

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (1)

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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. 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." 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."

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables. He did not tell them anything without using a parable. 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." (Matthew 13:31-35, International Standard Version).

So Jesus went on to say, "What is the kingdom of God like? What can I compare it to? 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." Again he said, "What can I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (Luke 13:18-21).

In this article, I would like to discuss briefly the parable of the mustard seed. Let us divide the discussion into three parts.

First, what is the kingdom of God like? 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? Let us continue to read from the Gospel According to Mark, chapter 4:

He was also saying, "How can we show what the kingdom of God is like, or what parable can we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. Although it is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 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."

With many other parables like these, Jesus kept speaking his message to them according to their

ability to understand. He did not tell them anything without using a parable, though he explained everything to his disciples in private. (Mark 4:30-34)

In our past 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 on their own, grow well and bear fruit. This shows how the true church would grow in this world after the Lord ascends to heaven until all believers are also raised to heaven. Once the plant grows, 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:

"...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." (Ephesian 5:27)

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

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

What I would like to discuss with you in this article is how the kingdom of God grows in a way that is visible .

The answer to the first question, "what the kingdom of God is like," can be found in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 6, verses 9 and 10:

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

Jesus prayed, "May your kingdom come." This Kingdom does refer 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. While these things have been already accomplished in heaven, they have not been done yet in this world. It was for this reason that Jesus said;

"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.'" (John 18:36)

The Kingdom of God and this world are in total conflict with each other. All nations in this world

today are controlled by some form of 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 are accepted as 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 the Lord. They also desire to walk according to that will and actually follow it.

The only desire of the people of the kingdom of God is for the name of Jesus to be glorified. Their hearts are filled with love for Jesus and they always prepare themselves for the need 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? What appears to us as the kingdom of God today is fake and not the true kingdom of God. In this world, a very small, limited part of the true kingdom of God is revealed in the form that is visible to our eyes— just like the tip of an 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, the ruler of this world is the Devil. People are amazed by what human beings have accomplished. One such accomplishment 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.

Jesus said that Christianity as a religion would grow rapidly just like a mustard tree and would be extremely huge. Christianity today is a worldwide religion that possesses huge global power in the economic, social and political arenas. In fact, it has grown huge enough to astonish people all over the world. However, no matter how magnificent it may look on the surface, it is like a useless, big, dead tree, which has no true power or strength.

Naturally, a mustard tree is not so large. However, it is written in these verses, that this mustard tree will grow to a great height. This is the implication of how Christianity would degenerate to become like any other man-made religion as it loses its spirituality and expands largely in quite an unhealthy way. When the early churches that gathered in Catacombs (subterranean burial places in the Roman Empire) 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 implicit in how the trees look and what birds do to them in these verses. The growth of the tree symbolizes what 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 the Scripture, birds are always used to symbolize the works of the Devil or Satan. Let us look at the Gospel according to Mark, chapters 4 and 15; birds are used as an example of something that takes away the seed—the Word of God.

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

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. (Mark 4:15)

A very similar description can be found in these verses from the Old Testament. Let us look at Jeremiah, chapter 5, verse 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. Like a cage full of birds, so their houses are filled with treachery. This is how they have become prominent and rich, 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.”

“Should I not punish them for this?” asks the Lord. ‘Should I not avenge myself on a nation like this?’ “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: 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?” (Jeremiah 5:26-31)

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

It is written, that when the mustard tree grows and becomes taller, the birds of the sky come and make 'nests' in its branches. That is to say, the prophets who prophesize falsely and the priests who rule with authority 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. Through this parable, Jesus predicted how Christianity would become distorted during His absence from this world after He would ascend to Heaven.

When Jesus came down to this world, the seed of the Kingdom of God was sown. There were only 11 disciples who witnessed the ascension of 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 when it is sown, it will bring great bearing at the end time.

The seed that Jesus sowed was very tiny but it was genuine and pure. Contrarily, what people believe to be Christianity in this present world, may look magnificent in the eyes of humans. But in reality, 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 these three things? To begin with, repentance consists of three aspects. Firstly, it is to “expose ourselves to the light of the Lord.” Secondly, it is to “admit our own sins.” And thirdly, it is 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 according to the Bible.

“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.” (2 Samuel 12:13)

“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.” (2 Samuel 24:10)

To repent is to admit ourselves as sinners. This was what Job did when he said;

“I’ve heard you with my ears; and now I’ve seen you with my eyes. As a result, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:5-6)

And true repentance leads people to the confession of their sins. It can be seen from this confession of David:

“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!” (Psalms 32:5)

Now, what is the faith that leads to 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.

To begin with, faith starts by looking up to Jesus. Let us read out the Gospel according to John, chapter 1, verse 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!” (John 1:29)

Those who look up to Jesus, the crucified Lamb of sacrifice, as the Savior who takes away death and sins that they have committed and appreciate His great accomplishments, have the true faith that leads to salvation.

Secondly, faith is to have the determination to accept Jesus. It is written in the Gospel according to John, chapter 1, verse 12:

“However, to all who received him, those believing in his name, he gave authority to become God’s children.” (John 1:12)

Faith does not refer to believing in something specific as a 'doctrine,' but it is to accept Jesus Himself. It is to trust Jesus without any conditions. Jesus confessed that even He cannot do anything on His own accord, but He only does the will of His Father God. True reliance is, seeking the will of the Lord instead of walking in your own will; 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 kinds of behavior. 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 prepare yourself 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 determined to endure all kinds of ordeals for the Lord.

However, later in history, when Christianity was designated as the official religion of the Roman Empire, people were forcefully baptized and threatened with swords. They were then compelled to follow Christianity as a man-made religion.

Today, many people are baptized and believe that they have become Christians. 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. It is because they do not understand and follow this order that, in many churches, it is getting difficult to distinguish clearly between true believers and non-believers. The number of believers will increase infinitely in such churches, but spiritually, they will totally degenerate.

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 importance is placed on the service or ability of members, such churches will grow in a wrong and abnormal way just like the mustard tree. The desire to play important roles, to be admired by others, or seeking respect from others causes people to ignore the will of the Lord and the Holy Spirit can no longer work in them. The church of Laodicea was a typical example of such churches,

which is described in the Book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 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.” (Revelation 3:17)

I suppose that this is very much the Christianity of today. 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 they see themselves as a splendid mustard tree. 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 minister to 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 else? Do we sincerely desire for the name of Jesus to be praised and for Jesus alone to be glorified?

To be continued in the next issue....