

The Great Assurance

Parables: Truth hidden in plain sight. Earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The first thing Jesus does when he begins His ministry is to proclaim “Now is the day of Salvation” *“The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.”*

Jesus proclaims that His Kingdom is a **reign** not just a **realm**. He was establishing the authority inherent within a King to rule. All the gospels tell us this Kingdom is not just a **future home** but a **present reality**.

The Pharisees, Sadducees and religious leaders couldn't understand Jesus showing mercy to “Sinners”.

So Jesus directs parables in three ways

- 1. Jesus directs the critics attention to the poor to whom he is proclaiming the good news. Sick people need a physician!**
- 2. Jesus directs the critics attention to their own evil motives**
- 3. Jesus directs parables to show the true Heart of God. God loves to show mercy to sinners.**

Three times Jesus talked about the joy that comes when something which has been lost is found. A lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost Son. *Do come in, trespassers will be forgiven.*

So, these parables teach us first, that God wants the sinner. That is precisely what the strict Jew could not understand. They were quite certain that God approved of good people but had no use whatsoever for the sinner.

Shocking: God not only loves to show mercy to sinners but God actually *goes out to seek the sinner*, or, that *He is actually waiting and watching for the sinner to come home.*

Jesus says to the religious leaders who begrudged God's mercy to sinners basically says, **“All your lives you have been making a great profession of your devotion to God and now your attitude to me belies your whole profession. The people you brand as sinners have all their lives seemed to turn their backs on God; but now they have changed their minds and found a place in the kingdom of God, which you have thrown away.”**

Jesus not only faced difficulty with opposition from the religious leaders, but with the growing doubt of his own disciples over his messianic mission. The disciples needed “Great Assurance.” To encourage his disciples, he told them parables of contrast to illustrate that great ends are implicit with small beginnings.

The Great Assurance So what is the Sitz em Leben “Situation in life” in which these parables are spoken?

1. Jesus is speaking to his disciples who are a little bit confused about Jesus mission.
2. The issue of controversy is the growing doubt of Jesus’ disciples over the messianic mission. When God starts something, He finishes it. The end is guaranteed by the beginning.

(400 years of nothing) Intertestamental period

1st to arrive on the scene is John the Baptist. God sent him to “prepare the way of the Lord”. *This dude was extremely impressive!!!* (first hippie)

Greater days and greater things were to happen.

I am unworthy to untie His shoes; **John 1:29** “*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World*”

Jesus started so strong... So much excitement and anticipation from the disciples. They thought Jesus was going to overthrow the Roman government... Jesus had no intention of an earthly defeat but an defeat of the sin that ruled our lives.

Announcing “Today is the day of Salvation”... things are off to a roaring start. Healings and miracles are happening all around. Just when the ball gets rolling ... He’s healing people, blind are seeing, lame are walking, lepers are cleansed, withered hand healed on Sabbath ... opposition is increasing.

After healing on the Sabbath Mark 3:6 tells us, “*Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him*”. **First of many plots to kill Jesus!**

John 6:53-56, 60, 66 – **53** Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.⁵⁵ For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ... **jump**

to verse 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” ... **Verse 66** from that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

As William Barclay states in regard to the disciple’s state of mind, “There is no doubt that they were bewildered and discouraged. They had hoped for so much and so little had happened. The crowds had abandoned Him; and it was already clear that the mission of Jesus which started with such promise was likely to end in failure and disaster. They had begun with such high hopes and now were apparent to be disappointed.”

So, the critics were breaking ground. And many ceased to follow Jesus even His own disciples were doubting the validity of His messianic mission.

Into their doubt and confusion Jesus speaks parables of contrast... The Kingdom of God is like a bit of leaven which gives rise to a loaf; it is like a mustard seed which develops into a large shrub. What is required is the patience of the husbandman to wait for the harvest. The seed is doing its work below the surface ... all the wheels are in motion ... the end is about to come – what is required is the faith to see that the end is guaranteed by the beginning.

Let’s stand together... Matthew 13:31 – ³¹ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³² which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

Rabbi spoke of the mustard seed as a spot or blemish

What we need is the faith and patience to know God always finishes what He starts.

Jesus gave them the great assurance, through you the messianic community look like a rag-tag band, one day the kingdom will contain every kindred, every tribe, every race and every tongue.

What they needed was the faith and patience to know the God always finishes what He starts.

As Barclay states...

“It is not the purpose of this parable to merely describe the process, this is the way we would view it. We need to see it the way the oriental would see it. He looks at the first stage and the last, seizing the paradox of the two. The great contrast between the seed and the shrub. The oriental minds sees two situations, on the one hand the dead seed and on the other hand the waving cornfield, here death, there through divine power, life.”

Barclay again “All the time the mustard seed was growing, from day to day and hour to hour that growth was not measurable; but when the beginning was compared with the end, the growth was plain for all to see.”

Paul echoes this same theological promise in Philippians 1:6 – being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ. ***Paul tells us we need the faith and patience to know the God always finishes what He starts.***

Pauline Theology

Justification = seed planted

Sanctification = growth

Glorification = shrub

Most of life 99.9% is spent in the process of sanctification. (2 steps forward, 1 step back)

Paul and Jesus are telling us something very simple ... yet beautiful.

Although the work God began in you started Small (mustard seed; justification) In the Kingdom of God implicit in small beginnings are great ends (shrub, glorification)

Example: All music comes from the octave, from these 8 notes comes every hymn, every song, every concerto, every symphony, and every oratorio ever written All literature is built on the 26 letters in the alphabet, from them come every novel, every treatise, every poem, every speech which was ever made. **Small → Great**

God plants the seed... God causes the growth...**God completes the job**
Paul's confidence was in God

We lose the faith and patience in remembering sanctification takes a lifetime . . .

Fast food society Jesus is saying the need to see the contrast between what you are now and what you will be. In the end what I will accomplish will be astounding.

We spend years messing up our lives and we want God to fix us now

He is not in a hurry

Jesus took 30 years to prepare... Moses needed 40 years

Story of Moses: 1st 40 years – somebody, 2nd 40 years – nobody, 3rd 40 years – what God can do with somebody who is a nobody.

Marriage counseling (fix us now)

How many years has it taken you to mess up your marriage? 15? Well give God as much time to fix it!

Illustration from my own life: 1) still made mistakes after got saved, 2) seemed there was much more of me than Jesus, and 3) will I ever become something of value.

In our lives from day to day, it becomes very difficult for us to see growth. It seems we are becoming less and less like Jesus instead of more and more like Him. Even now as I look at myself from day to day, I see little growth, but as I take my eyes off the now and look to when the seed first began and me now, WOW, **what a complete transformation**. Even greater than that Jesus challenges me to look from my beginning as a Christian to the end. **What a contrast that will be.**

Example: how parents seeing their children day to day never notice the physical growth but other who seldom see them do notice.

God is the one who started the process, He will continue to perfect it.

This is the process where faith and great patience is required of us.

The whole key to this parable is getting our eyes off the now and putting them on God for he is the one who will turn the mustard seed into the shrub.

2 Timothy 1:12 – For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to **keep** what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Example: story of plant just beginning to grow and the stick (Jesus) holding it up and strengthening it until a full complete, beautiful flower.

Every so often we need to take our eyes off the here and now and see the great contrast of the when (first seed was planted) and then (shrub at its completion), the past, the future, the beginning and the end, yes, the seed and the shrub. **For in the Kingdom of God implicit in, small beginnings are great ends.**

Illustration: Song by Kerry Livgren (A. D. Album)

“Remember me now as you see me, but as I’ll be, not as I am.”

LIFT UP YOUR EYES & SEE

We’ve Come a Long Way, Baby