

**CAPITAL BIBLE CHURCH**

**July 23, 2017**

**SERMON NOTES**

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**“Secrets of the Kingdom”**

**“The Mustard Seed”**

**Matthew 13:31, 32**

Big Idea – I need to learn to see things from God’s viewpoint. Little is much if God is in it!

After hearing the parables of the sower and of the wheat and tares, the disciples might have been discouraged.

How could God's people survive, much less thrive, in the midst of such unfavorable circumstances?

Long before Jesus' crucifixion it was obvious that the Jewish leaders rejected His claims of messiahship. It was also obvious that the multitudes who praised and followed Him did not understand His true nature or mission and were only superficially attracted to Him.

His true disciples were a handful against the whole nation of Israel, not to mention the vast and ungodly Roman empire and the regions beyond. In response to that unspoken concern, Jesus used two parables to emphasize that small things can have far-reaching effects.

Western music is commonly composed of only twelve notes—the seven basic notes and their five sharps/flats. Every symphony, hymn, love song, oratorio, and other piece of music is made up of various combinations and octaves of those same few notes.

In the same way, every poem, essay, novel, letter, and other piece of English literature is composed of combinations of the same twenty-six letters.

Lord Kelvin once suspended a large piece of metal from a cord in his laboratory. He then proceeded to wad up small pieces of paper into balls about the size of a pea and systematically throw them at the metal weight. At first the almost imperceptible impact of paper hitting metal seemed to have no effect. But eventually the steel weight was swaying rhythmically back and forth due to the cumulative force patiently applied against it.

In an immeasurably more dramatic and important way, God would demonstrate through the church how a handful of believers, totally weak and inept in themselves, would in His power turn the world upside down. The kingdom of heaven would grow and prosper in spite of Satan's opposition and would ultimately permeate and influence the whole world in Jesus' name.

He presented another parable to them, saying, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”* (Matthew 13:31-32)

1. The mustard plant

In this parable Jesus again uses the figure of planting and compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed and its growth into a full-grown plant.

Mustard has long been a widely-used herb throughout much of the world, and in modern times it has found additional commercial value in the manufacture of film. Amazingly, years ago it was discovered that cows whose feed was supplemented with mustard seed developed bones that had a superior quality for use in making the silver compounds used in photographic film.

Jesus' referring to the mustard seed as being smaller than all other seeds has often been cited as proof that Scripture is errant—that Jesus was either fallible and made a mistake or that He accommodated His teaching to the ignorance of His hearers and knowingly distorted the truth.

He was not comparing this seed to all other seeds in existence but only to the seeds of garden plants in Palestine. Many seeds, such as those of the wild orchid, are much smaller than the seed of the mustard plant. But of the many plants grown at that time in the gardens and fields of Palestine, the mustard plant has the smallest seeds, just as Jesus said.

When sperma (seed) is used in the New Testament in reference to plants, it is always used of agricultural plants, those intentionally grown for food. And of those plants, the mustard had seeds that were smaller than all other seeds.

The main field crops (barley, wheat, lentils, and beans) have larger seeds, as do other plants which might have been present as weeds and so forth. The only modern crop plant in existence with smaller seeds than mustard is tobacco, and this plant of American origin was not grown in the old world until the sixteenth century or later.

This parable is also criticized for supposedly exaggerating the size of the mustard plant, referring to it as a tree, in which the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. Many varieties of mustard plants are rather small bushes whose branches are too flimsy for birds to nest in. But the mustard plant of Palestine often grows to a height of twelve or fifteen feet

Just as Jesus said, when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and, from a comparative viewpoint, becomes a tree. At certain times of the year the branches become rigid enough to easily support a bird's nest.

## 2. The outward/external power of the kingdom

The instruction

But, even though the omniscient Jesus was speaking literally and accurately in this parable, His purpose was proverbial, not technical or scientific.

Because of its tiny size, the mustard seed was commonly used in the ancient Near East to represent things that were extremely small. Ancient Jewish literature contains references to a drop of blood or a blemish on an animal that was the size of a mustard seed. To this day Arabs sometimes speak of faith weighing as little as a mustard seed, in much the same way Jesus did (Matt. 17:20).

idea of a small mustard seed growing into a large plant was proverbial, and the disciples would have immediately understood Jesus' point and the central lesson of this parable -

The kingdom of heaven, though now very small and seemingly insignificant, would one day grow into a large body of believers.

When He was born, Jesus was placed in a manger, in the midst of cows, sheep, goats, donkeys, and other animals. The region of Judea, in which He was born, and of Galilee, where He grew up, were insignificant backwaters of the Roman empire. In the region of Galilee, Nazareth was among the least promising towns—a fact that prompted Nathanael to ask Philip, *"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).*

None of the twelve disciples came from the Jewish religious leadership or from the economic and social aristocracy. They were few in number, uneducated, fearful, weak, slow to understand and believe, and generally unqualified to be the leaders of any significant earthly kingdom.

The group of believers who gathered for prayer in Jerusalem just before Pentecost numbered only about 120, Acts 1:15, but noticed how quickly it grew in Acts early chapters:

Acts 2:41 – 3,000 souls saved

Acts 4:4 – 5,000 men saved

Acts 5:28 – they filled Jerusalem with Jesus' teaching

Acts 5:42 – in every house they were teaching about Christ

Acts 6:1 – number was multiplying

Acts 6:7 – word of God spread, number disciples multiplied greatly,  
great many priests were converted to the faith.

Now in Old Testament even though the prophets were not aware that the Messiah would come to earth twice or of the intermediate kingdom that would separate those two comings, they knew that ultimately the Lord would

*"rule from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:8).*

all kings would bow down before Him, and all nations would serve Him (vv. 9-11). In the end,

*"the kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" Rev. 11:15.*

Another lesson of the parable of the mustard seed is that the kingdom of heaven will be a blessing to the rest of the world.

The tree that grows from the small mustard seed represents the kingdom of heaven, which in the present age corresponds to the church.

Some interpreters have held that the birds of the air represent demons or other evil forces, as they do in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:19). But there is no reason to expect any given figure to always represent the same thing, and the idea of evil is alien to the context of this parable.

The figure of birds making nests normally calls to mind that which is positive and helpful. Nesting carries the idea of protection, safety, refuge, and sanctuary, which the mother bird provides for her young.

In King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel he *beheld "a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew large and became strong, and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it" (Dan. 4:10-12).*

In his interpretation of the king's vision Daniel explains that *"the tree that you saw... is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth" (vv. 20, 22).*

Under Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian empire had brought unparalleled advancement in almost every field of endeavor—agriculture, architecture, education, the arts, literature, economics, and many others.

In spite of the cost in lives and slave labor, it had brought prosperity to a large part of the known world at that time. In the king's vision, the birds and animals who benefited from the tree's shade and food were the other nations of the world.

In a revelation to Ezekiel, the Lord described Assyria as:

*"a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches and forest shade, and very high; and its top was among the clouds. The waters made it grow, the deep made it high.... Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field and its boughs became many and its branches long because of many waters as it spread them out. All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs, and under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth, and all great nations lived under its shade" Ezek. 31:3-6.*

The meaning

Both Jesus and the disciples were familiar with those accounts, and the parallel to the parable of the mustard seed seems obvious. The kingdom of heaven would grow from tiny beginnings to a great tree and would ultimately provide shelter, protection, and benefit to the entire world.

When Christians live in obedience to the Lord, they are a blessing to those around them. Individual believers become the source of good to nations. And with all their faults, those nations of the world who have been so influenced and who have recognized God's sovereignty and have tried to build their laws and standards of living on His Word have proved a blessing to the rest of the world in economic, legal, cultural, and social ways as well as spiritual and moral.

From the teachings of Scripture through Christian witness that high standards of education, justice, the dignity of women, the rights of children, prison reform, and countless other such social benefits have come. Whenever the gospel of the kingdom of God is faithfully preached and practiced, all the world benefits.

Jesus' point is that, in spite of great opposition, represented by the three bad soils and the tares, His kingdom will start small and spread in power and influence to become victorious.

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

#### THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM TODAY

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

There Is The "Mathematical Possibility"...

Beginning with just twenty disciples, each converting just one person a year, and their converts doing the same...

...the growth would be like a mustard seed!

- a. End of year 1 - 40
- b. End of year 5 - 640
- c. End of year 10 - 20,480
- d. End of year 15 - 655,360
- e. End of year 20 - 20,971,520
- f. End of year 25 - 1,342,177,280

All it takes is for each person to bring one soul to Christ each and every year!

The "Spiritual Possibility"...

We have the same "seed" of the kingdom, the Word of God!

A "seed" which is incorruptible, that lives and abides forever - 1 Peter 1:23-25

*1 Peter 1:23 You have been born again...from something that cannot die. You were born again through God's living message that continues forever.*

... the word of the Lord will live forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

A "seed" capable of producing what God intends

*Isaiah 55:10 Rain and snow fall from the sky and don't return without watering the ground. They cause the plants to sprout and grow, making seeds for the farmer and bread for the people.*

*11 The same thing is true of the words I speak. They will not return to me empty. They make the things happen that I want to happen, and they succeed in doing what I send them to do.*

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...

People with vision...Who have the vision of Christ... 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

Therefore we need to put the kingdom of God first - Mt 6:33

Matthew 6:33 The thing you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what God wants.

Boys and girls, how many eyes do you have? How many ears? How many feet do you have? Toes on each foot?

How many hands? How many fingers on each hand?

Ever thought about what could happen if you gave your 5's and 2's to Jesus?

<http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-5000/>

Turn to John 6:5.

*John 6:5 When Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough bread for all these people to eat?"*

*6 (Jesus asked Philip this question to test him, because Jesus already knew what he planned to do.)*

*7 Philip answered, "We would all have to work a month to buy enough bread for each person to have only a little piece."*

*8 Another one of his followers, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said,*

*9 "Here is a boy with five loaves of barley bread and two little fish, but that is not enough for so many people."*

*10 Jesus said, "Tell the people to sit down." This was a very grassy place, and about five thousand men sat down there.*

*11 Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, thanked God for them, and gave them to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, giving as much as the people wanted.*

*12 When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his followers, "Gather the leftover pieces of fish and bread so that nothing is wasted."*

*13 So they gathered up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left from the five barley loaves.*