

## The Parables of Jesus

### - The Mustard Seed

(Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32;  
Luke 13:18-19)

The "Parable of the Mustard Seed" was actually used twice by Jesus in two separate settings. As we read through the Gospel accounts we find that it was not uncommon for Jesus to teach a certain concept or to use a parable again in different settings to different audiences. Jesus first brings forth this parable while by

the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In both, the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark, we see that the "Parable of the Mustard seed" was given during the same time as the "Parable of the Sower and the Four Soils," as well as the parables of "The Good Seed Sown" and "The Wheat and the Tares."

In this particular teaching setting on the shores of Galilee in Matthew and Mark, Jesus used these and other parables in conjunction with each other as teaching tools in preparing His disciples concerning the principles of the "Kingdom of Heaven" upon the earth. He was giving them insight on what the "Kingdom of Heaven" upon the earth would be and look like, as well as what to expect so that they would not be caught off guard or surprised when they would be confronted with and experience certain things in their not too distant future. He was preparing them for their mission even though at the time they really did not grasp what that mission was to truly be. We know that later on, the Holy Spirit would bring all these teachings and parables back to their remembrance as they were released to fulfill their commission of preaching the Kingdom to the uttermost parts of the earth.

In the Gospel of Luke, we see that Jesus uses this parable at another time in a different setting.

In Luke 13:10 we see that Jesus was in a synagogue, most likely the synagogue in the city of Capernaum. It was on the Sabbath. He had just brought healing to a woman who "had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together..." (Luke 13:11-12) The ruler of the synagogue began to chastise Jesus because He had healed the woman on the Sabbath. (Luke 13:14) Jesus then outwardly and quite bluntly called the ruler a hypocrite and went on to expose his hypocrisy to the delight of the people. (Luke 13:16-17) It was with this backdrop and within this context that Jesus reused the "Parable of the Mustard Seed."

It is important to note that even though Jesus used this parable in two different settings, He was using it to bring forth the same point. He was revealing and exposing a very important fact and truth that was going to take place within the Body of Christ. It was something that was very needful for those in the Body to be aware of in the times of the growing of the Church after His resurrection. It was a vital teaching point for the disciples to be very much aware of as they were establishing the Church. It is also a very important lesson for us today to be aware of and take heed to.

For our discussion we will look at this parable as it is given in the Gospel of Matthew. You are encouraged to read the parable as given in Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19

Matthew 13:31-32 - *"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: 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."*

At first glance this parable would seem to be a nice little parable that tells us that the Kingdom is such a wonderful place that will give shelter and refuge to all that come under its covering. This is true. However, that is not what Jesus was teaching as He used this parable. Taking this parable within its contexts as given in Matthew and Mark, we see that it was used in the midst of a teaching concerning what to expect and what to be aware of and take heed to as the Kingdom of Heaven was being established on this earth.

In Luke Jesus was using it in the same way as it was used while bringing correction to the religious leaders of the synagogue. Therefore, there may be something a little more to this parable or it may be saying something a little different than what it may seem like on the face of it. Let's see.

First, let's take a look at the "Characters" involved in this parable

- The "man" - based on the parables Jesus gave just prior to this one such as "The Sower and the Four soils" and "The Wheat and the Tares," Jesus' expresses that the term "man" used in this parable would be referring to Himself, the "Son of Man." (Matthew 13:37)
- The "field" - again based on the previous parables that were given just prior to this parable, Jesus expressed and explained that the term "field" was referring to the world. (Matthew 13:38)
- The "mustard seed" - this is definitely one of the smallest seeds found in the Middle East. The type of mustard tree found in the Middle East is one that is really considered a bush. However, this "mustard bush" can reach an average mature height of between 6 and 20 feet with a 20-foot spread, although under ideal conditions it could grow to 30 feet in height. They have a spreading, multi-stemmed growth habit with a drooping or weeping branch structure.

Jesus uses the "mustard seed" in another analogy when He speaks about having faith. We can see why Jesus would use this tree/bush when He is referring to faith based on our knowledge of the above information.

However, Jesus is not talking about faith in this parable. We must not confuse the two very different uses of the "mustard seed" by Jesus. The use of the "mustard seed" in this parable we are discussing must be taken in the context of what Jesus is teaching on - the "Kingdom of Heaven" here on this earth. Again based on the previous parables Jesus had given just prior to this one, Jesus was using the "mustard seed" in reference to the "children of the kingdom," His true disciples, the Church, the Body of Christ. (Matthew 13:38)

- The "birds of the air" - This is another time when we see Jesus use the term "birds of the air." In Matthew 6:26, Jesus uses the expression "birds (fowl) of the air" to show us how God takes care of even the "birds in the air." How much more will He take care of His people? However, Jesus is not using the idea of the birds in the same way as he did in Matthew 6:26.

In our parable, based on the context in which it is given, Jesus is using the term "birds of the air" in a different context. He is using this term in the same way He used this term when He was giving the "Parable of the Sower and the Four Types of Soil." In the "Parable of the Sower and the Four Soils," Jesus uses the term "birds/fowls." In that context we read that these "birds" came to "devour the seed" that was sown. (Matthew 13:4) Jesus then went on to compare those birds/fowl to "the wicked one." He tells His disciples in Matthew 13:19, "... *the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.*"

Just as Jesus used the birds/fowls to be a type of the enemy in the "Parable of the Sower" and the Four Soils," in this parable, the birds are also used to represent the enemy, the forces of darkness who come against God's Word and His people. In the same setting, on the same day, with the same people listening, it would stand to reason that He is using the "birds/fowl" in the same context, here in this parable. They represented "wicked ones."

So what was Jesus trying to teach the disciples through this parable within the context of the other parables that He was using concerning the Kingdom of Heaven upon this earth as discussed in Matthew and Mark? What was the point He was bringing forth in Luke's account in the context of calling the ruler of the synagogue a hypocrite?

Jesus, as He was on this earth, was "sowing the seed" of the Good News of salvation and restoration of relationship between God and Man. Collectively, these seeds that would grow after "its own kind," would become the children of the Most High God. They would soon come to be known as the Body of Christ or as what has come to be called, His Church. His Church would grow from this little seed planted by Him. The "mustard seed" was the true Word of God that was being imparted to His disciples. They would then take that seed and spread the Gospel and the truth of God's Word and Kingdom throughout the earth and it will grow and grow and grow. However, as it grows, and the bigger it grows, Jesus warns that the Church would be open and vulnerable to the "birds" to come and sit "on the branches" and make themselves "comfortable" under the shadow of tree.

Jesus was warning the disciples then, as well as His disciples throughout the ages and today, that the enemy will infiltrate into that tree – the Church. The enemy will come into the Church, a place that is to truly be a refuge for many, and make itself comfortable alongside those that are true believers and who are truly taking refuge in the God of their salvation. They will come in to the Body of Christ for the purpose of "devouring the seeds of truth" and to bring forth corruption and deception by introducing and infiltrating the Body with "doctrines of devils."

Notice, Jesus uses the term "branches." This is referring to the many different "denominations and sects" of Christianity that will rise and has risen up throughout the earth today. That is why division in the Body of Christ is dangerous. It opens the door for the wicked one to come and lodge (dwell) on a "branch" and bring new doctrines and new teachings that are contrary to the truth of God's Word that Jesus taught. Also notice, that it is not just one bird that comes to "lodge," but Jesus uses the plural form indicating that there will be many of these "birds." There will be many forms of corruption and compromise that will come and sit on the branches within the Church.

Taken within the context in these two settings in which this parable was given, Jesus was using this parable to teach the disciples to again be on the alert. As the Church grows from its roots of Truth that He was teaching them and that they were to spread as they went forth, there would also come a time when the "wicked ones," along with their workers of deceit, deception and compromise, would come. These "wicked ones" will make themselves "very comfortable" in the Body of Christ. In Luke's account, Jesus was rebuking the ruler of the synagogue as being a hypocrite when He brought forth this parable.

It is the same concept. The ruler of the synagogue had an incorrect understanding of the Word of God. He was being led by and therefore leading others into "traditions of men." This is just as much a "doctrine of devils" as any other cult or false religion. Misrepresenting the true Word of God and teaching and preaching it in man's own understanding is dangerous to the Body of Christ. Jesus was giving His church a warning, both at that time and for us today that we need to beware - there will be the "birds of the air" that will come and they will be "*wolves in sheep's clothing...*" Matthew 7:15

*Let those that have ears to hear, let them hear...*