

THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN

BIBLE TEXT : **Matthew 13 :31-33**

LESSON 77 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done In earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 13:31-33

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.

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.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Small Beginnings of the Kingdom

1 The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a grain of mustard seed. Matthew 13:31

2 A man took and sowed the mustard seed in his field, Matthew 13:31;

Matthew 13:37-38 ³⁷ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

3 The mustard seed is considered the least of all seeds, Matthew 13:32;

Matthew 17:20 ²⁰ And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

II The Final Greatness of the Kingdom

1 When grown the mustard becomes greater than all herbs. Matthew 13:32:

Mark 4:32 ³² But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

2 In size and appearance it is much like a tree, Matthew 13:32;

Ezekiel 17:22-24 ²² Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent:

²³ In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.

²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

3 It affords blessing in its branches to the fowls, Matthew 13:32;

Genesis 12:3 ³ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Isaiah 2:2-4 ² And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

³ And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

III The Development of the Invisible Kingdom

1 Facts concerning the Kingdom of Heaven are like the parable of the leaven, Matthew 13:33

2 A woman took and hid the leaven in three measures of meal, Matthew 13:33:

Luke 17:20-21 ²⁰ And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

²¹ Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the

kingdom of God is within you.

3 The purpose of the leaven is to penetrate the whole quantity of meal. Matthew 13:33;

Matthew 4:23 ²³ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Matthew 24:14 ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

NOTES:

Jesus, in the course of declaring these wonderful parables, referred to "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). And step by step, at least some of these "mysteries" are being unfolded in the parables He gave. In the parable of the Sower we found that as His "words" are sown they must be received, for "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). And thus is the Kingdom planted in the heart of the individual. In the parable of the Wheat and Tares He taught that as His Words of Life grow in the heart, so are "the children of the kingdom" sown in the earth.

In the parables quoted above, *Jesus* dealt with the individuals constituting the subjects of that wonderful Kingdom. But now in the two parables before us He deals with the Kingdom as a whole. For the Kingdom of Heaven is far more than just a mystery in the heart. These beginnings may seem small and insignificant to some persons, and so they are, as compared with what is coming to pass; for Jesus teaches us that these "small beginnings" shall grow and grow, like the tiny grain of mustard seed, and some day this Kingdom shall fill all the earth (**Daniel 2:35-44** ³⁵ Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. ³⁶ This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. ³⁷ Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. ³⁸ And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. ³⁹ And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. ⁴¹ And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. ⁴³ And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. ⁴⁴ And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever).

The Grain of Mustard Seed

A grain of mustard seed is round and very small, and was proverbially considered in olden times the smallest of all seeds. At one time Jesus in conversation with His disciples, said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:20). He did not say, "As a grain of sand," for sand has no life in it: but a grain of mustard seed, as small as it is, has that wonderful secret of life, and it can grow. And the faith of all

true Christians is a living faith, and with the hearing of the Word it grows (**Romans 10:17** ¹⁷ So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God).

Well, Jesus very appropriately chose this tiny seed to typify the small beginnings of the Kingdom, for the Kingdom of Heaven is one realm which teems with life; its King is the "resurrection, and the life," and it can grow. A "man" took and sowed this seed in his "field." Since the Sower in the two preceding parables was the Son of man, we may say that He is also the Sower in this parable, and His "field" is likewise the world. And Jesus' work of establishing the Kingdom of Heaven began on earth.

In the beginning of the Gospel Dispensation John the Baptist, the forerunner of the King, appeared on the scene; and his trumpet note was, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Six months later Jesus entered upon His ministry, and He took up this same call to repentance; and throughout His entire ministry He preached "this gospel of the kingdom" The Kingdom of Heaven which He came to found was constantly in His teachings. It is the central theme of that great prayer which He taught His disciples, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." In His brief ministry the "grain of mustard seed" was sown The beginnings of the Kingdom were planted, and it has grown; for His apostles and disciples were commissioned and empowered to proclaim this same Gospel of the Kingdom. This stage of the Kingdom of Heaven, unobserved perhaps by the eye of man, may seem small, but Jesus has something more to tell us about this Kingdom.

The Greatest of All Herbs

Travelers who have visited the Holy Land tell us that the species of mustard to which no doubt Jesus referred is still growing luxuriantly in Palestine and attaining heights which make the plants appear more like trees than herbs. This unusual herb, beginning with a tiny seed and growing into a veritable tree, is the symbol which Jesus selected to typify the final greatness of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Old Testament prophets, inquiring into the mysteries of the promises of old, caught a vision of that glorious Kingdom and, enraptured at the sight the Spirit revealed, they prophesied of its greatness and sang of its blessings.

The Prophet Ezekiel, in writing of this Kingdom, was given a symbol remarkably like the parable we now are studying: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell" (Ezekiel 17:22 23).

Isaiah likened the Kingdom to a high mountain, towering above all other mountains: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall

rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Daniel when interpreting the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, likened the Kingdom to a stone: "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole, earth. . . And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:35, 44).

Zechariah tells us of the King who shall found and govern this Kingdom: "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9); while Isaiah beautifully describes the virtues of this King, and the order and increase of His government: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace_ Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

JESUS is that King. Soon He shall leave His mediatorial throne, and come back to earth again to establish His Millennial Kingdom. And then shall be fulfilled those prophecies of old. Then shall be answered that prayer of the ages: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." "For we know," says Paul, "that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:22, 23).

The curse which sin brought upon the earth has burdened all humanity, and no form of government that man has devised ever has, or ever will lift that curse_ Only when Jesus takes the throne of David and rules in righteousness, will the curse be lifted. Then will the desert blossom as the rose. When the "mustard tree" reaches its maturity, then will the birds of the air find refuge in its boughs, for at that time will the promise given Abraham be fulfilled: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

**The Kingdom is coming,
O tell ye the story,
God's banner exalted shall be!
The earth shall be full
Of His knowledge and glory,
As waters are covering the sea!**

The Leaven and the Meal

The Jews, at the time of Jesus' appearing among them, were looking for a coming Kingdom, for its greatness and glory

QUESTIONS

- 1 In what respect is a "grain of mustard seed" like the Kingdom of Heaven?
- 2 Who does the "man" who sowed this seed represent?
- 3 In what way is the growth of this mustard seed like the Kingdom of Heaven?
- 4 What do the "birds," lodging in the branches of the great herb represent? What promise to Abraham does this feature of the parable typify?
- 5 Where and in what way do the beginnings of this Kingdom take place?
- 6 What does the "mountain" in Isaiah 2:2-4 typify?
- 7 Name the prophets of the Old Testament who prophesied of this Kingdom.
- 8 What will be the eventual great triumph of this Kingdom?
- 9 In what way is the action of the "leaven" in the meal like what takes place in the establishing of the Kingdom?

were eloquently described and its establishment repeatedly promised in the Old Testament, as we have seen from the passages of Scripture quoted above. But the multitudes, as well as many of Jesus' own disciples, looked for a kingdom of earthly glory and power. They had little or no conception of the spiritual Kingdom which Jesus preached. That was all a mystery. "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation [outward show]: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20. 21).

And it is obvious from these words that Jesus was speaking of the initial stage of His Kingdom — this Gospel Dispensation, when the Kingdom, as we have already learned, is being established in the heart, and is not yet visible to the world. And this is the stage, we believe, of which the leaven in the meal is a type. The "leaven," in its leavening effect upon the three measures of meal, is like the leavening effect of the Gospel, not upon the world, but which is mysteriously and miraculously going on in the world, during this Dispensation of Grace. The woman "hid" this leaven in the meal. And thus are the "mysteries of the Kingdom" hidden from a Christ-rejecting world. But nevertheless "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," until the "whole" is leavened, "and then shall the end come."

God in His infinite wisdom has seen fit to choose this world, where iniquity abounds, as His "field" for bringing to pass that eventual and glorious triumph of His Kingdom, foretold by the prophets. And it is here that He is choosing and perfecting His subjects for this Kingdom. It is here that we "fight the good fight of faith." And as hopeless as this "fight" may appear to some, yet the Lord Jesus Christ brought to this world "this Gospel of the Kingdom," which He and His apostles preached, and by which He opened the door of Grace to every kindred, nation, and tongue. This Gospel has never lost its power. "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

**"The work that centuries might have done
Must crowd the hour of setting sun,
And through all lands, the saving Name
Ye must with fervent haste proclaim."**