

LIV. Matthew in Biblical Perspective  
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God  
“The Parable of the Mustard Seed—The Kingdom in the World, Part 1”  
Matthew 13:31-32  
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June 28, 2015 – Morning Sermon

We will start by looking at Mark 1 but then go back to our text in Matthew 13 to study the parable of the mustard seed. Let’s look at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Mark 1 and it’s no accident that wherever the Kingdom of God goes people get arrested. Mark 1:14-15 says [14] *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

It is not surprising that Jesus makes this statement in Mark 1:15 because Jesus is the Messiah and that means He is the Prophet, the Priest and the King. So if Jesus is here then the King is here and then the Kingdom is here. So He speaks of the Gospel ministry as bringing men and women to repentance and establishing the Kingdom of God in this world. The time is now fulfilled, in Christ so that the Kingdom is at hand so that it is spread through the Gospel and it is entered by repentance.

So what is that Kingdom like? It is now but it is not yet. It is a Kingdom of God that once was housed in a physical kingdom of Israel with spiritual implications. It is now housed as a spiritual Kingdom within the church with physical implications, that is wherever it goes it changes culture, relationships, society and behavior. It is a Kingdom among the kingdoms of this world for all of them are temporary but this Kingdom is eternal. It is present and it is growing. It is in nations but it is international. How are we to understand this Kingdom?

Jesus knows and there needs to be clarity so six of His sermons are recorded in God’s Word. One of these sermons deals with the Kingdom and we’ve been in a study of it now for about eight weeks. It is the collection of the seven Kingdom parables. In it He is systematically teaching us about the Kingdom. We have already looked at two parables. The first was the parable of the sower that had a singular message which was the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. In other words, the seed is the Word of God proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and that the King has come into this world, gone to a cross, met His enemies (sin, death, grave, Satan), defeated all of them and He has won those who were His enemies to Himself. While we were enemies of God, He died for us that we might become the people of God. He rose from the grave victorious, ascended into heaven and sending this Kingdom into all the world making disciples of all the nations. That Seed is being preached and the fate of that seed is determined by the condition of the soil. The soil are the hearts of men and women.

So what does He do with the parable of the sower? Number one is He is telling us how the Kingdom gets planted in this world and it is through the proclamation of the Gospel as Jesus sows the message of the Kingdom in the hearts of men and women through us as we share the Gospel with others and through pastors who faithfully preach

the Word. So He is establishing His Seed as He is sowing it through the hearts of men and women.

Secondly, the parable teaches how people get into the Kingdom. They get into the Kingdom by being born again. As the Word comes upon their heart by the sovereign grace of God by the Holy Spirit takes that Word and changes the heart so that there is good soil that receives the Word and the root goes into Christ where they are taken from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of our Savior.

Thirdly, the parable tells us how we know who is in the Kingdom. They are fruit bearers. They not only have a root in Christ that sends up a shoot for Christ but they fruit for Christ, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold. [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples* (John 15:8) or exhibit that you're in the Kingdom of God. It is not your fruit bearing that gets you into the Kingdom but it is your fruit bearing that shows you're in the Kingdom and in the Kingdom of your Savior.

So what is Satan going to do about this? He has been defeated but hasn't been destroyed. He's been restrained but not paralyzed therefore he is still in opposition to that Kingdom. We find out in the parable of the tares, weeds, bearded darnel that the tare looks like wheat and even imitates fruit of the wheat with a bearded fungus that actually poisons if you eat it. So we just found out that Jesus sows and Satan sows. Jesus sows the wheat and Satan sows the tares.

Satan not only tries to silence the Kingdom by intimidation but he tries to dilute the Kingdom with theological infiltration. He also attempts to bring the message of death and sin through imitation as he imitates Christianity with a 'churchianity' that uses the vocabulary but denies the essence of it. The servants say they will pull it up but the master says 'no for that's not your job.' You stay on message, on mission and in ministry for I have angels and on the day I've appointed to pull it up, called the Judgment Day, I'll send them for they will know the difference between the wheat and the tares. One reason is there are a lot of tares I don't want you to pull up because I'm about to turn the tares into wheat.

An illustration of a tare turning to wheat is the Apostle Paul. When he was Saul he was bringing death in the name of religion, even with God's Name attached to it. Then Saul became Paul and became wheat. That is what God is doing. So you expose false doctrine and false teaching but go after those who are in the tares for in the life of the Kingdom tares can become wheat. With those two parables telling us how the Kingdom comes, how you get into it, how you know who is in it and Satan's strategy of imitation that can divert us, Satan's insistent scheme of imitation must be met by an unswerving commitment to Gospel propagation and anticipation. The Lord is the One who brings the judgment with those whom He has designed to do that judgment, the angels He has prepared.

Now we are at the third of the seven parables. I'm calling this parable of the mustard seed part 1 because the next parable is almost exactly like it but just a little bit distinctive called the parable of the leaven. So there are two parts to what these two parables are teaching but we'll look at the first one, the mustard seed in this study. Matthew 13:31-32 says [31] *He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. [32] It is*

*the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”*

Here it gives a third lesson about the Kingdom using this parable. Interestingly, this is the third parable where He uses sowing. Secondly, this is the third parable that is repeated in the three synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – but this one unlike the parable of the sower and the wheat and tares, is not interpreted. We can look at how He interpreted the first two to get the clue as to how we interpret this one. This metaphor of a mustard seed He will also use another time when He talks about faith. If your faith is rightly rooted even if it's just small mountains in our lives are moved. “The Little Mustard Seed” was a very common proverbial statement. Everyone knew about it and Jesus now uses it to teach us about the parable.

I want to introduce the parable of the mustard seed with five observations. Then I want to give you five things interpreted from the parable and we'll distill this into one takeaway. So the first observation from this parable is there is a mustard seed that is the smallest of all the seeds which teaches us something about the Kingdom. This is not a scientific statement but a proverbial statement. If you had lived during Jesus' time everyone knew about the smallest of seed being the mustard seed. It's not that it was the smallest seed but the smallest one proverbial that they used in that day. Just like it really doesn't become a tree but it looks like a tree and would be used in some proverbs.

Secondly, the mustard seed has a root, shoot and fruit. The mustard seed gives forth a living, growing, maturing organism that brings blessing to the garden and to the birds. Thirdly, it is living and growing alongside and among the other plants in the garden. Fourthly, it ultimately dwarfs all the other plants in the garden. The smallest seed becomes the largest plant/bush, actually becoming like a tree. Fifthly, it provides benefits to the garden and the birds of the air. The birds can also find a place to nest and rest in it to benefit from it.

What does this mean in the interpretation? I want to give you five things. The first thing is the mustard seed is the message of the Gospel of grace in the Kingdom of Christ. The mustard seed becomes the plant, the bush, and then the tree. The mustard seed is the Gospel of the Kingdom that has been placed in the garden.

Secondly, the Kingdom of God (the mustard seed matured) is growing among the kingdoms of this world. Thirdly, it is unimpressive in its origin, its growth and its progress in the eyes of the world. Fourthly, its growth is relentless. It is irrepressible. Fifthly, it both dominates and blesses the garden with its presence and it blesses the birds of the air with its presence. So as it matures relentlessly it ultimately dominates in the garden as the Kingdom of God among the kingdoms of this world. It blesses by its presence the kingdoms of the world and it provides blessing for the birds of the air that decide to make their nest in it. Here's where you don't trust me but verify.

There is a very specific Messianic prophecy from Exodus 17, Ezekiel 17, Daniel 3 and 6 that the Messiah would come as King. He would establish the Kingdom and in those prophecies the birds of the air are the Gentile nations of this world. Jesus just used a double metaphor for the nations. The plants and the birds both reflect the kingdoms of this world. So He is saying like it or not that wherever the Kingdom of God grows whether you are responding to it or not its presence is going to bring blessing to those nations, whether they affirm it or not. Those nations who decide to nest in its presence

and welcome its presence will also be blessed as they find shade and nourishment as they nest in its supple branches.

How can we distill that into a takeaway? Here is what we're learning about the parable of the mustard seed. The Kingdom of God begins unimpressively, grows relentlessly, blesses significantly, expands quietly and triumphs ultimately. I love that Exodus 17 text where that sprig is planted in the hill of Zion of Israel and it grows into a Cedar and the birds of the air can find their refreshment in it. Mount Calvary is the hill that is unimpressively in the eyes of the world and the King of glory goes to a cross there to defeat our sin to set us free from its penalty and power. There the King goes into a tomb and there He comes forth gloriously. The Kingdom of God begins unimpressively at Mount Calvary there in Israel in the nations where it goes with street and field preaching and small little house churches. It grows relentlessly no matter the intimidation, infiltration or imitation and its presence blesses significantly as lives, families, marriages, homes, neighborhoods and nations are changed. It expands without fanfare because its leaders do not call attention to themselves and if they do He will soon take them down for it is the preeminence of Christ the King and not those in the Kingdom. The King did much to set them free not to make much of themselves but to make much of Him. So it expands quietly and then it triumphs ultimately.

The Kingdom of God is life changing through the power of the Gospel, is planted in the midst of the kingdoms of this world. There it is in England, Africa, China, Kenya, America, Uganda, etc. It arrives in the midst of the kingdoms of this world who by in large consider it insignificant and dismiss it as insignificant. Even as they do this it continues to grow and triumph in the kingdoms of this world that are all temporary but it is eternal. As it moves it actually blesses the kingdoms of this world that are dismissing it by its very presence in their midst. For those kingdoms who recognize it, not necessarily legally but functionally find their rest in that Kingdom, then those kingdoms are blessed in an extraordinary and exceptional way. Even as nations find sustenance when they rest in the Kingdom of God, that Kingdom is never owned by any one kingdom of this world. This Savior and His Kingdom does not become the tribal god and kingdom of any one nation. So that is what our Savior is teaching us here.

You can see the impact of this personally, can't you? This mustard seed kingdom is the way it happened in your life – a father, mother, friend, a teammate – kept sowing the mustard seed in your life. God opened your heart and you received Christ as Lord and Savior and then things began to change. When you came you came with no negotiations but you had no idea where it was going to take you and what it was going to do to you to change you. The root of the mustard seed went into your heart and it gave forth and began to grow in your life. Its implications laid hold of your marriage, your parenting, your work, your citizenship and how you live in this world. What God did that was seemingly insignificant in that moment of your conversion He has continued relentlessly to grow you and through that you've been blessed and others have been blessed through that relentless growth and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom is growing. We have seen it historically. See where He died at Mount Calvary. See that tomb. See what He did when He came out. See those cowardly disciples transformed. They were transformed into 120, then to 3,000, then to 5,000, then to Antioch, and then to the world. Then less than 25 years later in Europe, these people have seemingly turned the world upside down. See the mustard seed dismissed by

Romans and a Sanhedrin but see it grow and bring its blessing of Gospel transforming power to the nations of the world as they make disciples of all the nations.

We see it in our own nation as well-meaning people came here in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and then soon lost their way. Then in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was perhaps eight to fifteen percent or what we would call evangelical believers but God raised up street preachers and field preachers like Samuel Davies, George Whitfield and they went everywhere preaching the Gospel as they were pelted by stones, thrown out and cast down. They kept getting back up and preaching and that little movement took hold. Then came a great awakening that swept this nation from 1735 to 1765 yet within 20 years we see its dismiss into Unitarian universalism, secularism, violence and drunkenness. Then God raised them up again in 1795 to 1880 where we see that mustard seed growing again. We see all of the benefits God brings to this nation through that.

We have even seen it as a church, haven't we? The founding pastor with leaders that get around him, from a store front to God giving a church that is a vital part of His Kingdom, from people on their knees just seeking to be faithful to God's Word. You see it with leaders who gather around in a Bible study on a college campus that becomes Campus Outreach and is now on over a hundred campuses. A Bible study started downtown with some young business men that turned into Young Business Leaders and has multiplied in other churches to women business leaders in the community. A Bible study started among medical interns that blossoms into a Christian Medical Ministry with missions. You are going to need encouragement and so I'm trying to give it to you for the mustard seed is relentless. We have experienced this in a seminary so that those that can't get to a seminary can online. We have a school that wants to support Christian education for those who attend and those who do it in their homes, as missionaries and in public school systems. Our Lord keeps showing us the mustard seed.

I would be absolutely negligent if I didn't bring this to a conclusion by looking at the context of where we are today. Our country has known the blessing of this mustard seed and it has made definitive statements in political elections and political decisions by the courts of this land. Politics do not shape the culture. Elections do not shape the culture. They reveal the culture and then accelerate what they reveal in those who are elected. So we have just witnessed a Supreme Court decision that was a legal fabrication but a political statement (to make homosexual marriages legal on June 26, 2015). Don't think that it is not significant. It is significant in what it reveals and what it unleashes.

This is a nation that has been extraordinarily blessed by God but there is nothing extraordinary about this nation. It has been the object of exceptional providence and exceptional kindness of God. I will not deny His goodness and grace in an attempt simply to mute those who would exalt America over God but I will acknowledge what He has done. Why has He brought blessing to this nation? Here is what I believe are the two reasons. Number one, there was an imperfect, unevenly but continually and clear testimony of the Kingdom of God (the mustard seed) of a church that was salt and light and it effected everything around it from education to elections to politics to business etc. It was never a majority but it had quite an affect because it doesn't take much salt if the salt is salty. It doesn't take much light if it is not shrouded.

Secondly, this country that was so blessed had enough sense to welcome the free practice of that religion by this church. Both of those have disappeared. Today's church in general is saltless and the light is shrouded. This country has definitively said the rule

and reign of God's grace and truth is not welcome. We may provide a spot for you in one day and one hour of that day in that place but it's no welcome in the public square.

So what does that mean with definitive rulings that we have just seen? I have heard people comment on it and resonate with some. My dear friend Al Moler said something that was so insightful which was, "As of the ruling of that Supreme Court nothing has changed yet everything has changed." Our mission is the same, our ministry is the same and our message is the same yet everything has changed because you no longer have any ally much at all in the culture that you have had. That was a legal decision but not a moral decision about marriage and sexuality. It was not about marriage equality but it was about redefining marriage to distort marriage to normalize distorted sexuality.

One thing did catch my eye and I'll conclude just by referring to it. A man made a right hearted but wrong-headed statement. He said here is this decision and he rightly outlined some of the implications and then said 'what does that mean for our church?' Then he said "It means absolutely nothing for tomorrow we're going to do the same thing." I want to make one allowance for what I'm about to say. His church may be such a faithful church that, that is true but for generally the church in North America that is not true. We better not keep doing the same things. It is what we have been doing that has laid the ground work for what has been done. Judgment doesn't begin at the Supreme Court. Judgment begins in the household of God. We have turned worship into entertainment. When you lose gravitas in worship you lose effectiveness in witness. We have made worship our own personal playground instead of corporate praise to God.

We have compromised on the Lord's Day. We were silent when they decided no-fault divorce. We now go to entertainment that our forefathers would have never thought of sitting and paying money for and laughing at. We have now given up on life on life discipleship to small group pep talks, expositional preaching for ten minute coach up statements. My dear friends, we are part of the problem. We can't do business as usual and Supreme Court decisions, while in one hand are not supreme in our lives, they do set some ground work and frame work whereby we minister and where we minister.

In 1857 they made a decision to accommodate the politics of the day and they called slaves less than people and property, at most 3/5s of a person and the church of Jesus Christ went on and did business as usual. We had the best preachers who could have pointed out the ungodliness of chattel slavery but it was business as usual and 600,000 lives were lost. We had a decision in 1973 Roe v Wade that gave unlicensed holocaust upon the innocent unborn and the church was not ready. It was business as usual and now 50 million lives have been lost. June 26, 2015 another decision was made and the church cannot do business as usual.

Out there are broken homes and marriages and the declaration that is displeasing to God and pleasing within our nations. Out there is an under gutting of the Gospel of Jesus because Jesus Christ saves from sin and if we're silent about what is sin we can't talk about our Savior. I'm going to tell you what I think will happen. All liberal mainline churches are soon to be gone because there is no longer a culture that you at least have to wave your hat to churchianity. They don't have a market anymore. You are going to see the winnowing of the evangelical church. There will be some in anger who will isolate themselves and become a museum of the past. There will be some in the name of love that will accommodate the culture in its new norms and they will be

assimilated into it as another piece of furniture. So nothing has changed but everything has changed.

We can't have business as usual. We have to become salt and we have to become light. We have to speak the truth in love. We have to love with truth. We have to tell people 'I love you and your identity is not your sexuality. Your identity is that you are made in the image of God and your new identity is that you can be whole in Jesus Christ.' This is the message we have to give to people where we will relentlessly love you no matter of the configuration of sin in your life but we will not quit calling sin, sin. Realize you can speak the truth and not love. You can't love without speaking the truth but you can speak truth without love. So our courage will not become arrogance and our strength will be in the Lord and not of ourselves. We will ask God to help us replant the mustard seed.

So we will start more Bible studies. We will return to family worship. Please return to Lord's Day gathered worship and family worship. We will exalt Christ. We will evangelize. We will recommit ourselves to life on life small group disciple making. We will realize that this decision positions the United States and this culture under the judgment of God. This decision is the judgment of God, not only upon the nation but upon the church therefore we will repent. May God grant us repentance. It is not business as usual. We need to be on mission, on message, in ministry for this nation needs a church that is salty that shines the light with love, humility, courage and compassion. May God be pleased to do something here and in me. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I pray that You will speak to our hearts profoundly and You would not let our anger at sin not become anger at sinners. Let our realization of Your judgment not pray for judgment but pray for grace and mercy and yet give us the ability to bring Biblical judgment upon on ourselves. God we will not play church or drive by church. The mustard seed in Your church is the embassy of the Kingdom that will be replanted and relentlessly may it grow in us personally, corporately and from us irrepressibly blessing the world and the kingdoms of this world no matter if they mock and reject it as insignificant and dismiss it. Our Savior reigns, therefore we will be a blessing to the nations and Father would You cause this country again, not officially, for our system of government has no business instituting Christianity because that's not their job, to rest in the branches of this mustard seed/tree whereby they are shaded, nourished and we might grow the Kingdom in this nation and to all the nations. God I know this is a pivotal moment. Father, I believe that we are either watching the death of a nation or the loud cymbal of another Gospel awakening. God, You know my heart. Thank You for these people and may we send this Gospel to ourselves, our families, our city and to our nation. There is no impropriety for a church that desires the Gospel to go to all the nations to say 'Jesus give us America with the Gospel' even as we desire all the nations to receive that Gospel. Plant the Seed Father. Grow the mustard seed into the glorious tree that dwarfs the temporal kingdoms of this world and gives refreshment, renewal and salvation to all who rest in its branches. Thank You Jesus, I pray in Your Name, Amen.