

The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13: 31-32

As we continue to examine the parables in Matthew 13, we come to another parable that deals with sowing. In the first parable we discovered the sower sowing precious seed in various types of soil. There the seed represents the Word of God. In the previous parable, the sower sowed good seed and the enemy came in later and sowed contaminated seed among the good seed. There the seed represents people, those who have received Christ as Savior and those who remain unsaved. Our text today deals with the sowing of mustard seed. Here the seed represents the church, a combination of the Word and the people who have received the Word.

As I considered this parable, I was reminded of a lesson learned in Bible College. The Old Testament prophets had a limited view of the events that would come through Christ. It is better understood when we consider viewing a range of mountains from a distance. One sees the mountain tops clearly, but the valleys in between are not in view, and thus unrecognized. The prophets of old clearly saw the mountain peaks, the birth of Christ and His reign during the Millennial Kingdom, but they failed to see the age of grace, the church age in which we now live. This remained a mystery to them. The parables here deal with the mystery of the church age.

Let's take a few moments to discuss the [truths](#) Jesus reveals as we consider: [The Mustard Seed](#).

I. The Sowing of the Mustard (31b) – [Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field.](#) Again Jesus reveals the significance of sowing, with the potential for a vast harvest in mind. The mustard seed was sown in the field in anticipation of an eventual harvest.

- Bear in mind, Jesus is teaching these parables prior to His crucifixion and resurrection. These words were spoken prior to the birth of the church at Pentecost. However, Jesus knew the church would come according to the plan and will of God. When she was born, the disciples and others would have valuable instruction regarding the church age from the wisdom of Christ.
- If the church is to prosper in our day, those within the body of Christ must be faithful to sow precious seed. We must sow the Word of God, the good news of the Gospel, to a world that desperately needs to hear. We must strive to reach those who are unsaved, and disciple them in the faith following their conversion. New believers are vital to continued growth among the church.
- The major principle in sowing seeds for harvest is reproduction. The church is no different. There must be reproduction if the church is to remain strong. Now, the church at large will never

perish, but individual congregations must continue to reproduce if they are to survive. This involves sensing the need for other local congregations in areas where the Gospel is not being proclaimed and supporting efforts to plant churches in those areas. We must be faithful to sow if the church is to continue to prosper.

II. The Size of the Mustard (31a, 32a) – The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed...

^[32a] **Which indeed is the least of all seeds.** Jesus reveals the very small nature of the mustard seed. It was the least of seeds known and planted among that region. Some have used this as an accusation against the infallibility of Scripture since others seeds are smaller than a mustard seed, but I refuse to entertain such nonsense. Clearly Jesus is dealing with the seeds the hearers were familiar with. The phrase, “smaller than a mustard seed” was often used to describe things considered very small. The fact is the mustard seed was not large at all. He will reveal that a small seed possesses great potential.

- So, what is the significance in revealing the small size of the seed? I am convinced Jesus was preparing them to accept humble beginnings. The majority at that time, and even following the resurrection, did not embrace Jesus as the Christ. Most denied His deity and refused to accept Him as the means of salvation. The church would begin very small. We know this is true. Acts records there were only 120 gathered in the upper room when the church was born. She would have a small, humble birth, but her impact would soon reach the world.
- This truth needs to be understood in our day as well. The Lord knows the desires and ambitions of humanity. He knew many would focus solely on numbers for peace and contentment in Him. Jesus taught, prior to the birth of the church, that even a small seed, a small congregation of believers, could have an eternal and substantial impact on those around them. Numbers are important because they represent souls. However, the Lord doesn't require large numbers to accomplish great things. We should strive for growth numerically, but a lack of numbers is no excuse to avoid our responsibilities or fail to expect great things in Christ.

III. The Stature of the Mustard (32) – **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.**

The church would face a very humble beginning, but she would quickly grow and expand. Just as the mustard seed is very small when planted, it produces a large herb. As the Spirit was given, filling every believer, the church would begin a rapid growth. God, through His divine wisdom and power, would add to the church daily as many as He pleased. Literally thousands were saved at a time. The church quickly spread out, due in large part to persecution, but it spread nonetheless. When Paul was called to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, churches

were planted throughout the known world. What began small at Pentecost, quickly grew throughout the world, as the Gospel was preached, souls were saved, and churches were planted.

- The church continues to prosper in the world today. She was born nearly 2,000 years ago and yet the Lord continues to work through the church. She continues to face difficulty and persecution, but she remains steadfast in the midst of difficulty. Opposition is on the increase, and yet the Gospel is being taken to parts of the world where it had yet to reach. Through the advance of radio, television, and particularly the internet, the reach of the church continues to expand. The enemy and those who promote his agenda have tried for centuries to silence the Gospel and destroy the church, but she remains vibrant in the Lord.

IV. The Significance of the Mustard (32) – but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree. Of all the herbs planted in that region, the mustard was the greatest. Mustard plants in that area often grew to a height of 12 to 15 feet. It was easily distinguished from other herbs and readily recognized at first glance.

- Consider this from a spiritual point of view. Jesus was born and lived in obscurity. He never traveled far from home. The majority who knew Him, denied His claim as Messiah and rejected Him as the Christ. He was rejected and condemned to death on the cross. They placed His body in a borrowed tomb. Most thought they accomplished their goal. The one they considered a blasphemer and rebel had been crucified. They failed to realize this was all within God's plan. They hadn't counted on Him coming forth three days later in resurrection life. They could not prevent His ascension and the reception of the Holy Spirit within believers. They continued to oppose the Gospel and the church, but their attempts were futile. They created difficulty for many, but the church prospered in spite of their attempts to destroy it. The seed that was planted in the earth became the First-fruit of many to follow. His power, provision, and guidance ensured the prosperity of the church!

- Our world is filled with various religions, gatherings, social groups, and other entities. Some of these are very influential and powerful, but none compare to the church. These are all organizations led by mere humans. The church is a living organism, led by the Lord Himself. We are His body. Being in Christ grants access to all that heaven affords. Many continue to refute the Gospel while seeking to hinder the church, but she remains the greatest among all. Christ purchased her redemption on the cross. He granted her eternal life. The church will never cease to exist. She is secure in Christ the Lord.

V. The Sanctuary in the Mustard (32b) – 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. Jesus reveals the mustard seed produced a tree large enough to accommodate birds lodging within its branches. Now, some look at this statement and view it negatively. They refer back to the parable of the sower and the soils. Clearly the birds that devour the seeds that fell by the wayside picture Satan. Some conclude that Jesus is speaking of sin and error in the church. One cannot deny that churches deal with sin and error. She is made up of sinners saved by grace. Our flesh is not redeemed and it is prone to sin. I understand that, but I do not view this negatively. Jesus says nothing to imply a negative scene. The mustard seed was planted, being very small; and yet it produced a tree that provided sanctuary for the birds of the air.

- What comes to mind when you consider birds lodging in a tree? They nest there, providing a place of safety and security to lay their eggs and raise their young. It is a place that promotes and supports life. It serves a place where the young are fed and instructed in flight. All of that is a beautiful picture of the church within the world. She is a place of safety and security. A place where people are born into the family of God through Christ the Lord. The young and old alike are fed within the church. Instruction is given for our daily lives. The church is a blessing to all who dwell within it. It is a sanctuary of peace and security. We must do our part to ensure this particular sanctuary remains strong and vibrant for those who are yet to be born.

Conclusion: The church is an amazing organism. She is the body of Christ, loved of Him so much that He was willing to bear our sin and suffer judgment in our place. The church has the assurance of eternal life in Christ. There is nothing like the church!

I trust this has been an encouraging and informative study. I hope you better understand the significance and purpose of the church. May we as believers do all we can to ensure her prosperity and continued growth! If you are yet unsaved, having never received Christ as your Savior, you do not belong to the church. Why not come and receive Christ by faith and be saved today?