

A Journey with Christ the Messiah

The Kingdom of God is Like...

A Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing a series that I have entitled *A Journey with Christ the Messiah*. We are currently looking at the parables that Jesus taught during His ministry that start with the phrase "**The kingdom of heaven is like**" or "**The kingdom of God is like**".

Four years ago I read the verse found in Matthew and Luke.

Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

This verse started a lengthy study concerning the kingdom of heaven. Jesus told us that the first thing we should seek for is "His kingdom and His righteousness".

If Christ put so much emphasis on the kingdom and if we are to seek it first in our Christian walk with God, then we should know a whole lot more about it.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Matthew 13:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ 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; ³² 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."

As we prepare to continue on this journey, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Prayer

ILLUSTRATION:

I am sure you are aware of the two guys who gained front-seat car fame as the faces of Sonic Drive-In advertisements. Their characters do not have names, so I am going to name them Norm and Clueless. If you are familiar with the ad and you need me to identify which guy goes with which name, then this illustration is especially for you.

One day Norm and Clueless went on a camping trip. When they arrived at their destination, they set up camp. They had the fire going, had eaten a good meal, and the tent was perfectly set up. When it turned dark, they told stories by the camp fire and eventually crawled inside the tent and fell asleep. Some hours later, Norm woke his faithful friend.

"Clueless, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."

Clueless replied, "I see millions of stars."

"What does that tell you?" asks Norm.

Clueless pondered for a minute.

"Well let's see. It tells me that it is a clear night and we should not expect any storms. It tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. The north star tells me which way is due north. And the vastness and beauty of the stars tells me that God is all-powerful and that we, in contrast, are small and insignificant.

Then - after a pause, Clueless says: "Why, Norm? What does it tell you?"

Norm just shook his head for a moment and then he said, "Clueless, you **dimwit**, someone has stolen our tent."

Like Clueless, it is easy for us to miss the obvious when we look for the meaning in Jesus' parables. And today's parable of the Mustard Seed is no exception. There are a lot of interpretations to this parable.

Matthew records eight parables in chapter 13. This morning we will be looking at the third parable where Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as being like a Mustard Seed.

Jesus gave an explanation to the first two parables to the disciples. **The Parable of the Sower and the Soils** and **the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares**. This left six of the eight parables unexplained. It is as if He is saying "Here are two parables of which I have given you an explanation and now you can explain the other six parables by following the pattern that I have given you from the first two parables".

Do you remember what the pattern was in the first two parables?

Matthew 13:11 (NASB)

¹¹ Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

The message is delivered to people in the church. Different people will react to the teaching differently. It demonstrates the effect that that teaching has on the hearts and lives of those who hear. The seed of the word of God does not always fall on the same kind of heart. Or as Jesus put it, the seed does not always fall on the same kind of soil. That is why Jesus says repeatedly "He that has ears to hear, let him hear".

That means we must have spiritual ears to understand the parable.

In the first two parables, people are selective hearers. They hear only what they want to hear. People who are not represented by the good soil do not listen to the word of God like those who are represented by the good soil.

The wheat and the tares also do not listen to the word in the same way. Those who are the wheat have heard the word and have tested themselves and are overjoyed. The tares do not know that they are tares, because they look just like the wheat. They have not examined themselves. They are dead. They cannot hear.

And so we see that these first two parables emphasize that we must evaluate ourselves.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (NASB)

⁵Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

This is also the warning expressed in the parable of the ten virgins. Five had oil in their lamps which represented a true saving faith and the indwelling the holy spirit in their lives. The five foolish virgins were only professors of their faith. They did not have the indwelling of the holy spirit.

Let's continue the journey!

BODY:

I. THE SOWER.

Matthew 13:31 (NASB)

³¹ 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;**

The first question is who is the sower?

When we compare the man who sowed good seed in his field in verse 24 with verse 31 we see that the wording is almost identical. We must conclude that both sowers represent the same person. Jesus revealed to the disciples, in verse 37, that **the sower is the Son of Man**, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In **the parable of the wheat and the tares**, Jesus is the sower of the good seed.

In this parable the seed is the grain of a mustard seed. Jesus chose just one of these small seeds to illustrate that the kingdom of heaven is like something starting very small and it grows into something very large.

II. THE MUSTARD SEED.

Matthew 13:31 (NASB)

³¹ 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;

The second question is what is the mustard seed. We do not put our focus on the mustard. We put our focus on the seed. This is the item that is similar to what is referred to in the first two parables.

In the previous two parables, the seed represented two different things. It might be expected then that once again the seed may represent something different. In this parable the entire kingdom of heaven evolves from one single seed. So the seed is not one gospel message like in the first **Parable of Sower and the Soils** because the kingdom of heaven does not evolve from just one gospel message. And the single seed does not represent one human being like in the second **Parable of the Wheat and Tares** because the kingdom of heaven consists of many human beings.

When we think of the one grain of seed, we are drawn to a statement in Galatians 3:16 where God speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the seed **in Singular!**

Galatians 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring to many*, but *rather to one*, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

In this verse, Christ is referred to as the seed. He was sent to earth in the form of man as one singular seed of God.

When Christ rose from the dead, he started the kingdom of God. He was the firstborn from the dead. He is the head of the body, the church.

When the Jews and the Romans crucified Jesus, they, no doubt, felt that Jesus' death would be the end of it all. **Yet it wasn't!**

The final nail in the coffin of Christianity should have been when the Christians made the ridiculous claim that Jesus rose from the dead. **But it wasn't!**

Indeed it was after that claim that the church really took off.

Matthew 13:31-32a (NASB)

³¹ 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; ³² and **this is smaller than all other seeds,...**

The kingdom started with one very small seed.

Jesus was born in a stable and he was laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. He lived to serve others. He selected 12 men to help Him start His work. It was truly a humble beginning.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NASB)

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

III. **THE MUSTARD TREE.**

We are told that this one mustard seed grows into a large tree. This **represents the kingdom of God**. Indeed, the entire kingdom of God originates from one person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 13:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ 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; ³² 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,**

The plant that was described was very different from the modern day mustard plant. The mustard tree that Jesus referred to took several years before it bore fruit and became an actual tree. Our mustard is an annual plant. It is always small, and is properly called an herb. Early Hebrew writers speak of the mustard-tree as one on which they could “climb,” as on a fig-tree. The seeds of this tree were remarkably small, so that they, with the great size of the plant, illustrate how the kingdom of heaven will start very small and become very large.

Listen to what God says in Colossians 1:18.

Colossians 1:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

IV. THE BIRDS OF THE AIR.

Matthew 13:32b (NASB)

³²...THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES.”

So who do the nesting birds represent? This is a tough one to interpret because Matthew does not include an explanation given by Jesus as he does for the first two parables.

Some think it represents believers flocking to a safe haven that provides shelter and spiritual food.

Some think they are Gentiles participating in the Kingdom of God.

But we have clues from the other parables that give a different explanation.

Matthew 13:4 (NASB)

⁴ and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

Then Jesus gave the explanation of the birds.

¹⁹ When anyone hears the **word of the kingdom** and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.

Jesus had taught that there will be unbelievers in the visible kingdom in the Parable of the wheat and the tares. The disciples were baffled by it and asked Jesus to explain the meaning to them. His description was recorded for us in the scriptures.

Matthew 13:37-43 (NASB)

³⁷ And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the

sons of the evil *one*; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will **gather out of His kingdom** all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴² and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

The good seed was the children of the **invisible** kingdom; that is, of the true spiritual kingdom of God, or Christians. For these the Savior toiled and died. They are the fruit of his labors.

Then Jesus said that the tares are sons of the evil one. But I want you to notice that Jesus also said that the angels were going to **gather them out of His kingdom**. These are wicked people; and all hypocrites and unbelievers that were planted in the midst of the church by Satan.

The wheat and the tares combined makes up the **visible** kingdom. It is made up of both true believers and fake believers who may appear to our eyes to be true believers. The tares were planted within the church by Satan. Yet they must remain together until the end, when they shall be separated, and the righteous saved and the wicked lost.

When the body of Christ (the church) is large, it is inevitable that it will attract birds which will make nests in its branches. The birds are not part of the tree, but aliens to it. Jesus speaks of birds in the **parable of the sower**, equating them to the devil who takes away the word which is sown along the path.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would infiltrate the church.

Acts 20:29-30 (NASB)

²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

These birds may also represent false ideas being integrated into the churches. We must be able to discern truth from false teaching.

CONCLUSION:

Today, I ask you, are you part of the tree or are you a bird?

Don't be a bird!

If you do not know Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to come forward this morning and place your faith in Christ and become part of His kingdom.

He is Lord!