

THE MYSTERIOUS AND MIGHTY
[KINGDOM OF GOD]
Parables 21: The Hidden Seed and The Mustard Seed
Mk 4:26-32

I. ILLUSTRATION—MORAVIAN MISSIONS

- Hussites formed Bohemian Brethren—1457—grew in Czech nation and Moravia
- Persecuted over 100 years by Catholics—17th to 18th century
- 300 Moravian Brethren migrated—settled on von Zinzendorf’s Saxon estate—1722
- ‘Pentecostal’ type revival—1727—transformed them
- Set up perpetual prayer watch—24/7—lasted 100 years
- Planted 100s of ‘diaspora’ societies across Europe: prayer, Bible study, worship/ confession
- Built first global network of Protestant missionaries
- In 30 years—sent 100s of missionaries—Caribbean, N/S America, Africa, Asia, Arctic

TWO PRINCIPLES

Chaucer (c.1385)—Troilus and Criseyde—Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.
John Newton (c.1800)—God works powerfully, but for the most part gently and gradually.

II. BACKGROUND—MISUNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. ISRAEL’S EXPECTATION

- Restoration of glory of Davidic kingdom
- Throwing off Roman yoke—ascend to world dominion

2. EARLIER EVIDENCE

- Jesus knew they wanted to make Him king by force—**Jn 6:14-15**

3. FRUSTRATION AND OPPOSITION

- John’s ministry—had been a raging success—with promise of even greater to come
- But soon John will be arrested—and some of Jesus’ disciples will abandon Him—**Jn 6**
- Opposition of religious leaders—especially scribes and Pharisees—and political Herodians

4. THE CROWD WILL GROW IMPATIENT—AS THEY APPROACH JERUSALEM

- *They supposed the Kingdom of God was going to appear immediately*—**Lk 19:11**
- So—Jesus began the Parable of Ten Minas this way

**Lk 19:12—A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom
for himself and then return**

5. TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Mk 11:9-10—Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—MK 4:26-32

26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” 30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

IV. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT

1. NO PARALLEL FOR ‘GROWING SEED’ PARABLE
2. ‘MUSTARD SEED’ PARABLE
 - o Parallels in **Mt 13** and **Lk 13**
 - o **Matthew** and **Luke** pair it with the Parable of Leaven—Mark omits it
 - o **Matthew** and **Mark** put it *earlier*—after The Parable of the Sower
 - o Luke put it *later*
 - After Sabbath healing of woman bent double for 18 years
 - Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem—teaching along the way
3. ELSEWHERE ‘MUSTARD SEED’—SYMBOLIZED LITTLE FAITH
 - a. When apostles could not exorcize demon-possessed boy

Mt 17:20—you shall say to this mountain, move from here to there
 - b. When apostles asked Him to increase their faith

Lk 17:6—you shall say to this mulberry tree be uprooted and planted in the sea

B. PURPOSES

1. GROWING SEED
 - ❖ **Corrected** a worldly misunderstanding of the Kingdom
 - It is being established **not** by dramatic, instant, violent, human revolution
 - But grows quietly—**mysteriously**—by God’s unseen ways and unknown timing
2. MUSTARD SEED
 - ❖ **Demonstrated** the nature of God’s miraculous method

- Established **not** by *sizeable*, overwhelming military and political forces
- But uses *small* and insignificant things—to builds His **mighty** kingdom

3. BOTH PURPOSES—SUMMARIZED BY ZECHARIAH

Zech 4:6,10—*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. . . .
For who has despised the day of small things?*

C. THE PARABLES

1. GROWING SEED

- a. The man **casts** seed upon the soil
 - Connects with Parable of the Sower
 - Here—focus is **not** on *nature* of soil and *varying* productivity
 - Instead—growth is controlled by God and His elements—not by man
- b. **Stages** of growth
 - Must be completed—in due time—cannot be rushed
- c. The **harvest**
 1. *Multiplies* the original investment
 - Points to *productivity* in Parable of Sower—30, 60, 100 times
 2. Includes man’s responsibility—to work with God
 - We are responsible for the conditions—tilling—planting—weeding—tending
 - When we recognize the sign—‘white unto harvest’—we must **act**

2. MUSTARD SEED

- a. The **nature** of mustard seeds
 1. *Not* the smallest of seeds
 - Cypress and orchid seeds are smaller
 - But neither cypress nor orchids are indigenous to Israel
 - Jesus was not making a scientific observation
 - And He was talking about seeds that produce *harvest*—not trees/flowers
 - Mt and Mk describe it as smallest—Luke does not mention this
 2. Incredibly **small**
 - Only one millimeter in size
 - 750 seeds make one **gram**—1/28th of an ounce—[21,000 per **ounce**]
 - Arabs use it to describe faith—weighing no more than a grain of mustard seed
 3. **Germinates** quickly—in 5 days
 4. A ‘**garden** plant’
 - a. According to rabbinic tradition

- ☆ Not a ‘garden plant’—by location—but a field plant
- ☆ Because it grows too tall for small gardens—10 feet tall
- b. But Jesus’ description was accurate
 - ☆ **λαθανον** = ‘herb’
 - ☆ Herbs *were* ‘garden plants’ by their fruit—regardless of location
- b. **Two main points**—about mustard seed parable
 - Shows **contrast**—from small to large
 - Shows **growth**—the progress and process of the Kingdom
- c. Possibly two other meanings
 - ❖ From—**Ezekiel’s** description—the cedar the Lord will plant on the mountaintop
 - a. **All nations**—will come into the kingdom
 - Ezek 7:23**—*And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.*
 - b. **The dominion**—of the Lord
 - Ezek 7:24**—*All the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord; I bring down the high tree and exalt the low tree. . .*
- d. Erroneous interpretations—when applied to the church
 - **Isolationism**—the church as a monastic-type haven—protected from the world
 - **Triumphalism**—the church will dominate all other religions
 - **Denominationalism**—branches represent many denominations of the church

D. MAIN POINTS

1. THE GROWING SEED—4 POINTS

- a. **THE KINGDOM OF GOD—HAS BEGUN**
 - The kingdom of God is like—**v26**—**εστιν**—explicitly stated—present tense
 - The soil is **producing**—**v28**—**καρποφορει**—present tense
 - Not just future—but a present reality
- b. **THE KINGDOM OF GOD—GROWS GRADUALLY**
 1. Good things take time to grow—develop—mature—through stages
 - It takes time for a **seed** to grow
 - Like learning a **language** or skill—**knowledge** itself—and **wisdom**
 - It takes time for a **broken bone** to heal once set
 2. Teaches patience
 - **Wait** for God’s timing—only He knows—when He will finish building it

3. Read this when **discouraged**
 - God is still at work—even when we do not see it

c. **THE KINGDOM OF GOD—IS OF GOD**

1. *He* is **king**—not we—it is *His* kingdom
 - He is in control—not we
2. *His* **methods**—make it succeed—not ours
 - His ways are **mysterious**
 - Only God makes it work—He is behind it all—not we
 - Only He brings sunshine, rain, and nutrients from soil
 - Only He gives life—even if we fabricate artificial seed—only *His* reproduces
3. *He* must get the **glory**—not we
 - When the kingdom is fulfilled—in power and glory
 - It will be obvious *He* did it—not human ingenuity
4. *His* **timing** is best—according to His plan
 - a. Even Jesus submitted to the Father’s plan and timing
 - b. Evidence—look at the **Temptations**
 - ☆ Turning **stone** to bread—would cause people to flock to Him for provision
 - ☆ **Jumping** from the Temple—a dramatic miracle—would attract multitudes
 - ☆ **Bowing** to Satan—would instantly give Him worldly kingdoms and wealth
 - c. Conclusions
 - ☆ Not only would this have been sinful—out of the Father’s will
 - ☆ It would have caused a premature and false following—based on popularity
 - ☆ And prevented final victory of the cross—based on shame and rejection
5. *He* is the Master Gardener—who **produces** the harvest—not we
 - There is only so much we can do in evangelism
 - God does the hard work—bringing souls from death to life

I Cor 3:6—*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase*

d. **THE KINGDOM—IS CERTAIN**

1. God is constantly at work—though secretly—behind the scenes
2. The process may be slow and apparently insignificant—but it is guaranteed
 - **Example: cork hitting 100-pound iron weight—repetitively**
 - **Similar experiment by Lord Kelvin (William Thomson) used paper pellets**
3. Nothing is so unstoppable as the power of growth
 - **Ex: like a tree root cracking the pavement above**

➤ **Ex: London church after Blitz**—harvest festival corn grew on bombed site

4. Be **encouraged**

a. Even when discouraged and questioning

☆ **Peter's little faith—sinking into the sea**

☆ **Disciples unable to exorcize the boy**

☆ **Asking for signs of last times—for assurance—Mk 13**

☆ **Lord are you restoring the kingdom of Israel at this time?—Acts 1:6**

b. The **promise** of harvest spells **victory—v29**

2. THE MUSTARD SEED—2 POINTS

a. **THE CONTRAST**

1. Shows God's **method**—of great **reversals**

➤ God **inverts** things—going from apparent death to life

➤ God uses the **smallest** things—to do the greatest things

2. **Universal** truth—great things have small beginnings

➤ Every great **musical** piece comes from **eight** notes—the **octave**

➤ Every great piece of **literature**—from **26 letters**

➤ The **Mayflower**—had only 101 people—about 35 million descendants today

3. God has done this repeatedly

a. Used small numbers to bring great victory

☆ **Gideon with 300**—not 32,000—not 10,000—against Midianites—**Jdg 7**

☆ **Against 9th century Syrian army**—only 2—Elisha and servant—**II Kgs 8**

☆ **At Pentecost**—only 120

b. Otherwise—humans would claim the glory

Jdg 7:2—The Lord said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful saying ‘My own power has delivered me.’”

4. The Great **Inversion**

a. God uses the most unlikely persons—to shine the brightest

☆ **Fishermen and tax collectors**

☆ **William Carey**—at first Olney church refused to ordain him

☆ **C.H. Spurgeon**—rejected as student by Regents Park College

☆ **G. Campbell Morgan**—rejected by Methodists—not fit to preach

b. God uses the most impossible situations—to snatch victory from defeat

☆ Example: **the cross**

5. **Point**—do not be discouraged by small beginnings

b. **THE GROWTH**

1. God's Kingdom—is a **living** and **growing** organism

2. **Kingdom growth** is not dramatically noticeable—but inexorable—and constant

➤ **Note**—**weeds grow really fast—and die!**

3. Seldom do great things happen overnight—connects with first parable

➤ But the Kingdom *is* growing—will *continue* to grow—and *will* succeed

➤ From unimpressive **12—then 120**—it *shall* prevail against the gates of Hell

4. Some argue against this emphasis on 'growth principle'

➤ Because of implications of 19th century liberalism and evolution

5. But this parable is about *both* contrast *and* growth

➤ After inaugurating the Kingdom—Jesus *seemed* to fail at first

➤ But now it *still* grows—unexpectedly—almost unnoticed

6. This is *not* mere postmillennialism—humans bringing in the kingdom

➤ **God** is doing it—miraculously—in cooperation with the church

7. This does not argue against an instant end-time explosive second-coming

➤ It does *not* negate the dramatic nature of the *parousia*

➤ It does *not* argue against the final state of the kingdom being radically different

V. APPLICATION

1. WE OURSELVES BECOME GROWING SEEDS

- o God working in us mysteriously—over time
- o His purpose—to make us into fruit bearers
- o Growth is a slow but continuous—process—requiring patience

Many a genius has been slow of growth. Oaks that flourish for 1000 years do not spring up into beauty like a reed.—English philosopher George Henry Lewes (1846)

2. WE OURSELVES BECOME MUSTARD SEEDS

- o Seemingly insignificant—but God can do great things through us
- o Even with small faith—imperfect faith—God can use it—to bring great results
- o If we have only the faith of a mustard seed
- o A group of 200—can do mighty things—by giving—serving—going
- o **Remember 300 Moravians**—transformed Protestant missions to a global endeavor!

3. WE OURSELVES BECOME SEEDS—TO BEAR FRUIT

- a. Becoming less than small—becoming insignificant—being willing to die to self

Jn 12:24—*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

- b. So—God can get all the glory—and not ourselves

❖ **WHO DESPISES THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS?—Zech 4:10**

VI. INVITATION

COME, ALL CHRISTIANS, BE COMMITTED

**Come, all Christians, be committed
To service to the Lord;
Make you lives for him more fitted,
Turn your hearts with one accord.
Come into His courts with gladness,
Each his sacred vows renew,
Turn away from sin and sadness,
Be transformed with life anew.**

**Of your time and talents give ye,
They are gifts from God above;
To be used by Christians freely
To proclaim His wondrous love.
Come again to serve the Savior,
Tithes and off'rings with you bring.
In your work, with Him find favor,
And with joy His praises sing.**

**God's command to love each other
Is required of everyone;
Showing mercy to one another
Mirrors His redemptive plan.
In compassion He has given
Of His love that is divine;
On the cross sins were forgiven;
Joy and peace are fully thing.**

**Come in praise and adoration,
All who in Christ's name believe;
Worship Him with consecration,
Grace and love you will receive.
For His grace give Him the glory,
For the Spirit and the Word,
And repeat the gospel story
Till mankind His name has heard.**