

The Parables: The Mustard Seed

Good morning! As you probably already know we are looking at the teachings of Jesus and the parables or the 'cryptic stories' that Jesus told about the Kingdom of God. As both Phill and Paul said in the previous weeks these stories can have many meanings and many different ways and angles that they can be looked at from and in the parable we are looking at today Jesus paints a picture, an image of a **mustard seed**. This parable is not a long story that tells a story involving characters of a story with an outcome. But it's a metaphor, a picture of what the kingdom is in a short sentence. So let's look at what Jesus said:

Matthew 13: 31-32,

Here is another illustration Jesus used: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter in its branches." NLT

Mark 4:30-32,

Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can come and find shelter." NLT



Luke 13:18-19

Then Jesus said, "What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds come and find shelter among its branches." NLT

What a strange metaphor? A MUSTARD SEED!!!

- **Exercise (5-10 minutes)**
- Take a look at the picture of a mustard seed and what do you notice? –
- I have brought some Mustard seeds in with me today so please take a few and have look at them? – What do you notice?
- What is Jesus trying to tell us when he uses a mustard seed to illustrate the kingdom?

The question I was asking myself whilst I was preparing this message was How can something so small and insignificant illustrates the kingdom of God? And today I want to talk about what this illustration of the mustard seed tell us about the kingdom and what this illustration means to us as agents of the Kingdom.

THOSE LITTLE THINGS....

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants and grows into a tree. (Matthew 13:31-32a)

The idea of using a mustard seed is interesting because the mustard seed has been around and used throughout the centuries for thousands of years. In the time of Jesus the Romans (who made mustard seeds popular in Central and Western Europe) grew mustard to flavour wine. In this parables Jesus tells us that the mustard seed is one of the smallest of seeds, (as you have seen for yourself!) but when it grows, it becomes in one of the largest of plants and grows into a tree. The tiny mustard seed you have in your hand can grow to over 4 metres tall and in some cases 12-15 feet.

Mustard trees are not like an oak, cedar or willow tree, they are not firm, strong or very old. On the contrary the mustard tree's branches are narrow and flimsy looking and yet in this story Jesus tells us that the birds come and find shelter in it.

When Jesus came declaring the kingdom of God there were many who wanted that kingdom to be a physical and visible kingdom that fought back the oppression of the Roman Empire. They were looking for power, force, might and strength, someone too stand-up to Romans, (They were looking for a wise old oak, a fir tree, a cedar tree, trees that is strong, that can stand and last the passage of time) Instead Jesus paints a picture of the kingdom as a seemly insignificant mustard seed that at best is flimsy tree.

When looking at this image of the kingdom being a mustard seed a good place to start is looking at the life and work of Jesus and how it started off from small beginning.

For example:

- The kingdom came from a baby who was born in a manger.
- It came from a man to begin on his own declaring that the kingdom had come.
- It came from Jesus and his disciple learning and living the message of the kingdom
- It came from one man who came and was crucified on a cross for the sins of the world

And it grew:

- From Jesus to 12 disciples and then more and more disciples.
- From (message)Jerusalem to Samaria, Europe, Africa and the world

The mustard seed symbolises small beginning and how the kingdom comes out from and expands from some of the smallest things. What does this mean for us as agents of the kingdom, well the kingdom is advanced through the smallest acts. Not necessarily through preaching on the stage to thousand (although this has its place) or necessarily shouting your faith on the streets but it's through the small ways you show love, the small ways you show kindness, the small words of hope that you share, small acts of charity and good to those in your world, your work, where you live.

As Kingdom agents we demonstrate the kingdom of God like a mustard seed when you show simple acts of kindness to others, when you include those who are excluded, when you encourage the person who is having a hard time where you work, when you are able to help someone on your street and in your community who is in need. It is these kinds of ways where you advance the kingdom of God by planting little seed a love, a seed of hope, a seed of justice in your world, where you work and on your street!

It's interesting because God uses some of the small acts of kindness and goodness, love, peace and justice to touch the hearts of people and to allow them to experience and connect with the kingdom through you.

Then Jesus said, "What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds come and find shelter among its branches." Luke 13:18-19 NLT

If you take a look at the pictures around and on the screen you see how birds come find shelter in the mustard tree. The kingdom is a shelter for the birds, a shelter from the storms, a shelter from the troubles of life, a refuge when times are tough. When we think about the kingdom as a mustard seed that grows into a tree and gives shelter to the bird's we learn that God's kingdom is a place of safety, a place of hope, a place of healing, a place to receive help, be encouraged, receive love faith and hope. We are the conduits through which the kingdom is seen and people can access God as shelter.

When we as agents of the kingdom through simple acts of love, hope, kindness, justice and peace we show that we live and are part of a kingdom where there is shelter for those who need it, for those bogged down, for those who life is not going well, for those who need hope, those who are unloved, those who seek justice, for those who are sick and those who are tired and those excluded and be included. The song writer said you're my shelter through it all, you're my refuge and my strength.' A lot of people today are looking for this and it is when we demonstrate the kingdom through the little things that they see beyond religion and can connect with Jesus and connect with God as their shelter.

We can demonstrate the kingdom of God as a shelter, a refuge and a safe place for all through simple and small acts of love, kindness, hope, peace and justice to those who need it, to the poor, the captives, the blind, the disables, the excluded where you are, where you work and where you live.

Take a minute to look again at your mustard seed and the picture on the screen of the mustard tree and can think of any ways or people you can show love, kindness, hope, peace and justice?

Bibliography

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