As we continue with our series of messages on “The Parables of Jesus” I would like for you to please turn with me in your Bibles once again to the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

READ: Matthew 13:31, 32

PRAYER

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INTRODUCTION

When you read “The Parable of The Mustard Seed” several things immediately stand out.

The most obvious thing that stands out about this parable is how brief it is. Its just two verses long. But don’t let the “smallness” fool you. This little parable appears in three of the four gospels which tells us it is of great importance. (Matthew 13:31,32; Mark 4:30,31; Luke 13:18,19)

The second thing we notice is Jesus once again uses “a seed” as the object of this parable, just as He did in the two previous parables.

And the third thing we notice is that unlike the two previous parables, Jesus gives no explanation of this parable. He simply tells the parable and leaves it at that.

In our study of this PARABLE, I would like for us to consider three things.

Let’s begin with the “object” Jesus used in this parable.......
v. 31 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

v. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.

1. By now I’m sure you have noticed that tiny little “mustard” seed in the upper right hand corner of tonight’s Disciple Maker sheet. I wanted you to be able to visualize exactly what Jesus is talking about.

   The seed of a mustard plant is well known for its HOT flavor. I tasted some seeds and know that to be true.

   As a plant it ordinarily reaches a height of about 4 feet, but with proper maintenance, mustard bushes or trees can reach heights of 10 to 15 feet.

   In the fall of the year, its branches become very rigid and the plant often provides shelter for birds of many kinds.

2. It becomes very obvious when you read the Gospels that Jesus was very fond of this tiny little seed.

   In addition to using “the mustard seed” in this parable Jesus used it as an illustration in two other ways:

   In MATTHEW 17, He used it when His disciples could not cast the demon from a young boy. When the disciples asked Jesus, “Why couldn’t we drive it out.” Jesus replied:

   “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the
truth, if you have faith as small as “mustard seed” you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20)

And then in LUKE 17, Jesus used the same “mustard seed faith” to illustrate total forgiveness.

“If your brothers ins, rebuke him and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.

The apostles said to the LORD, “Increase our faith.” He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you. (Luke 17:3-6)

3. Why was Jesus so fond of this tiny little seed? I mean, if you were to lay a mustard seed alongside a bean seed, a corn seed, and a watermelon seed, the “mustard seed” would look like nothing more than a “speck of dust.”

Perhaps what attracted Jesus to this tiny little seed so much was its unbelievable potential. That mustard seed was evidence that God could bring something great out of something so insignificantly small.

That brings us to the second thing we want to consider, and that is.................

II. The Meaning of The Parable In Jesus’ Day

To understand the meaning of this parable in Jesus’ day, it helps to look at it in the context of the two previous parables Jesus told.
In both, “The Parable of The Sower” and “The Parable of The Wheat and Weeds” Jesus had revealed some discouraging truths.

- In “The Parable of The Sower” Jesus had revealed that while much “gospel seed” would be sown, only a minority of people would ever take it to heart and bear “fruit” for the Kingdom of heaven.

- And in “The Parable of The Wheat and Weeds” Jesus had revealed to His disciples that Satan would do everything he could to stop the growth of the kingdom by “sowing his weeds of false teachers” in the world.

After hearing those two parables, no doubt the disciples were discouraged thinking “If most people won’t even receive the gospel and Satan is going to do everything he can to stop the kingdom from growing” how will this “Kingdom” Jesus is talking about ever rise to greatness?

Sensing their discouragement, Jesus now tells His disciples this “Parable of The Mustard Seed” to lift their spirits and erase their doubts.

In this parable, Jesus is teaching His disciples that despite her “small” beginnings, the Kingdom of heaven would grow to great size.

(A) Consider the “small” beginnings of the KING, HIMSELF

Listen to Isaiah’s prophecy concerning JESUS.

Isaiah 11:1 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

And listen to Isaiah 53:2-3.....

He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. (now listen how much this next part sounds like “a mustard seed.”)
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.

Just like the “tiny mustard seed” Jesus had a “small” beginning.

- He was born in the little town of Bethlehem to a humble Jewish carpenter named Joseph and a teenage peasant girl named Mary.
- He grew up in the little Galilean town of Nazareth.
- For thirty years He lived in relative obscurity.

But then in the three years following His baptism by John in the Jordan River, Jesus’ life, His teachings, His miracles and His death, burial and resurrection left the most lasting impact of anyone who has ever set foot on this planet.

(B) Consider the “small” beginnings of the KINGDOM.

In Daniel 2:35, Daniel prophesied concerning the Kingdom, “But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

At the time of Jesus’ ascension, there was a total of 131 disciples living in Jerusalem, that includes the 11 remaining apostles and the 120 disciples who had not deserted Jesus after His crucifixion. One hundred and thirty one followers hardly sounds like a “kingdom” does it?

But consider what happened shortly after Jesus left this world.
In Acts 2 we learn that on the Day of Pentecost the Kingdom grew from 120 to 3,000 in a single day.

Just two chapters later in Acts 4:4, we learn the number had increased to 5,000.

Just two chapters later in Acts 6:7 we learn that the kingdom was no longer adding, it was multiplying very rapidly.

Then in Acts 9, we see “the kingdom,” “the Church” branching out (like the mustard plant) to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

And as we know, in time the Kingdom of heaven advanced to the GENTILE nations in the “uttermost parts of the world.”

Now there is a “key point” in this short parable that must not be overlooked and that is with regards to “the birds of the air” coming to perch in the branches of the mustard tree.

In the “Parable of The Sower” we learned “the birds” represented Satan and his agents who swept down to eat the seed that fell on the hardened path. (Matthew 13:19)

Likewise, “the birds of the air perching in the branches” of the mustard tree represents Satan and his agents.

Jesus was warning His disciples that as His kingdom grew larger it would become a “nesting place” for “counterfeit” versions of Christianity. Today there are many religious groups “nesting” under the umbrella of Christianity; groups such as: the Unitarians, the Christian Scientists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and a host of others.

Just as Jesus prophesied, many “birds of the air” have
built their nests in the mustard tree of the kingdom.

Well we have considered “The Mustard Seed” and “The Meaning of The Parable in Jesus’ Day.”

Finally, let’s consider ……………

III. The Meaning of The Parable Today

1. By way of practical application, I believe this “Parable of The Mustard Seed” teaches us a very important Biblical Principle and that is:

   “GOD specializes in turning little things into great things.”

2. In this Parable, God turned a tiny little seed into a great tree.

   In the fulfillment of this Parable, GOD turned a small handful of disciples into the glorious Church.

   GOD turned a little boy’s lunch of FIVE loaves and TWO fishes into enough food to feed 5,000 people.

   GOD turned Gideon’s small band of 300 soldiers into
victorious champions who defeated the Midianite army of thousands.

3. Time after time after time in the scriptures we see GOD take LITTLE things.........INSIGNIFICANT things........and seemingly WORTHLESS things........to accomplish GREAT THINGS.

4. We must never underestimate what GOD great things GOD can do through this Church.

Compared to a lot of other Churches, Christian Hope Church is a “mustard seed.” We don’t have a BIG membership. We don’t have a BIG attendance. We don’t have BIG programs. But that doesn’t mean GOD can’t do great things through this Church for the Kingdom of Heaven.

5. And we must never underestimate what great things GOD can do through us as INDIVIDUALS.

We think, “Well, I’m just one person. What can I do?” The answer is, “A lot!” if you and I have faith the size of a mustard seed.

6. You may think your “little” prayers, your “little” deeds of kindness, your “little” words of encouragement don’t matter. But they do! Those are your “mustard seeds” of faith! And in due time God will bring about a great harvest if you don’t give up!

CONCLUSION

I want to close with the words of an old hymn entitled: “Little Is Much.” These words “punctuate” what we have studied here tonight in “The Parable of The Mustard Seed.” Listen closely........

_In the harvest field now ripened  
There’s a work for all to do;  
Hark! the voice of God is calling  
To the harvest calling you._
Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There’s a crown—and you can win it,
If you go in Jesus’ Name.

In the mad rush of the broad way,
In the hurry and the strife,
Tell of Jesus’ love and mercy,
Give to them the Word of Life.

Does the place you’re called to labor
Seem too small and little known?
It is great if God is in it,
And He’ll not forget His own.

Yes little is much when God is in it!