

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM - Part IV The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Text: Matthew 13:31,32

Key Word: Change

Key Thought: The Church Needs to Become Very Careful During Changes as it Grows

This is the 4th of our series on the Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the first of 8 parables that our Lord gave without any explanation. **We always have the possibility of misinterpretation when a parable is not explained.** This is one of those parables that has run into the problem of misinterpretation.

There are several reasons for this problem:

1. Popular interpretation may be wrong. Remember that popular interpretation of Scripture led to the crucifixion of Jesus.
2. People often don't bear in mind the consistency of our Lord's figures of speech. He never uses a figure of speech in 2 different ways.

Some renown Biblical scholars have left aside the principles of Biblical interpretation to accept the mainstream of thought. I notice that when I study a commentary on a certain book of the Bible that the writer continuously refers to what others have said. **There is very little "original thought" in our books today.** Due to these problems we have lost the harmony of some of our Lord's teaching.

NO parable moves from the time of Christ to our present age. Writers have taught that this parable meant that the Gospel that began with Jesus and His disciples would grow until the whole world would be reached and converted to its message. To put it another way, **many believe that our Lord was predicting the complete and ultimate success of His Kingdom at the end of the age.**

As one writer of modernistic thought put it,

"Behold how vast a tree has grown from so small a seed. A despised Rabbi in a despised corner of the Roman empire, coming from despised Nazareth, sowed the seed Himself and entrusted it to a dozen untrained, non-university men of lowly birth and little influence - and the world-wide Church is the result."

In other words, it started small and insignificant but it will end just the opposite. History has shown us that this has not happened. In fact, just the opposite has happened.

Without prejudice of previous thought, let us consider what Jesus wanted His disciples to understand from this parable. **Jesus was NOT illustrating the true nature of His kingdom as He wanted it to be but rather the reality of what will take place.** We do not find the ethics of His kingdom in these parables. That is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Last week we saw how the "*enemy*" of God would go about sowing "*tares*" among the wheat. Since he was clearly going to do this, we must face the next question.

What Is the Enemy Attempting to Do to Change God's Plan for His Church?

I. THE SMALLEST MUSTARD SEED

II. AN ABNORMAL TREE

III. THE RAVENOUS BIRDS

I. THE MUSTARD SEED

When J. Dwight Pentecost visited Israel, their tour guide took them to a Mustard Plant. It stood about 10-12 feet high. The guide removed a seed from the plant asking the people what they thought it was. Of course, most thought it was a mustard seed.

The guide then put the seed into the palm of his hand and crushed it with his thumb. A smudge of black dust appeared. The dust was identified as the seed of the mustard. He explained that what we often refer to as the mustard seed is really a container for a multitude of seeds. The so-called "seed" that he took off the tree was not the smallest of all seeds. **Yet after crushing the "cluster of seeds" the group could realize how small a single seed really was.**

The diameter of a mustard seed (single seed) is often referred to as the smallest seed to measure in the whole world. It is also the lightest that can be weighed using a precise scale.

There is no question of the size of the mustard seed. **It is the smallest seed of all our herbs.**

Here is a description of the beginning of Christianity in its beginning. Our Lord left heaven with all its glory to be born and placed in a lowly cattle trough. **The natural beginning of our faith was signified by lowliness, meekness and humble service.**

"for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart."

Matthew 11:29

I. THE MUSTARD SEED (Contd.)

"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

43. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

44. and whoever wants to be the first must be slave of all.

45. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:42-45

Paul made this same teaching clear to the church at Philippi when he wrote,

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

*7. but made himself nothing, **taking on the very nature of a servant,** being made in human likeness."*

Philippians 2:5-7

Jesus was telling His disciples through this Parable that the Kingdom of Heaven would begin in a very small and insignificant manner.

II. AN ABNORMAL TREE

Here is where the problem of interpretation takes its greatest twist in this parable. The "*great tree*" or "*grew and waxed a great tree*" tells us that the mustard plant had grown beyond its normal size. **Here we have a picture of an abnormal growth.**

Trees grow slowly developing a strong wood in its body in order to support and channel nutrients to the branches and leaves. The "*great tree*" suggests **loftiness, expansion, and prominence, pride, and dominance.** **Whenever these characteristics begin to describe the Church we begin to grow abnormally.** We are not to be attaining to greatness but rather to the **position of a servant.** Also our treasures need to be laid up in heaven not on earth.

During the reign of Emperor Constantine, the Church began a strange growth. Instead of scattering the **seed in lowliness,** the Church grew into denominations, institutions and orders. **The Roman Catholic Church began to abnormally take a place of prominence, position and power.** The Church grew to represent the emblem of **earthly dignity and supremacy.** The Princes of the Gentiles commenced to exercise dominion over the Church's affairs (Matthew 20:25-28). The Church became corrupted from her simplicity in Christ (II Corinthians 11:2,3).

The Church grew to become UNLIKE her Founder. The Church transformed from an organism to become an organization. There came a consuming **passion for prominence, position and power.** After Emperor Constantine defeated Licinius in 328 A.D. he "*set Christianity upon the throne of the Caesar*" and the princes of the land took on a new title - "*high priests.*" **It became a dark day for Christianity.**

The Papacy took on the role of dominating in the name of Christ. They claimed to have power over kings, emperors and rulers. They began to tell them what to do. The papacy became the head of all leadership on earth.

Multitudes of heresies began to form in quick succession. They included prayers for the dead, Worship of saints and angels, worshipping of images and relics, holy water, celibacy of the priesthood, prayer beads and the rosary, apocryphal books added, infallibility of the pope, baptismal regeneration, Mary Queen of Heaven (cf. Jeremiah 44:17-19); sacraments, worship of saints, purgatory, veneration and sinlessness of Mary.

Back in December 1993, I listened to the Archbishop of Canterbury attempting to adjust a statement made by one of his colleges in reference to Prince Charles. **According to English law, the Prince is the final authority over the Church of England.** The problem was that on July 29, 1981 Prince Charles stood in St. Paul's Cathedral sharing his vows with Princess Diana (known as the wedding of the century which even became a national holiday). Those vows included a statement "*until death us do part.*" **But on July 15, 1996 they were divorced which means that his vow was broken.**

II. AN ABNORMAL TREE (Contd.)

The Church of England had to grapple with the fact that its spiritual leader was *not serious when taking his vows*. So the question remains to be answered. **Will the Church of England grow abnormally and usurp its authority over him now that this problem has come to the surface?** Or will they now continue their downward slide into accepting new standards for their church leadership? Recent decisions show that they are on a downward moral slide.

The Bishop of Southwark made a stunning statement when in June, 1961, Michael Ramsey, the son of a nonconformist, was enthroned as the Archbishop of Canterbury. Describing the gorgeous splendour of the cathedral he said,

"Hundreds of people were in top hats and shallow coats. But I didn't run into a single working-class person. I sometimes wonder what the Carpenter of Nazareth must think about His Church. And I wonder whether He would have been admitted to the enthronement; probably not."

The Bishop of Southwark

We need to again return to our mustard seed faith and cast this mountain of pride, position, and power into the sea of humanity where it belongs and begin to allow God's Kingdom to return to its initial nature of humility, lowliness, and servant hood. It's time to return to the God of our fathers and His purpose and plan for His Church. None of this pomp and power has caused the true church to grow. In fact, it's just the opposite that we see occurring.

During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the Biblical symbol of the "*great tree*" really began to be explained.

Read: Daniel 4:10-15a; 19-27

The **Ecumenical Church** therefore, has outgrown its initial nature and has become puffed up and dominating over its people as well as those of the world (*field*).

III. THE RAVENOUS BIRDS

Here again there has been a change of consistent Biblical interpretation to "fit" the interpretations of men. I cannot understand how good expositors go wayward with their thoughts.

Error Example: "*Christ was teaching that though the new form of the kingdom would begin with an insignificant beginning, it would grow to great proportions and provide blessing and bounty for the many people who would come into it.*"

III. THE RAVENOUS BIRDS (Contd.)

It again sounds good but true Biblical symbolism does not support it. Scriptures clearly teach that “birds” or “fowls” symbolize “Satan and his subtle forces of wickedness.”

In the Parable of the Sower, “*the birds of the air*” came and ate up the Seed that was sown along the path (Matthew 13:4). Jesus went on to explain whom “*the birds*” represented.

“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.”

Matthew 13:19

When the birds came down to feed on the sacrifice that Abram was making to God, the Scriptures say,

“but Abram drove them away.”

Genesis 15:11

It was only then that God could put the Patriarch into a deep sleep and make His covenant with Abram and his offspring.

At the end of this present age Scriptures teach,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great (political and commercial)! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird”

Revelation 18:2

Jesus said,

*“Foxes have holes and **the birds of the air have nests**, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”*

Matthew 8:20

III. THE RAVENOUS BIRDS (Contd.)

Jesus would not identify with the resting places of foxes and birds. Why have the birds all of a sudden taken on a new symbol? Is it because we have allowed deceit to enter our thoughts? **The birds haven't changed in whom they are or what they plan to do!!** Unfortunately, it has been well-trained educators who have tried to change Christ's clear meaning through their mislead thoughts.

Birds never come to a tree with fruit on it to admire the fruit. They come with one sole purpose and that is to CONSUME IT. There is a truth that we must see about the birds coming to "*perch*" in the branches of the tree. The word means to "*camp down*" "*to tent*" "*to encamp*" "*to occupy*." **A tree does not grow healthy by birds lodging in its branches. If we are not careful, we will protect the "*birds of the air*" and offer shelter for their corrupt thoughts to consume the fruit of our labour.** Satan's birds are still attempting to snatch away the good seed for others to grow by.

Jesus was dealing with a realistic viewpoint of His Kingdom. **The Kingdom of Heaven is NOT heaven itself but rather Christianity which is trying to survive in the midst of Christendom.** **Beware of the birds because they love to consume our seed (the Word of God) before it can reproduce itself.**

An ABNORMALLY GROWN CHURCH opens itself for this kind of an attack from the enemy. Jesus was encouraging His Church to grow humbly, without love of **pride, prominence and position.** In doing so we will not be so apt on attracting "*the birds of the air.*"

Remember that Scriptures teach that the devil is the . . .

"prince of the power of the air."

Ephesians 2:2

Lets not be so concerned about becoming great in the eyes of mankind. **IT IS NOT IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH TO BECOME GREAT. It IS important that Jesus be seen and understood for Whom He is and what He represents in His Church. Lets not allow the enemy to change God's purpose and plan for the Church.**

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Date: Apr 07/19

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: The Kingdom - D

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II. A GREAT TREE - *Matthew 20:25-28; II Corinthians 11:2,3; Jeremiah 44:17-19; Daniel 4:10-15a; 19-27*

III. THE RAVENOUS BIRDS - *Matthew 13:4; Matthew 13:19; Genesis 15:11; Revelation 18:2; Matthew 8:20; Ephesians 2:2*