

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Mark 4:21-34

Key Verses: 4:31-32

"It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

In the first part of chapter four, we learned the parable of the sower. This parable basically tells us that there are four kinds of people. The best kind of people are people who are like good soil. Good soil stands for a good heart. The man who is happy and who becomes a great man that makes a great achievement and can see the kingdom of God is the man who has a good heart. As we know, this generation mainly develops a man's head or mind and mostly produces experts of some skill. They don't care about their hearts. We should have a good heart so that we may bear fruit thirty times, sixty times and one hundred times. The parable of the sower also teaches us the secret of the kingdom of God. People cannot have the kingdom of God without a good heart. May God bless each of us to be a man of good heart instead of being a leviathan, which has a big head and a small leg or tail. Today's passage, verses 21-34, has three parables. These parables teach us a very important truth. Among three parables, the parable of the mustard seed is mainly concerned with the kingdom of God. May God give us one word from this passage.

I. A lamp on a stand (21-25)

Look at verse 21. "He said to them, 'Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?'" In this verse, the lamp stands for self-evident truth. It is also compared to a light to brighten a room. Jesus asks, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Don't you put it on its stand?" In order to light a room we bring in a lamp and we must put it on its stand. We should not put it under a bowl. In ancient times, a bowl played the role of a toilet basin in the room. Jesus also mentioned those who put their lamp under a bed. One who puts his lamp under a bowl or a bed is very stupid. He is less than a man of common sense. But in actuality, there are many who bring a lamp to put it under a bowl or under a bed. There are many people who want to honor God as God. Then, husband and wife must love each other. Everybody knows they should not break their children's hearts. But there are many people who do something beyond common sense. They know with their minds that they must love God and honor God. But their hearts are crooked. They hide their shining lamp under a bowl or a bed. How terrible it is to violate self-evident truth. How nice it is to follow self-evident truth. How wonderful our children will be when parents keep self-evident truth instead of divorcing and breaking young hearts. How wonderful it is when a man loves God more than money. Those who love money go to school and then work extra in the evening, and in the late evening they go to the bar and spend all the money they earned. Those who use [a credit card](#), not thinking about paying back the money, are violating self-evident truth. They try to hide the light under a bowl or a bed. Hiding the lamp under the bowl may be safe. But those who hide a burning lamp under the bed will bring disaster. There is a danger that he will burn his face and fingers and legs when the bed is burned by the lamplight.

Generally people of the world think that if they live contrary to the self-evident truth they will be all right. As a result, there are many kinds of people. Each person has a way of living in the world without self-evident truth. A father worried about his oldest daughter, how she could survive in the world. But she had her own way of living in this world. Her father was amazed that she became a math teacher in a high school and each year she received the best teacher's award from the principal. It is amazing that each person survives in the world without self-evident truth. But look at verse 22. "For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open." We are living in America. We must pray and think about America's future destiny. At the initial pioneering stage, Americans were the absolute minority and Indians were the absolute majority. Half of the land- Texas, California and Florida-was occupied by La Hispaniola. Americans who crossed the ocean and landed on the soil of America looked as if they would perish sooner or later. But it was not so. It is because God had a plan for Americans who immigrated to this land. In history, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ came from Israel first and crossed over to the Roman Empire and next to England and finally came across to America through a handful of Americans who wanted to believe in God freely after coming out from under the yoke of the Anglican Church. Anglican Church leaders were very corrupt and they distorted those who preached the gospel freely and imprisoned them. John Bunyan was a true man of God. He was also arrested and tortured and put in prison with a lifetime sentence simply because he taught the Bible to the thirsty people. There he wrote "Pilgrim's Progress." It is known as the best book next to the Bible. There were so many devout Christians who did not want to keep Anglican rituals and wanted to come to a free land and believe only in God freely. They gambled their lives and came to America. It was not their own will. From God's point of view, God gave freedom of religion to the Puritans and sent them to this land as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God wanted to pioneer America. Through those who had Puritan faith, he wanted to evangelize America, and next through America, the whole world. This was the same plan which God had for the people of Israel. God failed to fulfill this plan many times. But he always tries. For this great purpose, God gave to those people who were an absolute minority the best land America, clearing away the native Indians and La Hispaniolas who occupied half of this country.

American Puritans. In this case, American Puritans means those who loved God more than themselves and those who raised their children in the word of God. They are those who prayed at mealtime, and all family members prayed before going to bed. They were those who put a lamp on a stand. They were those who lived according to self-evident truth. When God saw those who lived by the truth of God, he blessed this country and finally made it the world's only world power nation.

These days most Americans do not honor God as they ought to. Many Americans are eager to make money. When we watch television and see the stock market activity, we immediately get a migraine headache. Many Americans can be compared to a stock broker. They make a huge amount of money. Next, they lose all the money. They make another huge amount of money. Then they lose all the money they earned. During these times, their blood boils because of their anxiety.

Let's read verse 22. "For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open." This is a warning that we should live according to self-evident truth or by the word of God, honoring God as God. Otherwise our final destiny will be miserable. God blessed this country so much. One time this country was able to send out one million missionaries to foreign countries. One of them is Reverend Mother Barry, who was so busy in the mission land that she had no time to get out to get married. She sacrificed her marriage, even though she wanted to have eight sons and four daughters. Once she was given a daughter as her daughter by a servant of God. Soon, the servant of God changed his mind and took her back from her. So the servant of God was called an "Indian giver." But these days there are a very small number of permanent missionaries in the mission land. Most American missionaries are one or two month long missionaries. Many missionaries are tourist missionaries. They claim they are missionaries because they traveled to a certain country. This tells us America's spiritual condition. School prayer is forbidden. Many UBF members have been arrested and put in jail overnight simply because they preached the gospel to students. This is America's spiritual condition. As soon as UBF ministry started, deprogrammers and kidnappers attacked UBF. They offended children's parents and took children away one by one. Altogether maybe 21 members, only from Chicago UBF, were brainwashed and indoctrinated to be anti-Christians and enemies of UBF. In many ways, America shows anti-Christian elements—for example, no school prayer and no prayer before eating and no family prayer. On the other hand, with the excuse of human freedom, even teenagers indulge in various kinds of corruption. At the beginning, the court carefully tried divorce cases. But the rate of divorce increased so much that the court could not handle them, first, because of budget deficiencies, and second, because of judges' grinding headaches in dealing with divorces. They had to deal with each divorce case. But finally they decided to allow free divorce. To anybody who wants to petition, the courts now say, "Okay." They don't even refer to the other partner about the divorce. Divorce is easier than going to Niagara Falls for sightseeing. Read verse 23. "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." This is Jesus' warning.

Look at verse 24. "'Consider carefully what you hear,' he continued. 'With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.'" In this verse, the word "measure" implies a way of life or the ruler a person uses. Jesus spoke very gently about the measure people use. But this verse tells us that they will be judged by the way they lived. If they lived for money, they will go to hell, where stock brokers are wiggling like worms day and night without sleep. If they lived an easygoing way of life with much money, they will go to hell where many heart patients are groaning terribly. Those who lived a selfish life will go to hell, where many tax collectors are looking at each other to get something from other tax collectors. Therefore, we must pray earnestly about what kind of lifestyle we should have and live up to it.

Look at verse 25. "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." This verse tells us about the treasure in heaven. This verse also tells us about the sovereignty of God. Those who have heavenly treasure will be welcomed to the pearly gates by the welcoming crowd. But those who lived only selfishly are not allowed to enter the kingdom of God and they have to fall into somewhere,

where there is no bottom.

II. The parable of the growing seed (26-29)

This parable tells us mainly about the character of the kingdom of God. Look at verse 26. "He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.'" This parable tells us that the kingdom of God grows in our hearts day after day, month by month, year by year. At first, we have a small seed of the kingdom of God in our hearts. It looks too small. These days many people have a life key verse of Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Those who have Matthew 6:33 are those who want to have the seed of the kingdom of God. But most of them dry up their seed of the kingdom of God because they do not have spiritual insight. One professor wrote a book about the kingdom of God based on Matthew 6:33. But he has a weight problem and diabetes. So he cannot eat. And his wife ate too much. Finally she got an incurable stomach ulcer due to her worries. So she also cannot eat. They have a problem: They have much money, but they cannot eat as they want. It is easy to talk about Matthew 6:33. The reason we mention this professor is to explain that talking about the seed of the kingdom of God is easy, but to make it alive and make it grow is very difficult.

It is not easy for us to have the seed of the kingdom of God. However, when we believe God and keep this seed in our hearts, the kingdom of God grows in our hearts day and night, unceasingly. But from time to time, Satan tempts us to give up the seed of the kingdom of God, saying, "You are the same person, not changed. Your bad habits—and you—are getting worse." We should not listen to the voice of Satan. We must keep the seed of the kingdom of God based on one word of God. We must know that we cannot grow the seed of the kingdom of God with our own strength. One cannot change himself and become a noble and holy man respected by all the peoples of the world. Here, our problem is a faith problem. If we have faith in God, that we keep the seed of the kingdom of God, God will grow the kingdom of God in our hearts day and night and unceasingly. The kingdom of God grows whether the man sleeps or gets up. The seed of the kingdom of God sprouts and grows though we do not know how. It's a miracle. But it's God's grace. Therefore, Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1Co 15:9).

Look at verse 28. "All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head." The more the kingdom of God grows in our hearts by God's grace, the more we feel the happiness of the kingdom of God and the more we feel victorious. The more the kingdom of God grows in our hearts, the more we can love God, and husbands and wives can have a lifetime honeymoon. Their children will be blessed because of the kingdom of God in their parents' hearts. Let's read verse 28. "All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."

Look at verse 29. "As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." In ancient Israel, the harvest story was very meaningful. Once upon a time Israel was in a great famine. So Naomi and her husband went far away to Moab. There they wanted to farm the land and harvest abundantly and raise their sons Mahlon and Kilion. But Naomi's husband died. They harvested

some, but then her two sons Mahlon and Kilion died suddenly. So only three women were left. Naomi, the mother-in-law, told Orpah and Ruth, "Go your way." Then the first daughter-in-law Orpah was very happy and said goodbye to her mother-in-law and left. But Ruth followed Naomi, her mother-in-law, and went to Israel, which was a foreign land to this young woman, Ruth. She had to live as a young widow in a foreign land. She had to support her mother-in-law and herself in a foreign land. God saw her faithfulness and blessed her and she became the wife of Boaz. Finally this foreigner and young widow became the great-grandmother of King David. In this situation, Ruth made up the harvest of her dead husband's family. We are like a kernel of wheat. A kernel of wheat is supposed to bear much fruit. If it remains a kernel it will be alone forever; there is no harvest for the undying kernel of wheat. But if a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it bears much fruit. To us, making money to support the family is important. To become a man of fame is also important. But from God's point of view, harvesting a soul is the most important. Is your harvest abundant? Do you have nothing to harvest? God will judge according to your harvest. Man is to harvest abundantly.

III. The parable of the mustard seed (30-34)

Look at verse 30. "Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?'" Verse 30 clearly tells us that the former two parables were written to explain this third parable, especially about the kingdom of God. Even Jesus was in agony as to how to explain the kingdom of God to them. So he said in verse 30, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?" The kingdom of God is not given, but we must discover the kingdom of God through studying the word of God.

Look at verse 31. "It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground." To a wicked human being, even if the seed of the kingdom of God is planted, it is like the smallest mustard seed. The kingdom of God looks useless and seemingly the kingdom of God is hopeless. The kingdom of God seems to be useless in this hard world. So Jesus explained that it is like a mustard seed which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Look at verse 32. "Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." Primarily Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God looks like the smallest seed. But when it is planted it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.

Here Jesus tells us another significance of the kingdom of God. We must first believe that the kingdom of God in our souls may grow by God's grace and finally become the largest tree among other trees. In other words, when we have the kingdom of God we will be the greatest persons; we will become the largest plant of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in our shade. The conclusion of this parable is that we must grow as the largest tree so that the birds of the air can perch in our shade. According to the Bible, no one is right. No one is useful. We are all nothing but good and evil men struggling to survive in this world. But when we have the seed of the kingdom of God and grow day and night, as we studied in the parable of the growing seed, we become the largest tree or influential and noble men of God. Then many people are introduced to come to God or try to have

a seed of the kingdom of God. How beautiful it is to see in a big tree with abundant leaves many birds come and perch in it and sing sweetly, and eat many worms in the trees and take a nap.

This parable basically tells us that we should not despise ourselves because we are like the smallest person among all people. Even if we are the smallest persons among all people, if we have the kingdom of God we can be the greatest tree with abundant branches and leaves so that many needy birds can come to rest in our shade. This parable reminds us of God's promise to Abraham, "You will be a blessing and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2,3). How can a seventy-five year old man whose wife was barren be a blessing? But he became a source of blessing to all people. Now we call ourselves descendants of Abraham because he accepted God's word to become a source of blessing. Of course, there were a lot of ups and downs in Abraham's life of faith. But finally he loved God more than his one and only son Isaac who was given after twenty-five years. Once God asked Abraham to make his one and only son Isaac a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. Abraham said, "Yes sir!" and he did it. When he took a knife and was about to cut his son Isaac, the angel of the Lord said to him, "Abraham, Abraham. Now I know that you love me more than your son." In this way, Abraham showed us that the small seed of the kingdom of God grew to be an ancestor of faith for all human beings.

Why does God want us to have the kingdom of God? It is mainly because God wants us to be a source of blessing. God is not pleased when we become burdensome to others like a paralytic. God is not pleased when we become like a tax collector who left his wife and his country and his people only to make money. When he lived in that way he did not become a source of blessing. He only became a pot belly and a laughingstock even to street children. Our God is indeed great. The hope of God for us is indeed great. God does not want us to remain like a seventy-five year old man with a wife who is barren. He wants us to be great. He wants us to be a great tree. He wants us to be a source of blessing so that many helpless people may come to us and take rest. Why do we have to have the kingdom of God? It is very obvious that God wants us to have the kingdom of God for ourselves as well as to become a source of blessing to others. God cares for us and God cares for others. God is our Father in heaven. May God grant us the kingdom of God. May God help us grow as a big tree and a great man who can be a source of blessing to others.