

# The Mustard Seed

Mark 4:30-32  
*Halifax: 19 May 2019, 10:30 AM*

## Introduction

For the past few weeks, we have been looking at the parables Jesus told about the kingdom of God that are recorded in Mark 4.

- He spoke to the multitudes that had gathered around Him in parables because they were not ready to hear that He was the Messiah without gross misunderstanding of what that meant.
  - If He had simply told them that He was the Messiah,
    - they would have immediately wanted to see the kingdom come in a very visible way where they (the people of Israel) were in power and where the other nations were vassals to them.
- Therefore, Jesus did not come right out and declare who He was to them, but showed them signs and left them to ponder and draw their own conclusions.
  - He spoke more plainly to His disciples in private, but even they were left to figure out that He was the Messiah.
  - And once they did, He constantly declared to them that He was going to be crucified, and then would rise again on the third day...
  - This was so contrary to what they and their peers expected of the Messiah that they could not accept it—and thought that He was speaking in figures.
- The parables were a way for Jesus to leave the multitudes with teachings that those who came to faith would understand later.
  - Speaking in parables was also a kind of judgment because of the hardness of the people's hearts which kept them from seeing their need of a Messiah like Jesus.
  - In fact, for many, Jesus' entire ministry, even after He was raised from the dead, was just an interesting and curious story that they could not make sense of.
    - It was not what they wanted of a Messiah.
    - They had no sense of their need to be reconciled to God except that they wanted God to act in their behalf in giving them dominion over the other nations.
      - But as for having a Saviour who would be a priest and who would offer Himself to atone for their sins, they had no use for that.
        - They had the sacrifices for sin at the temple.
        - They did not see a need for anything more than that.
      - So, what many of them got from Jesus was parables that they could not understand except in a superficial way—just the storyline.

The parable we come to this week is the parable of the mustard seed.

- It has a lot to do with what I was just talking about.
- It is about how the kingdom of God is very small and unimpressive presently, but it tells us that it will grow remarkably into a kingdom that will dwarf all its rivals.

Listen as I read this parable to you.

- It is in Mark 4:30-32. This is the word of God.

**Mark 4:30-34:** Then He said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? <sup>31</sup> *It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth;* <sup>32</sup> *but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.”*

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

**I. Jesus begins by asking us to think with Him about the kingdom of God and with what we might compare it.**

- In verse 30, He says: “**To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it?**”

A. It is very noteworthy that Mark and Luke both include this detail about Him asking this question.

1. It has a way of stopping us and getting us to think about this matter.
  - What is the kingdom of God really like?
  - Of course Jesus Himself has many different figures He uses to describe the kingdom... already there have been the sower and the lamp and the growing seed in Mark 4, and Matthew and Luke have many more.
2. But here He is drawing us in to think with Him about another comparison.
  - He wants us to think about the kingdom—He wants to bring the kingdom of God before our minds because it is important for us to think about it.
  - It is important if we want to be a part of it.
    - All through His ministry, Jesus spoke of how only some would truly enter His kingdom and of how many others would be cut off.
  - The consequences of missing the kingdom are as severe as any that could be imagined:
    - to be outside of His kingdom to left to be stand before God in your sins, without any provision for your forgiveness.

➤ You need to think about this kingdom.

B. So just what is the kingdom of God?

1. The kingdom of God is the kingdom over which God rules.
  - Not merely in the way of an earthly prince who has the military under his command and can establish the policy and the law of the land,
    - but much more than that...they serve Him with an inward devotion as God.
2. This is so alien to us that it is hard to even explain...
  - The subjects of His kingdom have the kind of relationship that we as creatures ought to have with Him as God...
  - A relationship where they are glad to have Him rule over them as their gracious and loving Father who guides them and protects them.
    - They are not forced into the relationship, they are totally dedicated to Him in love the way Jesus was.
3. And of course this kingdom is called a kingdom because it is made up of many subjects. You can hardly call it a kingdom if there are only a few who are in it.

- C. And in fact God told us from the very beginning what He had in mind...
- That He wanted His kingdom to fill the whole earth!
1. He made the man of the dust of the ground and then He formed the woman of the rib of the man, and He said, **“Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.”**
    - He had marvellously given them the ability to reproduce after their kind by making love,
      - and He wanted them to fill the whole earth in that way.
    - He wanted His kingdom to encompass the whole earth with His subjects...
      - People who were righteous and happy and who had God as their God and who served Him as their king in heaven.
      - It was to be a great world-wide kingdom that lived beautifully before God,
        - trusting Him for everything, and serving Him with their whole being.
  2. God provided them with a beautiful world that was full of everything that they needed not only to survive, but also to bring them joy and happiness.
    - He was worthy to be praised and thanked and enjoyed as their God who would direct them and bless them forever as they filled the earth with people.
    - What a great kingdom it was to be!

## II. The mustard seed is a fitting representation of the kingdom at its inception.

- A. It was fitting to represent the small beginnings of the kingdom with just one man and one woman called to populate the whole world.
1. Jesus explains His use of the mustard seed as that which represents the small beginnings of the kingdom.
    - Mustard seeds were proverbially used in Jesus’ day to speak of something very small that becomes very large.
    - Jesus says that the kingdom is: **like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup> but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.**
  2. Have you ever seen a mustard seed?
    - They are tiny—only about one to two millimeters—it takes about 700 to make up 1 gram—something like an average sized grain of sand.
    - And remarkably, if you plant a mustard seed in Galilee where Jesus lived,
      - the plant will grow to a shrub that can be ten or fifteen feet high in about six weeks—sometimes, if the conditions are just right, it can even be thirty feet high and almost twice that wide.
    - It makes corn and wheat and barley all look very small indeed, and yet it started out much smaller than any of them.
  3. You can see what an apt comparison the mustard seed is for Adam and Eve at creation.
    - God started it all with just one man and one woman with the mandate to fill the whole earth with their offspring.
      - They could only produce one or two children per year and then those children had to grow up before they could reproduce.

- How small one man and one woman would look, standing alone upon the earth with the call to fill the whole globe.
    - They were like a tiny mustard seed, like a speck of sand that had to fill up a whole beach.
  - But still, there was very little in their way...
    - Before the fall, there was no sin or death, no famine, no sickness, no wars.
    - God had provided them with all that they needed to fill the earth with people for Him—what a beautiful kingdom it would be.
- So this couple was the mustard seed that would become a tree that would fill the whole earth with subjects for God’s kingdom.
- What fitting symbol.
- B. But the tiny mustard seed became all the more fitting a symbol of the tiny beginnings of God’s kingdom after we fell.
1. We, the human race, rejected God as our God before we even brought forth the first child for His kingdom.
    - We never brought forth even one child that was truly subject to God before we severed ourselves from God as our God and king.
      - a. Satan was sent to tempt our first parents.
        - In effect to say, “Fill the earth with people that are subject to God?”
          - “Bah! Why should you do that?”
          - “Fill the earth with people who are for themselves.
        - “Like the prodigal son, take your father’s inheritance and spend it in the way you want, apart from your father.
          - “Why do you need Him telling you what to do?”
          - “You can be like Him. *You* can be the one who decides what is good and evil for you, in your own eyes.”
      - b. They decided to give it a go.
        - They expressed their independence from God by eating of the fruit of the one tree from which God told them not to eat—to see if they would be subject to Him or not.
        - They set out to fill the earth for themselves rather than for God.
  2. Of course this was not done without the Father’s plan and purpose.
    - a. It was done apart from His commandment to be sure.
      - It was an act of rebellion.
      - It was our act of rebellion, for we were in Adam, in his loins, as those that were to be born of him so that when he acted, he acted for himself and for his posterity.
    - b. But it was all according to God’s ultimate plan.
      - It was the Father’s plan that those who were to be the subjects of His kingdom would be shaped through the experience of a fallen world.
        - He might have gone “poof” and called us all at once into a kingdom of perfection, but He had a much more dynamic and wonderful way of shaping us for Himself.

- He would forge us from the crucible of a world gone mad, a world out of which He would rescue us by His grace.
    - With the outcome that we could know Him through the struggle of sin and temptation and suffering...
      - That we would know what it means to obey Him when obedience involves sacrifice and suffering...
      - That we would know His glory as one worthy to be obeyed even when obedience calls for sacrifice and suffering.
  - c. He designed it for our good and for His glory, that His kingdom might be filled with those who had been brought through fire and water for Him.
    - Those who had been redeemed and rescued by His mighty power, by His marvellous grace, and by His outstretched hand.
    - We would know Him as the one who not only provided for us in the world He wanted us to fill...
      - But as a God of grace who provided for our redemption through the sacrifice of His Son...
        - His only Son who become one of us and learned obedience through suffering the penalty of our sin for us as our priest and redeemer.
- God did all of this for His own glory—that His people might know His glory in ways that they could not otherwise have known it.
3. Jesus, the Son of God, is the mustard seed from which the kingdom grows.
- a. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection.
    - He is the firstborn Son who represents us all—the start and root of this glorious kingdom that we could no longer establish.
    - He is the beginning of the kingdom of righteousness—the One who, when He came, declared that the kingdom of God had come.
      - It came because He who was its beginning had come.
  - b. He is the seed that was promised in Genesis 3:15 after the fall who would come of the woman to crush the serpent’s head and form a people who would turn against Satan—
    - so that, like the prodigal, they would return to the Father to serve Him.
    - Out of this one Son, a son born to us, the kingdom would emerge.
    - Everything depended on this mustard seed.
      - He was promised to Abraham as the one through whom the kingdom of God would emerge, first in Abraham’s descendants, and then in all the families of the earth.
    - Those people chosen to be saved would be redeemed to fill the earth for God and no longer for themselves.
      - They were chosen to be members of His kingdom by union with Jesus Christ, the firstborn son of the kingdom.
  - c. In the Old Testament, He was represented by the ritual worship God appointed for Israel.
    - God was represented as dwelling in the midst in the tabernacle or temple where a symbolic footstool was placed between images of cherubim.

- Here, Christ the Son was represented by the priests who offered sacrifices to atone for sin, and He was represented by the bulls and goats and lambs that were offered to atone for sin.
  - He would come and offer the one sacrifice that would truly atone for sin forever and ever—not a mere ritual atonement, but an atonement that truly reconciles sinners to God so they can live as His subjects forever.
- He was also represented by David, who called the people to serve God in righteousness, who united them before God in a typological kingdom...
  - but under the promise that this Son would be born to him who would take his throne forever as a son who would never die...
  - And as a son who would truly turn the hearts of the people to God.
- Remarkably, the book of Revelation not only calls Jesus the *offspring* of David, which indeed He was, but also the *root* of David.
  - He is called the root and offspring of David.
  - David is in the eternal kingdom of God because Christ his Son is the root into which David is grafted.
    - David does not support Him, but He supports David as well as Abraham and all the rest of the Old Testament saints.

TRANS> So Christ is the mustard seed that grows into the kingdom of God

- Unless you are found in Him, you are no part of this kingdom of righteousness that is growing until the whole earth is filled—
  - filled with those who are subject to God in Christ our redeemer who also was crucified for us all and raised as the first fruits of the resurrection.

### **III. This parable of the mustard seed is a remarkable prophecy.**

A. Consider the circumstances when Jesus spoke this parable.

1. He has been preaching that with Him God's kingdom was at hand—it was started.
  - He has been preaching this wherever He goes, as we have seen in Mark.
  - He has been telling everyone to repent and believe the good news of the kingdom—that, with Him, it is at hand.
2. But the response has not been good at all.
  - The leaders of the synagogues in Galilee have turned against Him.
    - The leaders from Jerusalem have come down and their verdict was that He was casting out demons by Beelzebub.
  - And the multitudes clamour around Him, not because they want to be reconciled to God, but because He heals them and casts out demons.
  - And even His own disciples are pretty clueless about the kingdom.
    - Like the Jews as a whole, they do not see that they need an atonement for their sins—a Saviour to die.
      - As far as they see it, they have all that in the ritual sacrifices.
      - What they need a Messiah for is to give them dominion over the nations so they can rule the world.
    - They don't see that if they and the nations are to enter God's kingdom, they need Christ to make them the righteous subjects of God.
      - Both by dying for their sins that they might be pardoned...
      - And by turning their hearts to God.

- B. The question is, how can Jesus stand there and talk of His kingdom as growing like the tiny mustard seed that grows into a great tree?
1. It sure didn't *look* like that was what was happening.
    - This is a prophecy that could not have been made apart from divine revelation.
    - Think about it.
      - How could Jesus, rejected as He was at this time, possibly think that His kingdom was going to fill the earth?
    - And if someone wants to claim that Jesus never actually said this but others attributed it to Him after He was gone (which of course is not true... but if someone wants to assert that),
      - how in the world can it be explained that in the scriptures of the Old Testament, which were in the hands of the Jews, all the prophets declared that when the Messiah came, the nations would enter God's kingdom?
        - Abraham was told that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in His seed.
        - Daniel prophesied of a little stone that would become come a kingdom that would fill the whole earth.
        - Isaiah speaks of the nations flowing up to Jerusalem to serve God.
        - Psalm 2 says that He will inherit the nations, Psalm 110 that all the nations will be put under His feet, we could go on and on.
      - Those prophecies were not written after the nations (or the Gentiles) started to respond... they were written centuries before that...
        - Many of them were written when Israel was being taken away into exile—declaring what the future held for them!
      - What is so remarkable is the consistency of the prophecies... even in the darkest times...
        - Here was Jesus, headed for the cross with only a few terrified disciples, declaring that the kingdom of God He came to establish will fill the whole earth.
  2. Jesus knew the power that was in Him as the mustard seed... a power to raise up a righteous kingdom in this sinful world.
    - a. He knew that in Him was all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.
      - In that mustard seed was the One who had come from heaven to represent His people—to die for their sins on the cross.
      - In Him was that obedience to the Father that is required of those who belong to God—of those God wants the earth to be filled with.
      - In Him was that call to give His life for them so that they might be saved and that Holy Spirit that would be poured out on them so that they would repent and believe the gospel.
    - b. Jesus knew that the kingdom of God would emerge from Him after He was crucified and raised again.
      - As I mentioned a moment ago, the disciples of Jesus did not yet see that, for them to enter God's kingdom (and for anybody else to), they needed an atonement that was much greater than the ritual atonements at the temple and they needed a repentance that would truly turn them to God.

- Jesus knew what the cross and His resurrection would do for them.
    - They would learn the tremendous price of sin by watching their Saviour die.
    - They would learn of the justice of God and the love of God by watching Him die for their sins.
    - They would learn what it means to be subject to God by learning to suffer for God's cause the way Jesus suffered.
  - Then they would come to Christ crucified in a faith that would radically transform them.
    - It would be a faith in Christ crucified and raised again as the first-fruits of the kingdom that they would preach among the nations and that the people from the nations would receive.
- C. From our vantage point, we can see that this has happened and we can see that it will yet happen.
1. We can see that it has happened because there are people today from all over the world that are subjects of God's kingdom.
    - They have seen that an atonement like Christ made was necessary and they have seen that no one can enter God's kingdom without it.
    - They have within them the subjection to God that is willing to sacrifice and to suffer for Him.
    - Though they often come short, they are convinced that He is worthy of nothing less than the obedience that Christ gave to the Father.

➤ The parable of the mustard seed has been fulfilled by such people as these.

    - They are joined to Christ in faith and they are, by Him, subject to God.
    - You can see them in prison for Christ, tortured for Christ, dying for Christ.
    - You can see them in a classroom or a lunch room bearing reproach for His name.
    - You can see them turning from their sin to follow Him.
  2. And therefore we have every reason to take heart even though we live in a place and time where there is so much decline in the church.
    - Christ is the mustard seed and His kingdom will continue to grow until all His sheep have been gathered.
    - We will often find ourselves in the place where we are called to suffer and sacrifice in for our Lord in this world,
      - for it is in this way that we learn obedience to our Father and set before our eyes His worth and His glory as one who is worthy of such obedience.
  3. Indeed, may His kingdom come and may we be numbered with those who are part of the great mustard tree that is joined to Christ the mustard seed.
    - What a marvellous kingdom God is establishing for Himself.
    - He does not do things in a simple or easy way, but He refines us and shapes us to live in His kingdom by redeeming us from our sin and bringing us through the crucible of a fallen world.
      - Praise God for the mustard seed.