Parable of the Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

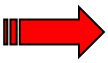
INTRODUCTION:

A. 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...
   1. In **"The Parable Of The Sower"**, only one soil of four would be truly receptive to the Word sown
   2. In **"The Parable Of The Wheat And Tares"**, they learned that Satan would be doing his best to undermine the efforts of the Sower

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

C. No one parable can completely describe God's kingdom in all its aspects, so Jesus gave several.

D. Through this parable, Jesus explained that his kingdom would have a small beginning. Indeed, it began with Jesus alone and, upon his ascension, was left in the care of twelve apostles and just a few hundred other followers. Jesus compared this beginning to the mustard seed, which was the smallest seed that a farmer used.



   1. **The mustard seed was so small that it would take almost twenty thousand seeds to make one ounce**.
   2. Modern critics have pointed out that the mustard seed is not the smallest seed, and they use this to argue against the accuracy of the Bible.
      a. Jesus was not making a scientific statement. Though the mustard seed is not the smallest seed in all of creation, it was used in rabbinic proverbs to designate the smallest of things.
      b. No other seed so small produced such a large plant.
   3. From this very tiny seed would grow a large shrub -- the largest shrub among all the herbs that the farmer would plant in his garden.
      a. A mustard shrub could grow ten to twelve feet in just a few weeks.
      b. While that is not technically a tree, Jesus used hyperbole to stress both the insignificance ("smallest") and magnificence ("largest," "tree") of the kingdom. His point was that just as a tiny seed will grow into the largest of garden plants, so God's kingdom will produce many people who truly believe.

[It is tempting to deal with both parables in just one lesson. But that we might give each one its own undivided attention, this lesson will focus only on **"The Parable Of The Mustard Seed"**.

To appreciate the point of the parable, background information may be helpful on...]

I. THE MUSTARD SEED

A. THE PLANT ITSELF...

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

B. PROVERBIAL USES OF THE MUSTARD SEED...

1. The mustard seed was used frequently to describe anything that is small in its beginning
2. Jesus used it on another occasion to describe one's faith - cf. **Mt 17:20**
3. The Koran reads "Oh, my son, every matter, though it be of the weight of a grain of mustard seed..." (quoted by R. C. Trench)

[With this understanding of the mustard plant and its seeds, perhaps we are better able to appreciate the meaning of the parable itself (please read **Mt 13:31-32**)...]

II. THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE

A. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WOULD HAVE A SMALL BEGINNING...

1. Old Testament prophecy foretold this:
   a. Concerning the Messiah - cf. **Isa 11:1; 53:2-3**
   b. Concerning the kingdom - cf. **Dan 2:35b,44** (starting out as a stone, becoming a great mountain)
2. 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)

B. BUT ITS TREMENDOUS GROWTH WOULD BELIE ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS...

1. Just as the "small stone" of **Dan 2:35** "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth"
2. The growth of the church in the first century A.D. certainly confirmed the truth of Jesus' parable
   a. The 120 disciples grew to over 3000 just in one day – **Acts 2:41-42**
   b. It was soon about 5000 - **Ac 4:4**
   c. The number of the disciples continued to "multiply"
      1. In Jerusalem - **Ac 6:7**
      2. Throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria - **Ac 9:31**
   d. Years later, there were "myriads" of believers just in Jerusalem alone – **Acts 21:20**
3. Even today, we see the growth and influence of the kingdom of heaven in lives of believers around the world!

C. IT'S GROWTH WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO THE WORLD...

1. In the parable, Jesus spoke of how "the birds of the air come and nest in its branches"
2. What is meant by Jesus? He does not say, but the kingdom of God is certainly a blessing to all who take refuge in its "branches"
   a. E.g., **"for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"** – **Rom. 14:17**
   b. To those seeking rest for their weary souls, the King offers His tender invitation to come to Him and enter His kingdom of rest - cf. **Mt 11:28-30**

[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!

What about today? 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?

Consider a few thoughts about...]

III. <u>THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM TODAY</u>

A. THERE IS THE "MATHEMATICAL POSSIBILITY"...

1. Beginning with just twenty disciples, each converting just one person a year, and their converts doing the same...
2. 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
3. All it takes is for each person to bring one soul to Christ each and every year!

B. THERE IS CERTAINLY THE "SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITY"...

1. We have the same "seed" of the kingdom, the Word of God!
   a. A "seed" which is incorruptible, that lives and abides forever - **1 Pet. 1:23-25**
   b. A "seed" capable of producing what God intends - cf. **Isa. 55:10-11**
2. While the first two parables remind us that not all will accept the Word of God, this parable declares that the kingdom will grow!

C. WHAT IS NEEDED IS PEOPLE...

1. **People with vision**
   a. Who have the vision of Christ, as expressed in His parables
   b. Who look not at an apple and count the seeds, but looks at a seed and counts the apples (with their many seeds)!
   c. Who look at converting and developing disciples in the same way
2. **People willing to put the kingdom of God first in their lives**
   a. The seed of the gospel will produce fruit, but only if it falls on good soil
   b. If we allow...
      1. The cares of this world
      2. The deceitfulness of riches
      3. The pleasures of life . . . to "choke" us, we cannot bear good fruit
   c. Therefore we need to put the kingdom of God first - **Mt 6:33**
3. People willing to abide in Christ
   a. For apart from Christ they can do nothing - **Jn 15:4-5**
   b. For only they are able to bear "much fruit" - **Jn 15:5**
   c. And only they will be able to glorify God and be His true disciples – **John 15:8**

CONCLUSION

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

B. Brethren, allow **"The Parable Of The Mustard Seed"** to serve as...
   1. **An encouragement** - The kingdom of heaven is destined for great things, though its beginning was small
   2. **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." Than entails being faithful!

C. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**