard seed.
- They talked about a tiny breach of the Mosaic law being a defilement the size of a mustard seed.
- They talked about a blemish or a spot on an animal the size of a mustard seed.
- To this day the Arabs talk about faith weighing the amount of a mustard seed.

Matthew 17:20, *So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here*

to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Luke 17:6, *So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

Jesus was simply using a story with a proverb that they used. But in His marvellous infinite wisdom, He happened to pick a proverb they used that was right.

Meaning of the Parable.

What it means?

1. The kingdom will start small.

Can we imagine how this is important to tell the disciple?

They were standing in a little group, being literally smothered by oppression, rejection, and blasphemy.

They were saying we just handful of us against the whole world. Jesus confirms that is the plan. Everything starts from something very small.

It was so small they couldn't even recognize the kingdom was there.

Acts 1:6, *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

It was so small, and it was buried in the ground, it was practically imperceptible.

Luke 17:20-21, *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."*

You can't see it.

The kingdom of God is within you.

It is already here but it's a little seed starting very small.

Just like when you plant that mustard seed in the ground, you can't see it, but it's here.

In that seed is the potential for a massive bush.

In that little seed planting of the kingdom is the potential for a kingdom that extends to the ends of the earth.

It starts very small.

Think of a manger, a feed trough.

Think of a stable, smelly animals, people wandering around ankle deep in the manure of that filthy place.

A baby born in obscurity in a country that was nothing but an infant wiggling in the arms of imperial Rome, with two districts, Judea, and Galilee, that were just dots on the earth. Samaria which was less than the other two.

Think of Nazareth where Jesus spent **30 years** uncultured and uneducated Nazareth.

Think of the disciples. All of them put together wouldn't add up to a mustard seed.

They were so small,

- inadequate,
- inconsequential,
- unqualified,
- fearful,
- faithless, and
- weak.

That was the kingdom that was planted.

But in the breast of that little infant in that feed trough in the manger was eternal life that would burst forth into an eternal kingdom. The seed was planted, small beginning.

This is a marvellous truth because this is not seen in the Old Testament. This is mystery revealed.

It starts small.

When Jesus ascended back into heaven, there were just 120 of them.

If we talk to a pastor today who has a church of 120, he feels cheated.

But when the kingdom started it only had 120.

The 120 disciples grew to over 3000 just in one day.

Acts 2:41, *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*

Soon 5,00 were added.

Acts 4:4, *However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*

They continued to multiply.

In Jerusalem.

Acts 6:7, *Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

In Judea, Samaria, and Galilee.

Acts 9:31, *Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

Years later we see the multitudes of believers in Jerusalem itself.

Acts 21:20, *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;*

In the first 3 centuries being a Christian is a capital punishment. You can't confess that Jesus is Lord when Caesar is Lord.

Until Constantine becomes Christian in the Milvian Bridge battle in **312 A.D.** Christians were hunted alive.

Next few centuries' Christians were persecuted for their faith. Even today in the 21st Century Christians are being persecuted for their faith but Christianity making so much of progress in the world.

It will cover the entire globe.

The kingdom started very small ends up very large.

The prophets saw a great kingdom.

The Old Testament prophets saw very differently.

Psalm 72:8-11, *He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. ⁹Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust. ¹⁰The kings of Tarshish and of the isles Will bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba Will offer gifts. ¹¹Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him.*

That's the extent of the kingdom.

That's how big the bush gets.

From a very little seed to a massive bush and that's the thing the Lord wants you to see. That you get the largest result from the smallest beginning in the case of the kingdom.

Isaiah 54:2-3, *"Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. ³For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations, And make the desolate cities inhabited.*

Messiah's kingdom shall extend from shore to shore, and entire globe.

Jeremiah saw it. (**Jeremiah 3, 21, &31**)

Amos saw it. (**Amos 9**)

Micah saw it. (**Mica 4**)

Zechariah saw it. (**Zechariah 14**)

We could see scripture after scripture that the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God would stretch from sea to sea, from land to land, cover the globe.

Ultimately, the millennial kingdom comes.

Jesus reigns over the whole earth.

Revelation 11:15, *“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”*

So, these parables actually take us into the millennium, into the fullness of the ultimate growth of the kingdom.

Christ’s rule,

- no matter how insignificant,
- no matter how despised,
- appears at first to be small.

It will grow and its end and consummation will be amazingly out of proportion to its beginning, such as a mustard bush to its seed.

Now this parable is meant to encourage us!

But sometimes I get discouraged.

How hard we try we always seem to be crushed and crowded out by the evil world around us. If I feel that way, can you imagine how they felt?

There are believing people in this city, other cities, and other countries and around the globe. God's people are there, and people are coming to Jesus Christ.

But even then, I sometimes feel like the battle is intense and that we are minority. Can you imagine how they must have felt?

When their very leader was being blasphemed in their presence, the sense of hopelessness, defeat, and discouragement.

When **John the Baptist** came, and he was such an impressive person, and the cities were flocking out to him, and it looked like everything was going to happen.

It was all so exciting.

John 3:30, *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

They were all getting caught up in the sweep of the establishing of the kingdom.

Then the crowds came and the miracles and the healings and the multiplying of food and all the wonders, walking on the water.

They could see it all beginning to happen.

Something shifted, and there began to be a mounting hate, bitterness, and rejection.

So, the Lord says, "It is going to start small, but it is going to end big." We are going to win in the end.

2. Kingdom will become blessings for the whole world.

The kingdom is going to stretch across the face of the earth and on into eternity forever and ever. We are going to be a part of that eternal kingdom.

V 32, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

What do these birds represent?

Some people think they represent demons.

The reason they think they represent demons is because of the earlier parable where the birds snatch it away and it talks about the bird sort of representing Satan who takes the Word away.

But birds could represent anything because they are simply an illustration.

What the birds mean is that the tree is very big. It is so big birds can lodge in it. It is Jesus' way of telling us how big it is.

Do you know why the birds live there?

Because there are seeds in that mustard bush to eat and they can feel at home. They don't have to eat out.

If I was a bird, I think I would go into a place where I could eat while I was there. We always read about mother birds going to find the food.

The mother bird in this deal stays home. But more than that, they build a nest. There is shade, protection, security, and food there.

Daniel chapter 4.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the greatest of all world Empires, has a dream.

Daniel 4:10-12, *“These were the visions of my head while on my bed: I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. ¹¹The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. ¹²Its leaves were lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it.*

Daniel answers this dream.

Daniel 4:20-22, *“The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which could be seen by all the earth, ²¹whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— ²²it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.*

Daniel saying that the Babylonian Empire has become like a tree. All the nations of the world are finding their comfort, security, and food in that tree.

- Babylon brought culture to the world,
- Brought education to the world,
- Brought architecture to the world,

- Brought prosperity to the world,
- Brought a sense of peace to the world.

There were lots of birds and the nations lodging in the tree of the Babylonian Empire.

Assyria described in Ezekiel 31.

Ezekiel 31:3-6, *Indeed Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, With fine branches that shaded the forest, And of high stature; And its top was among the thick boughs. ⁴The waters made it grow; Underground waters gave it height, With their rivers running around the place where it was planted, And sent out rivulets to all the trees of the field. ⁵Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field; Its boughs were multiplied, And its branches became long because of the abundance of water, As it sent them out. ⁶All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; Under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young; And in its shadow all great nations made their home.*

When you have one great massive dominant world power, a whole lot of other little ones get sheltered in the branches.

Ezekiel 17:22-24, *Thus says the Lord God: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent*

mountain. ²³On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. ²⁴And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it.”

Jesus is telling the same picture and borrowing Ezekiel’s image. So, Jesus comes along and says that he is fulfilling this prophecy of a new people with a new opportunity to spread their branches and bear fruit.

Your mission is to bear fruit and to be the place of shelter for all kinds of birds.

Now, we could take that politically into today and we could say that traditionally and historically, for example, the United Kingdom has been a great tree in which many, many other nations have been sheltered in our branches.

Foreign aid, education, many, many ways.

Our Lord is saying that ultimately the kingdom of Christ grows so extensive that the nations find their shelter and protection in the kingdom.

Now, the birds are not the mustard bush.

They are not necessarily part of the kingdom, they just benefit by its presence in the earth, as the non-Babylonians benefited by the presence of the Babylonian Empire.

We are looking at the kingdom in terms of God's sovereign rulership over everything.

Think of it this way.

Wherever Christianity flourishes, the people who climb in the branches prosper because of the flourishing of Christianity even though they don't know Christ.

Britian is what Britan is today because of its Christian heritage and there are lots of birds in our bush. They are not Christians, but they benefit.

The dignity of life in Britian, the law, the sense of right and wrong that's traditionally been ours, education, free enterprise, the dignity of a woman, the caring of children, and many things.

All of these rises out of Christian truth.

Every great reformation, every reform movement in history has had at its root's biblical truth.

Wherever the kingdom has extended, you have an environment of protection for the people who aren't even in that kingdom truly.

When the kingdom expands around the world, the people who find lodging within that kingdom are the most blessed people in terms of human life.

You contrast what it is to be in part of western culture under the influence of Christianity as opposed. For example, to being part of the world where Christianity's never been, where the mustard seed bush hasn't grown.

The kingdom will grow so that many will find lodging in its branches.

The kingdom is going to grow and grow and grow and grow and grow.

That's the promise of the Lord to encourage us.

Conclusion:

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preacher from London **1940-1970**. He was the greatest and most influential preacher of the twentieth century.

A quote from his biography.

“Do not waste too much of your time in worrying about the future of the Christian church.”

What a careless reader of that quote might think that ‘the Doctor’ meant was that the Christian church in modern times is failing and it’s on its way out.

Don’t worry about the church anymore. It’s a relic of a bygone era. Scientifically sophisticated people can’t be expected to believe the claims of the Bible that the church has always been built on anyway.

So, let the whole idea of ‘church’ fade away into history past. Let’s move on to other things that will make a greater difference in this needy world.

Of course, this is what a lot of people think today. It was also what a lot of people believed in **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’** Day.

He meant the exact opposite.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a message invented by men but is of God. It is God’s revelation to all humanity, for the people of all cultures and backgrounds, for all of time.

- As hard as the times may seem to be for the spread and growth of our Lord’s church on this earth,
- As much as human cultures may ignore the church’s message of the gospel,
- As much as man-made philosophies may discredit it,
- As much as human institutions may fight against it,

➤ As much as governments might try to suppress it,
It cannot and will not fail.

The Christian church and its message is of God.
God will protect it and see to its preservation and growth.

Do you remember the conversation that the Lord Jesus once
had with His disciples as they walked along the road?

Many people were talking about Jesus and His ministry at the
time.

Matthew 16:17-18, *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*
Jesus said that His church on earth would be built upon the
foundation of those words that Peter testified.

Jesus said He would build His church.

When Jesus gave His last great command to His followers in
His Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20, *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on*

earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

What **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** meant when he said, “Do not waste too much of your time in worrying about the future of the Christian church.”

Don't even bother wringing your hands in anxiety about the future of Christ's church on earth.

Serve it!

Defend it faithfully!!

Give yourself to it!!!

Love it as Jesus Himself loves it.

But it would be silly to worry about something that Jesus Christ, the Son of God has guaranteed will spread and be victorious until the time of His return.