

The Power and Influence of Christ's Kingdom, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 13:31–32

Code: 2301

INTRODUCTION

In Matthew 13, our Lord gave us a series of parables that teach about the Kingdom of heaven. Continuing in our study, let's read verses 31-33, where two more parables appear. The nature of the two parables in these verses requires that they be understood together: "Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; 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 of it. Another parable spoke He unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

Small things, ultimately, can have very large effects. All music--all symphonies, concertos, oratorios, hymns, and songs--comes from eight notes. All the profound words in the English language come from twenty- six letters. Lord Kelvin once did an experiment to demonstrate that small things can have extensive results. He suspended in his lab a large piece of steel weighing many pounds. He then proceeded to systematically throw pea-sized wads of paper at the steel. At first, the gentle taps had no effect at all. Eventually, however, the piece of steel was swaying back and forth because of the relentless tapping of the little pieces of paper. The cumulative effect of small things can have profound results. That is the lesson of the two parables in Matthew 13:31-33.

REVIEW

A. The Expectation

The disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Messiah means "anointed one." He was the Son of David, and the promised King who would set up the Kingdom. The disciples expected this Kingdom to come in glory and power, accompanied by cataclysmic events and the punishment of evildoers. They anticipated the music, the horses, the triumph, the wonder, and the blazing display of majesty and might that was to come when the Messiah established His Kingdom.

When things were not happening as the disciples expected, they began to wonder, "Was this the Messiah?" Even though Jesus continually assured the disciples that He was the Messiah, they still struggled with the issue. Even into the book of Acts, we see them still asking Jesus, "...Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac. 1:6b). It took them a long time to realize that the Kingdom would come later, because their expectations got in the way.

The disciples thought the Old Testament prophets had prophesied that when the Lord came, all of those who rejected God would receive the full fury of His judgment, and then the Kingdom would come. The disciples became confused because it seemed that those who rejected God kept increasing in number, and were becoming more violent and confrontive. Instead of Jesus talking about what He would do to them, He started talking about what they would do to Him. When He said, "They are going to kill Me," the disciples couldn't believe it. When Jesus said, "I must die," Peter said, "Lord, don't let this be so!" (Mt. 16:21-22). When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem just before His death, and people laid palm branches at His feet, crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," it seemed like that might be when Christ would bring the Kingdom (Mt. 21:8-9). The disciples were probably very excited with anticipation at that time, but when the excitement came to its peak, Jesus said,

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone..." (Jn. 12:24a). He started to talk about His death again.

The disciples were looking for a kingdom of glory, power, majesty, worldwide wonder, and where rejecting unbelievers were immediately devastated and destroyed. But it didn't come, and Jesus explains why in Matthew 13.

B. The Explanation

Jesus tells the disciples, "Before the Kingdom comes, there is a form of the Kingdom that exists now that you must understand." Jesus refers to this form of the Kingdom as the mystery form in Matthew 13:11. That means it was something that was not revealed in the Old Testament. Throughout the seven parables in Matthew 13, Jesus explains to them the mystery Kingdom that was to precede the millennial blaze of glory that they were anticipating. Let's look at the first aspect of Jesus' explanation...

1. In the First Parable

The first parable Jesus tells them is about four kinds of soil (hearts). Three of them do not receive the message of the King. That indicates that the mystery form of the Kingdom will include rejecters. We still have rejecters today. In fact, most of the world is like the hard soil that doesn't let the message in, the rocky soil that accepts it for a little while then falls away from it, or the weedy soil that eventually chokes it out because of the love of worldly things. The Lord says that in this form of the Kingdom, He will still be the King and sovereign over the earth, but He will also allow people to reject His message.

Knowing that there will be rejecters in the mystery form of the Kingdom, the immediate question that would come into the minds of the disciples would be, "What's going to happen to the blaspheming rejecters? What are we to do with them?" They were thinking that because Jesus was their King and they were His loyal subjects, they should destroy anybody in their society who was a revolutionary. The Lord answers that question...

2. In the Second Parable

In the parable of the wheat and the tares--the Kingdom citizens and the rejecters--Jesus says, "The wheat and the tares are going to grow together until the judgment." Jesus made it clear that we are not to be the executioners; the angels will take care of the rejecters at the judgment time. Our job is to be the wheat in the midst of the world so that we will influence the tares around us to become wheat. We are not to try to pull the tares out of the ground, or we're likely to kill some Christians in the process and overlook some non-Christians because we don't know the true condition of people's hearts. We are simply to evangelize, and let the tares and the wheat grow together. The disciples were probably thinking by now, "The Kingdom is going to be full of rejecters? That's going to be bad, because according to the parable of the wheat and the tares, evil is going to be everywhere because it was sown throughout the field. Because evil is so powerful and dominating in its influence, won't it choke out the life of the Kingdom? Isn't that going to strangle the power of Christ in the world?" Christ answers those questions...

3. In the Third and Fourth Parables

It is natural that the disciples would be overwhelmed by the thought of so many evil people in the world. They were thinking, "We are the Kingdom of God in the world. The odds are unbelievable. Aren't we going to be destroyed?" In response to that, Jesus teaches two more parables, and shows the disciples that the Kingdom will have a very small beginning, and in spite of the opposition, will ultimately influence the whole world.

The first two parables talk about the conflict. They talk about the antagonism of evil and good in the Kingdom--the right and the wrong fighting one another. But the next two parables talk about the victory of the good. The third parable speaks of a little mustard seed that will fill the earth, and the fourth parable speaks of a little piece of leaven that will permeate the whole loaf of bread. What started out very small will ultimately have a profound influence on everything. Jesus starts Matthew

13 with two parables that describe the nature of the Kingdom (believers and nonbelievers side by side) and goes on to two parables that describe the power of the Kingdom.

There is another way of looking at the first four parables. The first parable basically talks about the breadth of the Kingdom. The seed is sown in the field, and the field represents the world--that is the breadth of the Kingdom. The second parable talks about the length of the Kingdom. It will go on until the harvest. The third parable, which is about a mustard seed, talks about the height (or extent) of the Kingdom. The parable of the leaven talks about the depth of the Kingdom. It is hidden in the dough of the world but will eventually influence it. The Kingdom is described in those four parables in its breadth, length, height, and depth. The Lord describes it in every dimension. After that, the next two parables talk about the appropriation of the Kingdom in the life of an individual. There is a marvelous progression of thought in the parables.

The Lord does not explain the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven to us, but He did give us somebody to explain them to us. That somebody is the Holy Spirit. We know He explained the parables to the disciples, because the Bible tells us He explained all of the parables to them. We have the resident Holy Spirit, who helps us to understand the mind of God as revealed in the Word of God, and therefore enables us to understand the parables along with what we know about God's plans.

Let's look now at the parable of the mustard seed, which describes...

I. THE EXTERNAL POWER OF THE KINGDOM (vv. 31-32)

A. The Instruction

1. The Parable Introduced (v. 31)

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

This parable is about a farmer who plants a crop of mustard. Mustard was used in those days for many things. It was mainly used for oil, medicinal purposes, and flavoring. Today, mustard seed is a valuable commodity. The producers of Kodak film raise mustard seed to feed to the animals that they raise. There is a substance produced in animal bones which, when put together with the silver in the film, will react better with the silver if the animal was fed mustard seed. A number of interesting tests were done that proved that film produced from animals that had been fed mustard seed was better than other films. Mustard seed is valuable, and is still raised as a crop today.

2. The Potential Illustrated (v. 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 of it."

The particular mustard seed being spoken of here, when it grows, becomes a bush or shrub.

Normally it grows to a height of seven or eight feet, which is a good-sized garden plant. Mustard is a large herb (Gk. *lachanon*, which is in the herb family). Occasionally it will grow to a height of twelve to fifteen feet. There are many eyewitnesses that have testified of the fact that mustard plants grow as high as fifteen feet. One writer said that they can grow higher than a person on a horse, and another writer said that a horse and its rider could ride under the branches of some mustard bushes. In this parable, the Lord is emphasizing that there is no connection between the smallness of a seed and the largeness of the end result. The small mustard seed can become a very large bush. You can plant a barley seed and get a barley plant of a fairly good size. You can plant a seed of wheat or corn and get a good-sized plant. But if you plant a mustard seed, you can get a bush big enough to ride a horse under! That points out the fact that this parable is not an exaggeration. None of the parables are exaggerations; they are realities that were known of by the people Jesus was speaking to.

a. The Dispute About the Small Beginning In verse 32, Jesus says that the mustard seed "is the least of all seeds." That statement has stirred much controversy. Critics who want to attack the Bible pounce on that statement. They say, "That proves the Bible is not inerrant, because a wild orchid

seed is smaller than a mustard seed! Therefore, Jesus didn't know what was truly the smallest seed. If He didn't know that, then He is not God. Or, He simply accommodated the parable to the knowledge of the people--He accommodated their ignorance that the mustard seed wasn't in fact the smallest seed." When Bible critics find something they believe to be false in the Bible, and say it was written only to accommodate to what people at that time thought was true, they call it biblical or cultural accommodation. The danger with that is, who can say when something was true and something was false? The critics say, "Jesus was wrong. He was wrong either because He was ignorant of the truth, or because He went along with the ignorance of the people. Either way, He was still wrong." You say, "What do you think, John?" I think Jesus was right, and I think we can prove it, too. The words "grain" in verse 31 and "seeds" in verse 32 are the Greek word "sperma." The usage of the word "seeds" here refers to seeds sown in an agricultural manner. It refers to intentionally planted seeds. The word "herbs" in verse 32 (Gk. lachanon) refers to garden vegetables that are grown specifically for the purpose of being eaten. The same word is used in Romans 14:2 to mean the same thing. It refers to that which is planted as a crop to be eaten, as opposed to something that grows wild. The seed being referred to in the parable, then, is a seed that was sown agriculturally to produce something edible. Of all the seeds that were sown at that time in the East, and all the seeds that are sown today to produce edible products, the mustard seed was and still is the smallest. In the context Jesus spoke in, what He said was absolutely correct. This was recently affirmed by Dr. A. L. Shinnars, the director of the herbarium at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. That herbarium is the largest in the southwest, with 318 thousand botanical specimens from all over the world. Dr. Shinnars is also a regular lecturer at the Smithsonian Institute. He said, "...the mustard seed would indeed have been the smallest of those likely to have been noticed by the people at the time of Christ. The principal field crops (such as barley, wheat, lentils, beans) have much larger seeds as do...other plants which might have been present as weeds.... There are various weeds and wild flowers belonging to the mustard, amaranth, pigweed, and chickweed families with seeds as small or smaller than mustard itself, but they would not have been particularly known or noticed by the inhabitants." Those weeds and wild flowers were not planted as a crop. Isn't it wonderful that when Jesus talked about the mustard seed, He was right? If I can trust Him with facts about the mustard seed, then I can trust Him with facts about eternity. Dr. Shinnars also said, "The only modern crop plant of importance with smaller seeds than mustard is tobacco, but this plant is of American origin and was not grown in the Old World until the sixteenth century and later." When Jesus said that the mustard seed was the smallest seed sown by man, He was right.

b. The Dispute About the End Result

In verse 32, Jesus says that the mustard seed, "when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree." Bible critics are quick to say, "A mustard plant does not become a tree!" However, Jesus was not talking about a big timber tree here; He was talking about a shrub so large that it had the properties of a tree. Verse 32 identifies one property of a tree that the mustard bush had: "...the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it." In other words, birds can live in a mustard bush. The branches are large, like those of a tree. The word "lodge" in verse 32, in the Greek, means "to make a home there." The birds could build a nest and stay. There aren't very many bushes that are strong enough to hold a bird's nest. The mustard bush can grow very large, and botanists say that at a certain time of the year, the branches become rigid and birds build their nests in them. The details of the parable are very accurate! We must keep in mind that Jesus was speaking proverbially in the parable. He wasn't trying to give a lesson on botany. Because a mustard seed was the smallest seed a Jewish person ever sowed, mustard seeds became proverbial for something small. One proverbial saying that we have today is, "That person is as wise as an owl." By that we don't mean that the smartest thing in the world is an owl. It's just a proverbial saying that is commonly used. In the same way, Jesus used something the Jewish people spoke of proverbially to illustrate His point. He also chose a proverb that was accurate. In using the mustard seed to illustrate a point, the Jewish people spoke of such things as a drop of blood as small as a mustard seed, a tiny

breach of the Mosaic Law being a defilement the size of a mustard seed, or a blemish or a spot on an animal the size of a mustard seed. Today, the Arabs still talk about faith weighing the amount of a mustard seed. Our Lord even used that proverb in Matthew 17:20, when He said, "...If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Move...and it shall move...." Jesus, in His parable about the mustard seed, used a proverb used by the Jewish people. In His marvelous, infinite wisdom, He used a proverb that was accurate. Now that we understand what the parable says, let's find out what it means.

B. The Interpretation

1. The Commencement

a. Explained The Kingdom will start small. Can you imagine how important it was to tell the disciples that? They were just a little group of men smothered by oppression, rejection, and blasphemy. They thought, "There are just a handful of us against the whole world." Jesus says, "That's okay. That's the plan. The Kingdom will start out small." In fact, it was so small that they didn't even recognize it was there. In Acts 1:6, the disciples asked Jesus, "...Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" In other words, "Where is the Kingdom?" Just as the parable of the mustard seed says, the Kingdom at that time was so small that it was imperceptible. Many modern theologians don't see it in the Gospel of Matthew either. Luke 17:20 says, "And when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come [the Pharisees were asking Him when He was going to bring the Kingdom], He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." In other words, "You can't see the Kingdom of God--not in this form." In verse 21 He goes on to say, "Neither shall they say, Lo here [it is]! Or, lo there [it is]! For, behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." The Kingdom is already here, but it's starting out as a very small seed. Just like the little mustard seed has the potential to become a massive bush, so does the small beginning of the Kingdom have the potential for a Kingdom that extends to the ends of the earth.

b. Exemplified Think of the circumstances of Jesus' birth: He was born in a manger in a stable, with smelly animals, and a stable floor covered with manure. He was born in obscurity in a country that was nothing but an infant wriggling in the arms of imperial Rome. Israel was but two districts--Judea and Galilee. They were just dots on the earth, along with Samaria, another small region. Jesus also spent thirty years of His life among uncouth, uncultured, and uneducated people in a town called Nazareth. Think of the disciples: All of them put together wouldn't add up to a mustard seed. They were so small, inadequate, inconsequential, unqualified, fearful, faithless, and weak. Yet, that was the Kingdom that was planted. In the breast of that little infant in the manger was eternal life that would burst forth into an eternal Kingdom. That is a marvelous truth because it is not seen in the Old Testament. That is a mystery revealed. The Kingdom started with just the little group of disciples. By the time Jesus ascended back into heaven in Acts 1:9, there were only about 120 believers (Ac. 1:15). There are many more now, and by the time the harvest time comes, the Kingdom will cover the entire globe.

2. The Culmination

The Kingdom started out very small, and it will be very large in the end. That is the basic outline of the parable. If we were to read what the Old Testament prophets saw regarding the Kingdom, we would find out that its extent will be staggering.

a. Psalm 72:8-11 "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve Him." That's the extent of the Kingdom. That's how big the bush will become. All of that will have its origin from a little seed--that is what the Lord wants us to understand. The Kingdom will have great impact, and all from a small beginning.

b. Isaiah 54:2-3a "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break

forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the nations..."The Messiah's Kingdom shall extend from shore to shore, and from one end of the globe to the other. Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, and Zechariah all prophesied about the extent of Jesus' Kingdom. There are many Scriptures in the Bible that say that the Kingdom of God will stretch from sea to sea, from land to land, and cover the whole globe. Ultimately the millennial Kingdom will come, and Christ will reign over the whole earth. In Revelation 11:15 we read, "...The kingdoms of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."The parables in Matthew 13 take us into the Millennium--into the fullness of the ultimate growth of the Kingdom. No matter how insignificant it appeared and how despised it was, Christ's rule started out small. Those who hated Him probably thought that after He was killed, they were freed of Him. But the Kingdom will continue to grow, and its consummation will be amazingly out of proportion to its beginning, much like the contrast between a mustard bush and its seed. This parable is meant to encourage us. It is easy for us to get discouraged sometimes because we feel like no matter how hard we try, we always seem to be crushed and crowded out by the evil world around us. If we feel that way, can you imagine how the disciples felt? However, there are many believers all over the world today, and there are still many people coming to Christ. In some countries there are thousands of people coming to Christ every day. The Kingdom is growing. But even then, we sometimes feel like the battle is intense and remember that we're still in the minority. Imagine how the disciples felt: Their leader was blasphemed in their presence, and they experienced a sense of hopelessness, defeat, bewilderment, and discouragement. At first, when John the Baptist started preaching, people were flocking out to see him, and everything was exciting. He was saying of Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30). Everyone was becoming excited because they thought the Kingdom was about to be established. Jesus attracted crowds, did miracles and healings, multiplied food, and walked on water. It seemed like the Kingdom was coming. But then things began to change: There began to be a mounting hatred and bitterness toward Jesus. People began to reject Him. So to assure the disciples that everything was okay, He told them that the Kingdom was going to start out small, but it was going to become big. They were going to win in the end. The Kingdom was going to stretch across the face of the earth and go on into eternity.

3. The Custodianship

The planted mustard seed, according to the parable, became a tree. The branches were big enough for birds to build their nests on. The question comes up, "What do the birds represent?" Some people think they represent demons and evil. The reason they think that is because the birds in the parable of the soils represented Satan snatching the Word away from people. However, birds don't always represent Satan or evil. In the parable of the mustard seed, they are simply illustrative.

The presence of birds in the mustard plant means that it has large branches. There were other reasons that birds chose to live in a mustard tree: The seed in the tree are a source of food for the birds (the mother bird won't have to go out hunting for food all the time). The tree also provides shade, protection, and security.

a. Earth's Kingdoms Trees often illustrated kingdoms in the Old Testament, too: 1) The Babylonian Kingdom In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has an interesting dream. A description of the dream starts in verse 10: "Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed: I saw and, behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height of it was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and its height reached unto heaven, and the sight of it to the end of all the earth. Its leaves were fair, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all; the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heavens dwelt in its boughs, and all flesh was fed from it" (vv. 10-12). Daniel, interpreting the dream for Nebuchadnezzar, said this: "The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight of it to all the earth, whose leaves were fair, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heavens had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become

strong; for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth" (vv. 20-22). Daniel was saying that the Babylonian Empire had become like a tree, and all of the nations of the world were finding their comfort, security, and food in that tree. Babylon brought culture, education, architecture, prosperity, and a sense of peace to the world. There were many nations (birds) lodging in the tree of the Babylonian Empire. 2) The Assyrian Kingdom The Assyrian Empire is described in Ezekiel 31:3-6 as a tree: "Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and its top was among the thick boughs. The waters made it great; the deep set it up on high with its rivers running round about its plants, and sent out its little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore, its height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when it shot forth. All the fowls of the heavens made their nests in its boughs, and under its branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under its shadow dwelt all great nations." Little nations, which need protection, provisions, and security, will often shelter themselves in the branches of great, dominant world powers. For example, the United States has traditionally and historically been a great tree in which many other nations have found shelter. The United States, for example, has provided foreign aid and education to other nations. b. Christ's Kingdom Relating that to what our Lord is saying in Matthew 13, the Kingdom of Christ (the mustard bush) is going to grow so big that the nations find their shelter and protection in it. The birds in the mustard bush are not necessarily a part of the Kingdom; they just benefit by its presence on earth in the same way that non-Babylonian nations benefited from the presence of the Babylonian Empire. When we talk about the Kingdom, sometimes we are specifically referring to the true saints, and other times we are referring to God's sovereign rulership over everything. In the parable of the mustard seed, Christ is referring to God's sovereign rule over all the earth. Christ is saying, then, that wherever Christianity flourishes, the people who climb in the branches prosper, even though they don't know Christ. America is what it is today because of its Christian heritage. There are many birds in its bush. They're not Christians, but they still receive the benefits. The dignity of life in America, the jurisprudence system, the law, the sense of right and wrong, education, free enterprise, the dignity of women, and the caring of children all rise out of Christian truth. Reform movements throughout history have had their roots in biblical truth. Wherever the Kingdom's influence is felt, there is an environment of protection for those who aren't even in the Kingdom.

Can an Unbeliever Benefit from God's Blessings?

First Corinthians 7:14 is in microcosm what Matthew 13:32 teaches. Paul says that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever wants to remain married to the believer, to let him stay because the unbeliever is sanctified in the presence of the believer. An unbeliever married to a believer benefits just by being with somebody receiving the blessings of God. The unbeliever, then, is sheltered by the tree of the believer.

The Kingdom of heaven on earth is the same thing, only on a much larger scale. The people who find lodging within that Kingdom are the most blessed people in terms of human life.

If you contrast some part of western culture under the influence of Christianity as opposed, for example, to being in India or an aboriginal part of the world where Christianity has never been, then you can understand what Christ is saying. There will be many who will find lodging in the Kingdom's branches.

The Lord is teaching us, then, that in spite of the three bad soils, and in spite of the darnels, the Christians are going to win. The Kingdom is going to continue to grow. That's the promise the Lord makes in the parable. Those of us who are Christians are not just a small group of people waiting to be defeated by the world; we're a part of a growing Kingdom, and we're on the winning side!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Describe the experiment Lord Kelvin did in his lab. What did the experiment prove?
2. After Jesus told the parable of the wheat and the tares, what were the disciples probably thinking? In response to that concern, what did Jesus show the disciples in the third and fourth parables?
3. The Kingdom of heaven is described in the first four parables in Matthew 13 in its _____, _____, _____, and _____.
4. What was mustard used for in the time of Christ?
5. To what height do mustard bushes normally grow? How high have some eyewitnesses seen them grow?
6. What is the Lord emphasizing in the parable of the mustard seed? What does the fact that mustard bushes can become large tell us about the parable?
7. Jesus said in Matthew 13:32 that the mustard seed "is the least of all seeds." What is the response of Bible critics to this statement? How could you respond to their criticism on that point?
8. What does the usage of the word seed in the parable refer to? What does the word "herbs" in verse 32 refer to?
9. Jesus said that the mustard seed, "when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree" (Mt. 13:32). What is the response of Bible critics to this statement? What did Jesus mean when He called the mustard bush a tree?
10. What is the significance of the word "lodge" in Matthew 13:32? What does that tell us about the branches of the mustard bush?
11. When Jesus taught the parable, He wasn't trying to give a lesson on botany. He was speaking _____.
12. What are some examples of the ways the Jewish people used the smallness of the mustard seed to illustrate a point?
13. How did the Kingdom of God start out? Was the Kingdom on earth during the life of Christ? Use Scripture to support your answer.
14. What fact about the Kingdom is revealed to us in Psalm 72:8-11 and Isaiah 54:2-3a?
15. What is the parable of the mustard seed meant to do for us? How does it accomplish that?
16. What mistake do people commonly make about the birds in the parable of the mustard seed? Why do they make that mistake? What do the birds illustrate in the parable?
17. What two kingdoms were symbolized as trees in the Old Testament? What benefits did the nations under the Babylonian Empire experience as a result of being under Babylonian influence?
18. Are all the birds that lodge in the mustard bush a part of the Kingdom? Explain.
19. Why is America what it is today? What are some of the benefits in America today that came from biblical roots?
20. Explain one way an unbeliever can benefit from God's blessings (1 Cor. 7:14). In terms of human life, what is true about the people who find lodging within the current Kingdom on earth?
21. What promise does the Lord make to Christians in the parable?

Pondering the Principles

1. After Jesus told the disciples the first two parables in Matthew 13, they were feeling overwhelmed by that fact that there would be so many evil people in the world during the mystery form of the Kingdom. Have you ever felt powerless and defeated in the midst of all the evil going on around you? Read John 16:33. Jesus said this to comfort the disciples after He told them He would be leaving them to return to heaven, and that they would face persecution. In the last part of the verse, what attitude did Jesus tell the disciples to have? Why? In the beginning of John 16:33, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace...." Before the events of the crucifixion occurred, Jesus told His disciples what would happen, so their hearts would not be troubled. Read John 14:27. What did Jesus promise the disciples? What command did Jesus state at the end of the verse? Philippians 4:6-7 says that we have this same peace. Is your heart troubled by

the tribulation you face in the world? Write out the above three verses on a small card, and put the card in a place where you can look at it frequently. Whenever you look at it, ask God to help you remember the peace that Christ has already promised you!

2. Christ's Kingdom is on earth now in the hearts of those who have received Him as their Lord. In the parable of the mustard seed, Christ told the disciples that this Kingdom was going to become large and spread all over the earth. What evidence can you see of the growth of Christ's Kingdom in the area you live? In what laws can you see the Bible reflected? What activities do you know about that are promoting the gospel in foreign countries? Does thinking about those things help you to get a much broader perspective of the size of Christ's Kingdom on earth? Make an effort to keep up with what God is doing in your own community and the different countries of the world. Doing that will help you to remember that Christ's Kingdom is still growing, as the parable of the mustard seed said it would. Knowing that Christ's Kingdom is growing as Christ promised can be a true encouragement when you feel crushed by the world around you.

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