

Bible Class – the Parables of Jesus

23rd May 2024

The Mustard Seed & Leaven



When the Lord Jesus was teaching his disciples he spoke often in parables, as we have mentioned before, so that those who were mocking and scoffers would not fully understand, while those who were disposed to what Jesus was teaching would pick up the hidden messages. Additionally parables gave meanings on different levels, which those who understood what Jesus was saying, would appreciate. At the time Jesus was teaching, the nation was in a state of expectation, - the common people who heard Jesus gladly assumed that if he was the Messiah as John the Baptist declared then he would save them from the Roman oppressors. We know this from the question the disciples asked Lord, *wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* – Acts 1:6. They thought the time was now that the Kingdom of God would be restored in it's glory. But they were not the only ones - even the Pharisees were caught up in the hype - Luke 17:20-22 *And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with*

observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Thus these parables – of the mustard seed and the leaven were designed along with the parable of the sower for example, to show the nature of the Kingdom of God. It was not based on human expectations or rules, but Godly principles and heavenly standards. It would be a time of God's choosing, and not when it was convenient for the Pharisees or common Jews, who once had been given the Kingdom, but had spurned it as a nation. They even rejected the one who would be their King. Naturally the Jews in Jesus day saw the pagan idolotory of the organisation of the Roman empire which was forced upon them. They did not like it. They wanted freedom to live as they wanted. They saw the grandeur and glory, the pomp and power of that military empire, and wanted all of that to be part of a Jewish empire. It was about pride, personal and national.

But any form of the elevation of man's ideas, of human ideology has no part of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus then likened the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: he said *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.*

It was just one seed. It is unusual to plant just one seed. But this being a parable it had a meaning. The seed Jesus referred to was a mustard seed. A very small one. Insignificant. Just one. It is true, such a seed especially in Mediterranean climate will grow into a large shrub. Jesus had in mind an example of one that grew into a large bush even, which was so luxurious in growth, that the wild birds saw it as a place of safety and shelter. Jesus was showing how the

Kingdom of God would come from something which people would not even notice or give any credit to, and would eventually grow into a mighty and glorious vastness, so remarkable and notable that those like wild birds – wanderers and passers- through, Hebrews, would gladly seek the shelter and safety in all its peaceful expanse.

The second parable was given to emphasise the insignificant beginnings, the powerful growth – in both cases unseen, unnoticed. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Man sows and waters but God gives the increase – see 1 Corinthians 3:6,7. It is God who causes the seed of the Kingdom to grow. The leaven grew hidden in the three measures of meal. Unlike the Jews who were trying to achieve a Kingdom of Israel there and then, - some by force men known as the Zealots, and the Sicarii, some by politics such as the Sadducees, some by force of apostate religion such as the Pharisees and the Essenes. *But Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.* – Zechariah 4:6.

Interestingly the parable Jesus delivered about this mustard seed should have been familiar, as a very similar parable had been proclaimed by the inspired prophet Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 17: 22 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.

The same lesson. From insignificant and tiny beginnings – out of reach of men, - the top most branches – impossible for him to interfere, a great and noble Kingdom would be the result. God would do it. The other fancy grand looking trees – all the other nations, who made the boast of their existence their might, power, wealth and whatever else man likes to boast about. But they all brought down, and the little one, to be made great. This was Ezekiel's message. It was The Lord Jesus' message, who fulfilled and enacted the law and the prophets.

It is a theme throughout the Old Testament Daniel saw the little stone cut out of the mountain – without hands – grow and fill the whole earth. So also in Psalms 72:16-19: *There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.*

What was that one little tiny seed planted in the field? Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Galatians 3:16. Bro. Robert Roberts described it thus: *...When first planted in the promises, it was confined to one old man who must have seemed demented as he sallied forth from the midst of his friends to an unknown land, or as he afterwards sojourned among*

the inhabitants of Canaan with the quiet confidence that he would one day be the possessor of “all these countries.”... (Nazereth Revisited)

So insignificant was this little seed, that few, very few recognised the first green shoots... *Few there be that find it* – but the Dominion of heaven developed stage by stage, unappreciated and unnoticed by the world at large. Even those who were part of that shrub didn't even appreciate, and the unfruitful were pruned and cut off. As soon as man interferes and tries to take over, then the plant suffered a setback. But left to the power of God, how quickly it would recover!

Acts 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) but in just a few short years: Acts 21:20: And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: But soon man had to interfere, just as he does with his poor husbandry, damaging and ruining the environment at every turn through greed. The vigorous growth of the plant became distorted as apostasy corrupted the tree. A great pruning again took place. John 15:2 The mustard tree was not ready. Nowadays the garden has become a jungle, huge towering trees, the empires, nations and schemes of men, weeds create havoc and there is little light, and even less water. But there is a little clearing the mustard tree ancient, mature with huge roots, can still be found, and will take full advantage when the storm of the wrath of God clears the forest of nations and lays them low, and then the tree of life will spring forth in what will once more be the garden of the Lord.

These two parables were designed to give encouragement to the few. Those who are mocked, despised, and are insignificant just as

the Promised Seed was – and is still regarded. It is not by the will of man, but it is the hidden work of God which takes place in the heart – to Him be the glory. There is no need to be disheartened, if we see no growth of the tree, or the fruits do not mature in our time or expectation. Slow and steady growth, will make branches well able to support many who will seek help, shelter, and safety. It is important that we care for the tree, keep it free from the ideas and doctrines of men. It is the *hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*(1 Peter 3:4) and Peter also writes 2 Peter 3:18: *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

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