

### 3. The Mustard Seed

"The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

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

In this next parable, Jesus continues to describe what the kingdom of the heavens is like, in accordance with how it would manifest in the earth during the period of his absence. In this instance, he simply likens the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and plant.

The mustard was a very common garden plant in the East. Its seed was known to be very minute, the smallest of all the cultivated garden seeds, yet after planting, it would grow quite tall to become the largest of all the garden plants. It would actually resemble a tree with large branches that were big enough for birds to come and nest among the boughs.

The main thought behind the meaning to this parable is the relative *size* of the seed and what *size* the plant becomes through the natural growth process. Jesus is saying that the birth of the spiritual kingdom of God would begin very small, but it would eventually grow to become something very large. This would occur by the power of God's Spirit, and not by the power of man.

The small company of disciples, made up of common men and women from the tiny nation of Israel, represented the mustard seed, and through the power of the Holy Spirit the kingdom would continue to grow onwards and outwards; beginning on the Day of Pentecost in about 33 AD, its branches were to eventually reach out to all the nations of the world.

#### The Kingdom Tree

In Daniel 4, we have the account of King Nebuchadnezzar's conversion to the one true God, which began with a prophetic dream of a tree. He saw a huge glorious fruit tree in the middle of the land of Babylon, which fed the people, and provided shade for the beasts of the field and branches for birds of the air; in fact, it provided food for all creatures (Daniel 4:10-12). Subsequently, we are told that the tree was to be destroyed. Daniel then revealed to the king that **the tree represented the king of Babylon himself and his whole kingdom**; which kingdom would eventually fall like a tree to reveal the true power and sovereignty of God in order to humble the king (verses 20-27).

Ezekiel also had a similar word for Pharaoh of Egypt. In Ezekiel 31, as a warning to Egypt, the prophet describes the ancient Empire of Assyria as being a cedar of Lebanon in its time, which had been pulled down due to its arrogance and wickedness. The same would happen to the Egyptian Empire. So here we have further evidence to show us that *these trees represented kings and their kingdoms*.

Ezekiel 31:6 says,

“All the birds of the air nested in its boughs, all the beasts of the field gave birth under its branches; all the great nations lived in its shade.”

So it is evident that Jesus was alluding to these scriptures in the Mustard Seed parable, where the kingdom of God is likened to a tree that provides a nesting place for the birds of the air. This is not indicating that the kingdom is to be a political kingdom in this present age, only that it provides spiritual sustenance and it blesses those who live in its shade and dwell among its branches. As we have already seen earlier, fruit trees can also be a symbol of people, either as those who produce good fruit or those who produce bad fruit.

The ultimate reality of the Kingdom Tree of Life is a heavenly, spiritual one, for Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). This is the Tree that belongs in the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7; 22:1-2, 14).

## Faith

Jesus also uses the mustard seed as an example of faith and its growth.

...He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, **if you have faith as small as a mustard seed**, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

(Matthew 17:20 NIV)

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” He replied, “**If you have faith as small as a mustard seed**, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

(Luke 17:5-6 NIV)

In both these instances, Jesus was telling his original disciples that even if their faith was as small as a mustard seed, the power and ability within the seed would grow, and then they would realise that under God's direction, as deputies of Christ, they could do the impossible, such as moving a mountain or a mulberry tree; in the same way as Christ rules the created order by the power and will of the Father.

In Scripture, mountains symbolise kingdoms and empires, so to move mountains and trees essentially means the moving of kingdoms, nations and people by the power of Christ's kingdom. This is what true Christianity has done since its humble beginnings. Yet this power was ultimately to be realised in the resurrection when the people of God would fully enter into their heavenly inheritance. The apostles began to experience the powers of the impending kingdom in the first century AD as a foretaste of the coming age, operating as the sons of God in the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Ever since the first century, particularly after 70 AD, many Christians have thought that the Church should be ruling as a religious and political Empire, accompanied by the power and miracles of the apostolic Church – which is exactly what the Roman church attempted to do for about 1000 years. Nevertheless, this is not the way of Christ, for his kingdom is not of this world. Therefore, any attempt to set up a worldwide political, religious kingdom will ultimately fail! To do so is to

disobey God, and to rely on human wisdom and might instead, as a means of entering into the inheritance of the kingdom.

In a similar way, ancient Israel had the opportunity to enter the promised land of Canaan quite quickly after leaving Sinai, but due to their unbelief, they missed out and instead had to turn back to wander in the desert. Yet shortly after this, they decided to go up and conquer the land by themselves anyhow, contrary to what God had told them (Numbers 14:39-45). Moses specifically warned them that God would not be with them if they foolishly went to battle, yet they still did so – and they got a real beating for it, as they had been warned! This was not the way of true faith; on the contrary - they were actually *disobeying* God and deciding for themselves what they should do and when they should do it. This was blatant rebellion!

In a similar manner to ancient Israel, the Church has often sought to enter the Promised Land of the kingdom of heaven in her own way and in her own strength. Even the modern nation of Israel has been literally attempting to do a similar thing, using violence and bloodshed to claim their 'promised land'. *This is not the way of the new covenant in Christ.* The kingdom of God and of Christ is a spiritual, invisible kingdom, a secret kingdom, known only to those who belong to it. The messianic kingdom of stone, spoken of in Daniel, has already become a mountain that fills the whole earth – and all spiritual and earthly powers are under its sway (cf. Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45).

So contrary to what many teach today, it doesn't matter *how much* faith you have, as though it were physically measured out to you or something, it is the *quality* of the faith that counts; that is, it is all about whether we are truly believing God from the heart in obedience to his word. Jesus may have rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith a few times ("O ye of little faith"), which appears as though he was saying that the amount of faith does count after all, but this was an expression to highlight the fact that real faith in God was virtually non-existent among the disciples to begin with, for they often used their carnal, fleshly way of thinking instead. And to think that Jesus deliberately chose such an immature bunch! That gives hope to us all! Oh, the wisdom and grace of God!

True faith in God will grow, just as the anointing of the Spirit can grow, until it can do the impossible in accordance with the power and will of God. It is a process that requires training, but for maturity to occur there has to be a death to the fleshly and worldly viewpoint of the carnal mind - a truly mind-expanding transformation - along with a willing heart of obedience in the spirit of a servant. Be that as it may, sometimes suffering and death forms a large part of the servant's journey. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (cf. Acts 14:22).

Jesus said that,

"...unless an ear of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds... Whoever serves me must follow me."

(John 12:24-26 NIV)

The wonder of creation is that of multiplication. Numerous plants produce numerous further seeds, which in turn produce more and more seeds! Yet the single

seed has to die in the earth first before it can grow and bear fruit to generate further seeds. This is pure genius, and although we take it for granted, it is like 'magic'. The true servant of Christ also has to learn to die to the flesh, for only then can we grow and bear fruit to God, and then sow further seed. This is the path of faith-obedience that leads to spiritual maturity. This is the kingdom of God.

All believers in Christ have been given a measure of faith. With some it may appear that they have greater faith than others, in the sense that they are more mature than others, while some can be more gifted than others, and some may find it easier to believe than others (Romans 12:3); but we all have a measure of faith.

We must also remember that, as Paul says, we are just the channels that God uses to sow his seed, and to water it, as his fellow workers, **but it is God alone that makes it grow!**

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

(1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NIV)

It isn't us or the actual faith that gets things done, it is God's power alone that does the work. Modern preachers so often focus on the faith itself or the works of faith as though it was some kind of magic force that can be manipulated by us. This is in fact witchcraft! It is God's power that does anything worthwhile, and his power alone – and we cannot manipulate it. It is true that unbelief may hinder the power of God from working effectively at times within individuals, as Jesus encountered a number of times (Mark 6:4-6; 9:23-24; Matthew 13:58) - because even if God were to do a miracle, unbelief doesn't care and doesn't acknowledge the source of it. It is stubborn and ignorant. Nevertheless, the unbelief is not stronger than God!

If God so wishes he could knock someone down and blind them, and change their heart, as he did with Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, but usually where there is unbelief God will not move much at all. The unbelief (or the faith for that matter) itself has no power of its own, for God can blow it away by giving faith instead, for faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). God is the Power and the Source, faith is the channel or gateway, but it contains no inherent power of its own. We must keep things in perspective in these deceitful days. You can hinder the flow of the wind entering your house by keeping the door closed, but a stronger wind will blow your door down anyhow!

So as a summary: Christ has already taken the tiny Mustard Seed of God and planted it in his field, that is, the world (which began in a garden, the land of Israel) – and it has been growing by the power of God for nearly two thousand years now, bringing shade and nourishment to many. Yet only in the fullness of the kingdom will his people shine forth like the sun. The great Kingdom Tree fills the earth, bringing blessing to all. This is the Tree of Life that bears 12 crops of fruit a year and its leaves bring healing to the nations in a New Creation (Revelation 22:1-3).

"There's a garden in the valley,  
There's a beauty I could never conceive,  
In this paradise I dream of,

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I have known it though it's never been seen..."

"The Tree stands tall,  
It's mighty branches cover all,  
No wind can bend,  
Its majesty will never end."

*Xylon (The Tree)* by Kerry Livgren

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