

The Parable of Mustard Seed (1)

May 31st, 2016, Kichijouji Bible Study
Gotthold Beck

からし種のたとえ(1)
2016年5月31日、吉祥寺学び会
ゴットホルド・ベック

Matthew

13:31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom from heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and planted in his field.

13:32 Although it is the smallest of all seeds, when it is fully grown it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, and the birds in the sky come and nest in its branches."

13:33 He told them another parable: "The kingdom from heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

13:34 Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables. He did not tell them anything without using a parable.

13:35 This was to fulfill what was declared by the prophet when he said, "I will open my mouth to speak in parables. I will declare what has been hidden since the creation of the world."

[International Standard Version]

Luke

13:18 So Jesus went on to say, "What is the kingdom of God like? What can I compare it to?"

13:19 It is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the sky nested in its branches."

13:20 Again he said, "What can I compare the kingdom of God to?"

13:21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

Today, I would like to discuss the parable of the mustard seed.

Let us divide the discussion into three parts. Firstly, what is the Kingdom of God? Secondly, what people believe as the revelation of the kingdom of God at this present time, are all false. Thirdly, the kingdom of God to come in the future is the true kingdom.

Mark

4:30 He was also saying, "How can we show what the kingdom of God is like, or what parable can we use to describe it?"

4:31 It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. Although it is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 4:32 when it is planted it comes up and becomes larger than all the garden plants. It grows such large branches that the birds in the sky can nest in its shade."

4:33 With many other parables like these, Jesus kept speaking his message to them according to their ability to understand.

4:34 He did not tell them anything without using a parable, though he explained everything to his disciples in private.

In our previous meeting, we discussed the parable of the seed that bears fruit by itself as a lesson to learn about the kingdom of God. Plants sprout by themselves, grow well and as a natural consequence, bear fruits. This indicates how the true churches would grow in this world after the Lord was raised to heaven until all believers will be taken up to heaven.

Once the plants grow, the time of harvest will come. The Lord is watching us quietly and is patiently waiting until we grow up, bear fruit and are qualified to be raised to heaven. The purpose of the Lord is explained in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 27:

Ephesian

5:27 "...and might present the church to himself in all its glory, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but holy and without fault."

This is the purpose that the Lord has. Revelation, chapter 19, verse 7 also describes the purpose of the Lord that will absolutely be accomplished.

Revelation

19:7 "Let us rejoice, be glad, and give him glory, because the marriage of the lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready."

Today, I would like to use the parable of the mustard seed to continue the discussion about the kingdom of the Lord. The parable of the seed we learned about in the last meeting described how the kingdom of God grows internally in hidden places. What I would like to discuss with you today is how the parable of the mustard seed is related to the growth of the kingdom of God in a way that is visible from outside. Let us discuss this from three perspectives.

Firstly, what is the kingdom of God? Secondly, how does the kingdom of God appear to us at this present time? And thirdly, how will the kingdom of God be realized in the times to come?

The answer to the first question can be found in

Matthew, chapter 6, verses 9 and 10:

Matthew

6:9 "Therefore, this is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.
6:10 May your kingdom come. May your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus prayed, "May your kingdom come." This kingdom, of course, refers to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is where the name of the Lord is praised and the will of the Lord is realized. These things have been already accomplished in heaven. However, they have not been done yet in this world. It was for this reason that Jesus said;

John

18:36 "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my servants would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But for now my kingdom is not from here.'"

The kingdom of God and this world, totally conflict with each other. All nations in this world today are controlled by man-made political systems, and they have human rulers. But, who is the ruler of the kingdom of God? Needless to say, it is our Lord Jesus.

Wherever Jesus reigns, that is where the kingdom of God is. When people accept Jesus as the Lord of their own lives and obey His will, they become the citizens of the kingdom of God. What characterizes the citizens of the kingdom of God is that they always ask and seek the will of God. They also desire to walk according to that will and actually follow it.

Their only desire is for the name of Jesus to be glorified. Their hearts are filled with love for Jesus and they always prepare themselves for the service of the Lord. These people have already seen and tasted some part of heaven and are aware of its greatness.

Let us move on to the second question. How is the kingdom of God shown to us in this present world? In this world, a very small, limited part of the kingdom of God is revealed in a form that is visible to our eyes—just like a tip of the iceberg.

The kingdom of God can be revealed only through those who sincerely desire the glory of Jesus. In today's world, most of the things that attract our eyes are works of the Devil. According to Jesus, this world is ruled by the Devil. People are amazed by what human beings have accomplished. One such accomplishment of humans is what is called religion.

In this sense, I must say that Christianity has fallen to the level of one of many man-made forms of worship. However, Jesus foresaw completely how this so-called Christianity would change in the future. It was for this reason that he talked about the parable of the mustard seed that we are going to learn about today.

Jesus said that Christianity as a religion would grow rapidly just like a tree of mustard and would be extremely huge. Christianity today is one of the worldwide religions that possesses huge global power in the economical, social and political sense.

It actually has grown huge enough to astonish all people. However, just like a useless, big, dead tree, it has no true power or strength in it. Naturally, a mustard tree is not so large.

However, it is written in these verses, that this mustard tree will grow very large. This is the implication of how Christianity would degenerate to be like one of the many man-made religions as it loses its spirituality and expands largely in quite an unhealthy way.

When the Early Churches that gathered in Catacombs began to spiritually degenerate and compromise with this world, they consequently obtained worldly authority and power. The results can be seen in huge cathedrals in many places throughout Europe.

Their degeneration is implied in how the tree looks and what birds do to them in these verses. The tree symbolizes what grown human beings have accomplished. This totally conflicts with the will of God.

A tree that is supposed to remain small has grown externally and has become what is called Christianity—a huge man-made religion. This man-made Christianity is called Babylon the Great in chapter 17 and 18 of the book of Revelation, which implies that it has fallen to worldly authority. In many parts of the Bible, birds are used to symbolize the works of the Devil or Satan. In Mark, chapter 4, verse 4, birds are used as an example of something that takes away the seed—the Word of God.

Mark

4:4 As he was sowing, some seeds fell along the path, and birds came and ate them up.

4:15 Some people are like the seeds along the path, where the word is sown. When they hear it, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

There is similar expression in these verses from the Old Testament:

Jeremiah

5:26 “Evil men are found among my people. They lie in wait like someone who traps birds. They set a trap, but they do so to catch people.

5:27 Like a cage full of birds, so their houses are filled with treachery. This is how they have become prominent and rich,

5:28 and have grown fat and sleek. There is no limit to their evil deeds. They don’t argue the case of the orphan to secure justice. They don’t defend the rights of the poor.

5:29 ‘Should I not punish them for this?’ asks the Lord. ‘Should I not avenge myself on a nation like this?’

5:30 “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land:

5:31 The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?”

In these verses, birds are depicted as a symbol of the deception of the Devil. Also, we read of the prophets who prophesy falsely and the priests who rule by their own authority. It is written that the people do not resist them, but rather love such wickedness.

It is written, that when the mustard tree comes up and becomes larger, the birds of the sky come to nest in its branches. In other words, they dwell in Christianity, which is symbolized by the grown tree. The Devil does not hate Christianity as a man-made religion. The majority of the professors in divinity schools in Germany today are atheists. Their role is to remove the seeds of the Word of God from the heart of their students.

By this parable, Jesus predicted how Christianity would become distorted during His absence from this world.

However, when Jesus came down into this world, the seed of the true kingdom of God was sown. There were only 11 disciples who witnessed the ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven. From a human perspective, it might seem as if the success He achieved was very small. However, the seed that was sown through the death and the resurrection of Jesus will absolutely bear fruit when the time comes.

It was only one small seed that was sown in the field, which is this world. But through this seed, eleven disciples were given the mission to go out into the world to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus used this parable to describe what the kingdom of God is like, by which He convinced the readers that, although the seed seems very tiny and hard to see, it will bring great

bearing at the end time.

The seed that Jesus sowed was so tiny but it was genuine and pure. What people believe as Christianity in this present world, may look so magnificent in the eyes of humans. But, it is impure.

Now, I would like to discuss how people were led to the early churches and then, compare it to how people living today come to belong to Christianity, become members of so-called Christian organizations and operate as part of Christian man-made institutions.

In the early churches, all those who became believers had three things as a proof of their belief, which are repentance, faith, and obedience. What was the significance of having these three things?

Repentance consists of three aspects. Firstly, we need to expose ourselves to the light of the Lord. Secondly, we need to admit our sins. And thirdly, we need to confess these sins.

To expose yourself to the light of the Lord is to have a conviction that His Word is the light. The Bible is telling us that there is nothing good inside humans. We have to accept this fact completely from our hearts. David clearly admitted that he was a sinner.

2 Samuel

12:13 “At this point, David told Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan responded to David, “There’s one other thing: the Lord has forgiven your sin. You won’t die.”

24:10 “Later, David’s conscience bothered him after he had numbered the army, so David told the Lord, “I have sinned greatly by what I did. But now I am asking you, please remove the guilt of your servant, since I have acted very foolishly.”

Repentance is to admit ourselves as sinners.

Job

42:5 “I’ve heard you with my ears; and now I’ve seen you with my eyes.

42:6 As a result, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

True repentance leads us to the confession of our sins.

Psalms

32:5 My sin I acknowledged to you; my iniquity I did not hide. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin!

What is the faith that leads to the salvation? True faith

also consists of three deeds. Firstly, it is to look up to the Lord. Secondly, it is to accept the Lord. And thirdly, it is to trust the Lord.

Let us begin by looking up to Jesus.

John

1:29 "The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Those who look up to Jesus, the Lamb sacrificed on the cross as the Savior who takes away death and their sins and appreciate His great accomplishments have the true faith that leads to salvation. Faith is having the determination to accept Jesus.

John

1:12 "However, to all who received him, those believing in his name, he gave authority to become God's children."

Faith does not refer to believing in some of the doctrines you were taught, but it is to accept Jesus Himself.

Thirdly, faith is to trust Jesus without any conditions. Jesus confessed that He cannot do anything on His own accord, but He only does the will of His Father God. True reliance is, not walking in your own will, but to seek the will of the Lord; it is to desperately desire to do nothing but the will of the Lord and to walk entrusting everything into the hands of the Lord.

All those who have become believers have three things as the proof of their conversion, as I mentioned earlier—repentance, faith, and obedience.

The obedience of believers also consists of three behaviors. Firstly, it is to walk exactly as Jesus walked. Secondly, it is to no longer care about themselves at all. And thirdly, it is to wait eagerly for the coming of Jesus and make yourself prepared for that day.

This true repentance, pure, genuine faith, and obedience like little children characterized the believers in the early churches. It was through such repentance, faith, and obedience that people of those days were added to the assemblies—the flock of believers.

It was the reason that they were filled with joy, they were convinced, and they were prepared to endure all kinds of ordeals for the Lord. Later in history, when Christianity was designated as the official religion of the Roman Empire, people were forced to be baptized—being threatened with swords. This was how the

people were added to Christianity as a man-made religion.

Today, many people are baptized and believe that they have become Christian. Many churches claim that their members are saved by being baptized. Let us look at how baptism is explained in the Scripture. First, there must be faith, which is followed by the conviction of the forgiveness of their sins and then, as its consequence and the testimony of their faith to others, they are baptized.

In many churches, believers and non-believers cannot be distinguished clearly. It is because they do not understand and follow the orders for baptism. The number of "believers" will increase infinitely in such churches, but spiritually, they will be totally degenerated.

What characterizes today's churches is their huge power and wealth. In such churches, there is nothing left of the modest and poor little flocks of the early churches. People are dazzled and amazed by their great wealth and power, but it will never lead them to the true understanding of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord is the only foundation of our belief that guides the believers; this was the conviction that believers of the early churches shared. Contrarily, so-called Christian churches of today have an effect of taking away the Word of the Lord from the hearts of the believers just like the birds steal the seeds away.

I must say that the churches are serving the Devil today. If the service or ability of members is considered most important, such churches will grow in a wrong and abnormal way just like the mustard tree. Desire to play important roles, desire to be admired by others, or seeking respect from others cause people to ignore the will of the Lord. The Holy Spirit can no longer work on them. The church of Laodicea was a typical example of such churches.

Revelation

3:17 "You say, "I am rich. I have become wealthy. I don't need anything." Yet you don't realize that you are miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked."

I suppose that believers of the Christianity of today are saying the same things. That is to say, they believe in their hearts that they are rich, that they have become wealthy, that they don't need anything and that they are like a splendid mustard tree now.

What is called Christianity today has nothing to do with the kingdom of God described in the Bible. The kingdom of God is not something built by human

hands. In actuality, the kingdom of God has already been realized among the people who love Jesus from the bottom of their hearts, who serve Him and who give first place to this kingdom and its righteousness.

Therefore, we need to ask our own hearts. What is it that occupies the throne of our hearts? Do we sincerely love Jesus? Do we do our service for the Lord from a true and pure desire to serve Jesus? Or, are we striving on our own accord?

Do we truly seek the kingdom of God? In other words, do we truly hope that the will of Jesus be done in this world more than anything? Do we sincerely desire for the name of Jesus to be praised and for Jesus alone to be glorified?

End