

Parables Of Matthew 13 (Part Four): The Parable Of The Mustard Seed

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When Jesus taught parables as prophecies of the course of the church's history until His return, He provided two views of the one subject: specifically, the outward aspect, shown to the multitude of people; and the inward aspect, as revealed to His disciples. He gave the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19) to the mixed multitude to disclose evidence of a specific characteristic of the church compared to the outside world.

The historical development of the church of God would be one of humble beginnings. However, this parable contains more than this important truth. Hidden within it is a warning about the perversion of the church's method of growth and of satanic attacks upon it. This parable is an analogy, and as with all analogies, the symbolism is not exact but similar. Therefore, the symbolism of the Kingdom of God being *likened* to a mustard seed is not identical, yet it explains a particular aspect of the process that the church goes through in preparing for God's Kingdom.

1. What does the mustard seed represent? Matthew 13:31; Mark 4:31; Luke 13:19.

Comment: The mustard seed stands for the *progress* of the church from small beginnings. Because of its minuteness, the mustard seed came to symbolize small beginnings, denoting the smallest weight or measure, a tiny particle. The parable focuses on this idea of smallness. The mustard seed is something small that does its part to expand in preparation for the Kingdom of God. The seed represents an *instrument* by which spiritual growth can be advanced, just as a plant grows and reproduces itself through a seed.

In this parable, the small seed is the church, which appeared as the firstfruits of the Word. Just as in the Parable of the Sower, the one who sows the mustard seed is the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, and the field is the world. Jesus Himself had an insignificant entrance into the world by human standards, and the church He founded is likewise a "little flock" (Luke 12:31-32), small and designed by God not to become a physically powerful organization that would make a spectacle of itself.

In Matthew 7:13-14, Christ says the way that leads to eternal life is difficult and narrow, and *few* find it. He reiterates in Matthew 20:16 that *few* are chosen. In Luke 10:2, when sending the seventy out, He says the laborers are *few*. Paul argues in I Corinthians 1:26-29 that God calls the weak and the base of the world to put to shame the mighty and the noble. Jesus is referring to those few who, upon their calling by God, voluntarily submit to God's dominion, the Kingdom of God.

2. What do the birds of the air represent? Matthew 13:32; Mark 4:32; Luke 13:19.

Comment: Birds are naturally attracted to the taste of the mustard seed. Matthew identifies the birds of the air as "the wicked one" (Matthew 13:4, 19). Mark connects

them with "Satan" (Mark 4:4, 15), and Luke links them to "the devil" (Luke 8:5, 12). In Genesis 15:11, fowls swoop down on Abraham's sacrifices, and he has to drive them away (see Deuteronomy 28:26). The end-time Babylon becomes "a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird" (Revelation 18:2).

In the parable, Jesus predicts the birds of the air would lodge in the branches. These "birds," demons led by "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), have continually tried to infiltrate the church. Upon the unsuspecting early church, Satan moved quickly to implant his agents in it to teach false doctrine while appearing to be true Christians. Just as God permitted Satan to tempt Job intensely (Job 1:12; 2:6) and to sift Peter as wheat (Luke 22:31), He has allowed antichrists to lodge within His church (I Corinthians 11:18-19).

3. What does the "tree" represent? Same verses.

Comment: The largest of mustard plants, even under ideal conditions, can grow only to a height of about 15 feet. Luke 13:19 describes it as "a large tree," yet the natural mustard plant is not "a large tree" by any stretch of the imagination. All varieties of the mustard family, which are herbs, have thin, pulpy—not woody—stems and branches. It is nothing like a tree.

This mustard plant did something abnormal by growing beyond its design parameters; it became larger than what God designed as normal. What is this large mustard tree in which, apparently, demons are welcome? As the church grew from a tiny seed into a small mustard bush, it was as God designed it, but over time, it mutated into a large tree, something never intended by God.

This plant ceased to be God's church when it perverted its doctrines and objectives, moving beyond God's intended limits. It became a counterfeit of the true church, appropriating the name "Christian" and blending or syncretizing pagan mystery religions with Christianity. Eventually, it called itself the Roman Catholic Church, and later produced Protestant daughter churches whose doctrines are rooted in Catholicism.

What became of the true church? When the mustard plant mutated from its original form, God replanted His true church in another corner of the field, beginning the process anew. It is a consistent characteristic of God's true church to remain as a small herb, spiritually feeding the few who are chosen to become regenerated children of the Kingdom of God.