

Jesus – King of the Jews #36

Parables of Influence

Matt 13:31-35

Introduction:

1. After hearing the parables of the sower and of the wheat and tares, the disciples no doubt wondered how Christ's kingdom could survive if so many people rejected Him and were then allowed to stay on earth with contaminating influence.
2. How could God's people survive, much less thrive, in the midst of such unfavorable circumstances?
3. Would not the great power of Satan and his evil forces, utterly overwhelm and stifle the few (cf. [7:13-14](#)) of God's saints on earth?
4. Long before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion it was evident that the Jewish leaders rejected His claims of messiahship.
5. It was also obvious that the multitudes who praised and followed Him did not understand His true nature or mission and were only superficially attracted to Him.
6. His true disciples were a handful against the whole nation of Israel, not to mention the vast and ungodly Roman empire and the regions beyond.
7. In response to that unspoken concern, Jesus used these two parables to emphasize that small things can have far-reaching effects.
8. This parable should be a great encouragement to anyone who would live for Christ and endeavor to serve Him.
9. So often God's people are obscure, unknown, facing a task far greater than what their small means could ever accomplish.
10. Yet when the mustard seed of faith and obedience is planted, it produces an amazing work.
11. Are you small, unknown, and obscure?
 - a. Is your situation unpromising as far as doing anything significant for the Lord?
 - b. If so, do not give up and despair over your unimpressive situation.
 - c. Remember this parable. God specializes in making the small great.
12. At another time Christ also used the mustard seed in this proverbial way to encourage our faith in Him and our service for Him.
 - a. He said, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" ([Luke 17:6](#)).
 - b. Christ informed us that just a little faith could do wonders.
13. This should really encourage us - it also shames our faith; for our lack of accomplishments in faith says our faith is extremely small if faith no bigger than a grain of mustard seed could do so much.

I. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED – vs 31-32

A. The Similitude in the Seed – vs 31

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

- A parable is a comparison to illustrate a truth.
 - The mustard seed is also used elsewhere as a parable similitude of faith.
1. **The comparison in the similitude**
 - a) *The mustard seed is compared to the kingdom of heaven.*
 - b) *The "kingdom of heaven," as it is used in the four Gospels, covers a wide range of meaning.*
 - c) *It is sometimes used interchangeably with "kingdom of God" term*
 - d) *In brief it speaks of the dominion of God or of Christ.*
 - e) *It is used in a limited sense sometimes (such as you must be born again to enter the kingdom—[John 3:3](#)), and sometimes the phrase is used in a more general sense to speak of any rule of God or of Christ.*

BYZ **Matthew 13:31** Ἄλλην παραβολὴν παρέθηκεν αὐτοῖς, λέγων, Ὅμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν κόκκῳ σινάπεως, ὃν λαβὼν ἄνθρωπος ἔσπειρεν ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ αὐτοῦ·
κόκκῳ noun dms from **κόκκος** - (1) of grain or plants seed, kernel; (2) scarlet "berry"
σινάπεως, noun gns from **σίναπι** - mustard plant, an herb or shrub with extremely small pungent seeds (MT 13.31)

2. **The count in the similitude.** "The kingdom of heaven"
 - a) All eight of the parables in [Matthew 13](#) are compared to the kingdom of heaven one way or another.
 - b) It is the dominant theme in this chapter of Matthew.
 - c) To the Israelites looking for the Messiah to establish Israel's kingdom, these parables presented something far different than what they were wanting and anticipating.
 - d) These parables look on the character side of things.
 - e) The Israelites were more concerned about conquering physical enemies than spiritual enemies.

B. The Sowing of the Seed – vs 31-32

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: 32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

- The parable depends on the seed being sown. Without the sowing of the seed, there is no parable.
 1. **The mention of the sowing – vs 31** "sowed in his field"
 - a) Christ could teach the greatest of truths with the most simple of illustrations.
 - b) And often He used simple agricultural illustrations.
 - c) This is the third parable in this chapter of Matthew, and it is the third consecutive parable that involves sowing of seed.
 2. **The meaning of the sowing – vs 31**
 - a) In the first parable of this chapter, the sowing illustrated the proclaiming of the Word of God, for the seed represented the Word.
 - b) In the second parable, the sowing illustrated the sowing of people, for in the parable the seed represented people.
 - c) Here in this third parable, the sowing can represent either proclaiming the Word or the sowing of God's people throughout the world.
 - d) The purpose of the sowing is, of course, for reproduction.
 - e) No sowing means no reproduction.
 3. **The material in the sowing.** "Grain of mustard seed".
 - That which is sown in this parable is mustard seed.
 - The character of the seed is the key to the parable lesson.
 - Two features about character need to be noted.
 - a) **First, the diminutiveness of the seed.** "least of all seeds"
 - (1) The striking feature of the mustard seed, which plays an important part in the parable, is its diminutive size.
 - (2) It is the "least of all seeds." This makes the growth which comes from it the great illustration of the parable.
 - (3) The smallness of the seed is emphasized to show the greatness of the contrast between the seed and the size of the tree
 - b) **Second, the difficulty of the seed.**
 - (1) The problem in the seed is that it is actually not the smallest of seeds.
 - (2) Jesus' referring to the **mustard seed** as being **smaller than all other seeds** has often been cited as proof that Scripture is errant—that Jesus was either fallible and made a mistake or that He accommodated His teaching to the ignorance of His hearers and knowingly distorted the truth.
 - (3) "Many seeds such as the poppy or rue, are actually smaller.
 - (4) Yet difficulties of this kind are not worth making; it is sufficient to know that 'small as a grain of mustard seed was a proverbial expression among the Jews for something exceedingly minute... the Lord, in his popular teaching, adhered to popular language" (Trench).
 - (5) But "it is evidently tiniest of all seeds used in Jewish husbandry, even though not, of course, smallest known to botanical science" (Thomas).
 - (6) Grain of mustard seed was a proverbial expression among the Jews for saying that something was exceedingly small

BYZ **Matthew 13:32** ὁ μικρότερον μὲν ἔστιν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων· ὅταν δὲ αὐξηθῇ, μείζον τῶν λαχάνων ἔστιν, καὶ γίνεται δένδρον, ὥστε ἐλθεῖν τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατασκηνοῦν ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ.

C. The Success of the Seed – vs 32

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

- The seed was phenomenally successful in its growth and this success is interpreted in two different ways.
 1. **The virtue in the growth**
 - The tree's phenomenal growth is spoken of in three ways.
 2. **First**, the biggest. "the greatest among the herbs."
 3. **Second**, the branches. "Becometh a tree... branches."
 - a) The seed developed so well that it became a tree with branches.
 - b) This parable is also criticized for supposedly exaggerating the size of the mustard plant, referring to it as **a tree**, in which **the birds of the air come and nest in its branches**.
 - (1) Many varieties of mustard plants are rather small bushes whose **branches** are too flimsy for **birds to nest** in.
 - (2) But the mustard plant of Palestine often grows to a height of twelve or fifteen feet. Just as Jesus said, **when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and**, from a comparative viewpoint, **becomes a tree**.
 - (3) At certain times of the year the branches become rigid enough to easily support a bird's nest.
 4. **Third**, the birds. "So that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."
 - a) The large size of the tree is emphasized by the fact that birds can come and sit on its branches and lodge in it.
 - b) The encouraging lesson (virtuous interpretation) in this phenomenal growth is that though it had a small beginning it still grew into a large tree.
 - c) Sometimes the Lord's work looks so small and not able to amount to much, but be faithful.
 - d) Though it is like a mustard seed in smallness, it can still become a great work.
 5. **The vice in the growth**
 - a) There are some who believe this parable does not teach virtue but vice.
 - b) Some teach that this parable shows corruption coming into the kingdom in the form of the birds in the tree and in the form of abnormal growth.
 - c) However, the growth of this seed in Israel is not abnormal and the birds lodging in the tree do not illustrate corruption but emphasize the largeness of the tree.
 - d) The seed much better illustrates the kingdom of heaven, for the ministry of Christ had a very small beginning.
 - e) Christ was born in obscurity, lived in Nazareth in obscurity, was not a world traveler, yet His work has spread throughout the world.
 6. The chief point of the parable is to show that in the spiritual arena something small can become large in spite of its small beginning.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN – vs 33-35

33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. 34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: 35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

- This is the fourth parable in this parable chapter.
- The focus here is on leaven (we call it yeast today) which is put in bread dough to make it rise so that the bread is fluffy instead of a hard flat crust.

BYZ **Matthew 13:33** Ἄλλην παραβολὴν ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς, Ὅμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ζύμη, ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ ἔκρουψεν εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία, ἕως οὗ ἐζυμώθη ὅλον.

Is like unto leaven (homoia estin zumēi). In its pervasive power. Curiously enough some people deny that Jesus here likens the expanding power of the Kingdom of heaven to leaven, because, they say, leaven is the symbol of corruption. But the language of Jesus is not to be explained away by such exegetical jugglery. The devil is called like a lion by Peter (1 Peter 5:8) and Jesus in Revelation is called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5). The leaven permeates all the "wheaten meal" (aleourou) till the whole is leavened. There is nothing in the "three measures," merely a common amount to bake. Dr. T.R. Glover in his Jesus of History suggests that Jesus used to notice his mother using that amount of wheat flour in baking bread. To find the Trinity here is, of course, quite beside the mark. The word for leaven, zumē, is from zeō, to boil, to seethe, and so pervasive fermentation.

BYZ **Matthew 13:34** Ταῦτα πάντα ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν παραβολαῖς τοῖς ὄχλοις, καὶ χωρὶς παραβολῆς οὐκ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς.

BYZ **Matthew 13:35** ὅπως πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τοῦ προφήτου, λέγοντος, Ἀνοίξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου, ἐρεῦξομαι κεκρυμμένα ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

I will utter - ereuxomai - The verb, in which the sound corresponds to the sense (ereuxoma,), means originally to belch, to disgorge. Homer uses it of the sea surging against the shore ("Iliad," xvii., 265). Pindar of the eruption of Aetna ("Pyth.," i., 40). There seems to lie in the word a sense of full, impassioned utterance, as of a prophet.

A. The Circumstances for the Parable – vs 33

1. This is the fourth and last parable given to the public in this chapter; for after this parable, "Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house" ([Matthew 13:36](#)).
2. The rest of the parables were given in private to the disciples.
3. The first four were given in public and the last four in private.

B. The Contents in the Parable – vs 33

33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

1. **The leaven.** "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven"
 - The key to understanding correctly the parable is to be found in the leaven.
 - This parable, like the previous parable (mustard seed), has considerable controversy about it in regards to its interpretation and application.
 - There are two main views concerning this parable
 - a) **First, the iniquity view of the parable.**
 - (1) In this view, people hold that the leaven's work in bread shows the corruption that is brought into the kingdom of heaven.
 - (2) The problem with this view is that the Scripture does not say the leaven is compared to evil but "the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven."
 - (3) If leaven is to be interpreted as evil, then the conclusion from this view is that the kingdom of heaven is a subtle evil influence in the world—a view wholly contrary to the Scriptures.
 - (4) So the iniquity view is not Scriptural. It does not interpret Scripture accurately.
 - b) **Second, the influence view of the parable.**
 - (1) In this view, people hold that the work of leaven (influencing bread dough in a great way) shows the great influence of the kingdom of heaven, though the influence may go on quietly without fanfare.
 - (2) This view is consistent with the fact that the Scriptures say the leaven is compared to the kingdom of heaven and though it is often concealed to the human eyes, it still does its work well.
2. **The lady – vs 31** "Leaven, which a woman took"
 - a) Allegorists often get carried away with this feature of the parable.
 - b) It was customary for the woman to make the bread and, therefore, to mix and conceal the leaven in the dough.
 - c) What this action of the lady represents is how the Gospel and kingdom spread in spite of obscurity.
 - d) "This was wonderfully exemplified in the early history of Christianity. The leaven was effectually hidden. [For] How striking is the entire ignorance which heathen writers betray of all that was going forward a little below the surface of society" (Trench).
 - e) Even today the world at large is wholly ignorant of the work of the Gospel.
 - f) History text books do not put the work of the Gospel in capital letters.
 - g) To the world, the Gospel is not important.
3. **The loaves**
 - a) The "three measures" does not want to be pressed into allegorical interpretations.
 - b) It is simply a normal amount of dough a woman would be using when making bread.
 - c) The loaves simply represent the world in which the Gospel and kingdom messages are proclaimed.
4. **The leavening - "Till the whole was leavened" – vs 33**
 - a) This does not mean that the world was converted, but that the Gospel went through all the world and affected the entire world.
 - b) The influence of the Gospel is greater than natural man thinks.
 - c) It has had an impact upon people in every corner of the earth.
 - d) But mankind ignores the influence of the Gospel and how it has changed men and nations.

C. The Comfort From the Parable – vs 33

33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

- This parable is especially comforting in the last sentence of our text—
"Till the whole was leavened" ([Matthew 13:33](#)).
- 1. The first point in this parable is that small things can have great influence, in the way that a small piece of leavened dough can permeate a large piece of unleavened dough to make it rise.
 - a) *The power of **the kingdom of heaven** is great, far greater than its initial size and appearance would suggest.*
 - b) *The smallest part of **the kingdom** that is placed in the world is sure to have influence, because it contains the power of God's own Spirit.*
 - c) *The influence of **the kingdom** is the influence of the King, of His Word, and of His faithful people.*
- 2. The second point of the parable is that the influence is positive.
 - a) *Leavened bread has always been considered tastier and more enjoyable than unleavened.*
 - b) *To symbolize the break with their former life in Egypt, God commanded His people to eat only unleavened bread during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, which began on Passover evening.*
 - c) *They were not even allowed to have leaven of any sort in the house during the seven days of the feast ([Ex. 12:15, 18-19](#)).*
 - d) *But the bread they ate the rest of the year was leavened and perfectly acceptable to the Lord.*
 - e) *To the average person of Jesus' day, Jew or Gentile, there is no evidence that **leaven** carried any connotation of evil or corruption.*
- 3. A third lesson of this parable is that the positive influence of the kingdom comes from within.
 - a) *The **leaven** must be **hid** in order to have any impact.*
 - b) *The idea here is not that of hiding so as not to be seen but rather of hiding in the sense of penetrating deeply, completely permeating the world as leaven completely permeates the dough.*
 - c) *Christians are not to be of the world, but we are to be in the world, because that is the only way the gospel can reach and affect the world ([John 17:14-16](#)).*
 - d) *Christ sends His people into the world just as the Father sent Him into the world ([v. 18](#)).*
 - e) *The supreme purpose of the church is to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" [Mark 16:15](#).*