

“The Parables of the Kingdom – The Influence of the Kingdom”

Scripture: Matthew 13: 31-33

On this Lord’s Day, let’s turn again to Matthew 13, and we’ll look at verses 31-33 today. Only a couple of verses this morning, but they contain two parables of extreme importance. Remember, we are looking at the Kingdom parables – the stories that Jesus cast alongside truths about the Kingdom of Heaven so that His followers would understand the Kingdom - who would be there – what life would be like in the Kingdom? Why there is evil? What happens to non-believers? Those we have already looked at in Matthew 13, but today we will look at the influence of the Kingdom. How will the Kingdom grow and what impact will it have on the world – which we’ve learned will be antagonistic or opposed to its growth?

Remember, Jesus and His disciples have just had a day of opposition. The religious elite had accused Jesus of being from Satan, and they had rejected Him. The people rejected Jesus. So, here’s this little band of followers who have just learned that not everyone they tell the good news of the Gospel will even believe them, and they’ve learned – much to their surprise – that non-believers will be in this part of the Kingdom also, until the end of the age. And they’ve learned they have an enemy – Satan – who sows tares – unbelievers and opposition - in between the wheat – the good seed – so that evil sometimes grows up right beside good.

So, what are they thinking? Well, as we can see from other verses, they thought that the Messiah would eliminate their enemies. But Jesus explained that would not happen. So, what would you be wondering? Wouldn’t you be asking – well, then wait a minute – there’s just a few of us. How can we make a difference in this Kingdom? How will your Kingdom grow? Are we just going to be wasting our time?

So, Jesus in His love gave them – and us – these three verses that answer those questions and give us so much hope. Let’s read them both in Matthew 13: 31-33:

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³¹ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³² which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

The Parable of the Leaven

³³ Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

Let’s take these one by one

For the Parable of the Mustard Seed, we’re handing around Mustard seeds. They’re really small. In fact, they were the smallest of the herbal seeds that grew in this area, and still are the smallest of the edible seeds. And, just an aside, the word that Jesus used here referred to garden or edible plants. And He was right – obviously, because he made the seeds and the plants. But some folks say – wait, an orchid seed is smaller – and it is. But that’s why we have to read what Jesus said – he’s talking about the edible herbs. Just another affirmation of Scripture. But, I digress.

So, look at the seeds – really small. You know how they can end up – really large. Do an internet search for Mustard trees and you’ll find a couple that show a tree or bush more than twice as tall as a man, and a whole lot broader. You’ll even see one big enough for animals to hide under. That’s pretty good growth from such a small seed, wasn’t it?

So, what is this parable about? Well, again, Jesus tells us – it’s about the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s about how the Kingdom grows and the impact it has on the world around it. Let’s see both elements:

(v. 31) - Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Therefore, it starts how? Right - small.

(v. 32) But how does it end? Also correct - it ends very large. Just like the mustard tree.

And what is its impact? It's so large that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. These trees can get 15 feet high – and obviously very bushy. The word for “nest” is “lodge” – the birds make their home in the tree. And not just a bird – but birds – its big enough for lots of folks to find what? Well, what does a nest provide?

- Rest
- Shelter
- Protection

So, we can visually see this parable. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to this tiny little mustard seed and says the Kingdom of Heaven is just like this – it starts small but will grow to be large.

His disciples got this analogy. The mustard seed was used as a common example of things that were extremely small. For instance, you may remember that Jesus said that faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains. But the amazing, wonderful part of it was that the kingdom of heaven would be very small at first - very small and seemingly insignificant - but would one day grow into a large body of believers. This is the central lesson of the parable.

So, what impact do you think this had on the 12 apostles and other disciples at this point. It's just them – but He – the Lord of the universe – promised them that His Kingdom which they would proclaim – remember the Sower going along sowing the Word of the Kingdom – would be enormous.

But there is a second lesson. That lesson is that the Kingdom of Heaven will be a blessing to the rest of the world. The tree that grows from the small Mustard seed represents the kingdom of heaven which in the present age corresponds to the church. Some people think that the birds in this story represent demons as they do in the parable of the Sower. But that is not what Jesus is saying - Here, Jesus is just using the imagery of birds nesting as something which is normal, positive and healthy. Nesting carries the idea of protection and safety refuge in sanctuary. The analogy is very clear. God described it similarly in Ezekiel 31:3-6:

³ Indeed Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon,
With fine branches that shaded the forest,
And of high stature;
And its top was among the thick boughs.

⁴ The waters made it grow;
Underground waters gave it height,
With their rivers running around the place where it was planted,
And sent out rivulets to all the trees of the field.

⁵ Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field;
Its boughs were multiplied,
And its branches became long because of the abundance of
water,
As it sent them out.

⁶ All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs;
Under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their
young;
And in its shadow all great nations ^[b]made their home.

So, let's put these two lessons together – the lessons are clear to His followers:

1. The Kingdom of heaven would grow from **tiny** beginnings to a great Kingdom; and
2. The Kingdom would provide **shelter, protection, and benefit** to the entire world.

All Christians who live in obedience to the Lord are a blessing to those around them. Jesus' point is that, in spite of great opposition-represented by the three bad kinds of soils we saw and the tares that are planted by the enemy - the Kingdom, although it will start small, will spread in power and influence and be victorious.

And think about this. When Jesus said this, the Roman empire was ruling the world. It no longer exists and hasn't existed for 1500 years. But that little Mustard seed that Jesus planted in Galilee 2000 years ago has grown into a tree that is the biggest, longest living kingdom in history – and still going! No other Kingdom has lasted this long. Where are the Aztecs? Where is the Mongol empire? What about the Ottoman

empire? They are gone – but Christianity has survived for 2000 years and counting.

And think about another thing, there are branches - and birds on those branches - all over the world-from here in Dickson Tennessee to over in Korea with Rose & Rudy French– and all supported by the very same Kingdom.

Christianity spread all over the earth. It grows in hostile places, just like we learned it would. It grows in Communist China – is alive in the Middle East, even in the face of Isis – it grows everywhere.

Jesus was encouraging his disciples - don't give up.

Next, let's look at the Parable of the Leaven in Matthew 13:33. So, question 1 – what is leaven? It is an agent, such as yeast, which causes batter or dough to rise, especially by fermentation. More broadly, it is an influence that works to influence a whole.

The main purpose of leaven is to serve as a catalyst in the process of fermentation. It will produce the gas that makes bread rise. Gas from the leaven fills thousands of balloon-like bubbles in the dough. Once the bread has baked, this is what gives the loaf its texture. But one of the bread recipes I found online says that we don't have to be exact in measuring yeast, because its going to “multiply like crazy.” That's what happens with Kingdom of God – it started small, but it multiplies like crazy.

Now, the leaven is a very small – but in the parable, it was hidden in three measures of meal. This is a large amount of meal – in fact, three measures of meal were the equivalent of an ephah, which is the English equivalent of 5.8 Gallons of meal (about half a bushel basket of dough).

So, leaven is an influencer – we use that word today about Instagram – an influencer impacts the way people think and live. Usually, leaven is used in scripture as a negative but here, Jesus just says that the Kingdom of God – small as it will be – will impact the whole world.

So, the takeaways from these two parables are very simple:

1. Small things can have a great **influence**. In the same way that a small piece of leaven can permeate a large quantity of meal, the power of the kingdom of heaven is greater than its initial size and appearance would suggest. The smallest part of the kingdom that is placed in the world is sure to have influence because it contains the power of God.

2. The influence of the Kingdom is **positive**. If you've ever eaten leaven bread versus unleavened bread, I bet you like the leaven better. We will be celebrating the Lord's supper in a few minutes, and that cracker or wafer you get is unleavened. The idea is that leaven has a positive influence on the dough that it impacts.

3. A third lesson of the parable is that positive influence of the Kingdom comes from **within**. Leaven must be hidden in order to have an impact - this does not mean we hide it to keep it out of sight, but the idea that it is inserted deeply, completely permeating the world.

Jesus explained that the kingdom will start small but would one day become very large and bless the world in the process. When the Kingdom of heaven is faithfully reflected in the lives of believers, its influence in the world is both pervasive and positive.

So, let me ask you – in your little corner of the world – your work, your home – are you influencing for the Kingdom of God? That's what we're supposed to be doing. Even though you may be influencing only a small part, you can impact the whole world. I hope you see that. If you are not, confess it and ask the Lord to give you opportunities – He will.