

## Daily Bible Study

### *“The Mustard Seed”*

*Mark 4:30-34*

*March 14-20, 2010*

**THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY** – Continuing on this week we come and take as our text, **Mark 4:30-34**. Last time we looked at The Parable of The Growing Seed or The Parable of The Seed Growing in Secret and now we come to a parable which speaks a similar theme, namely that of the growth of The Kingdom of God. The title given by many throughout history to our text is simply The Parable of The Mustard Seed as Jesus uses The Mustard Seed by way of illustration and comparison. We will notice that Jesus is continuing with the subject of the growth of the Gospel, its success if you will both in the individual life as well as in the world as a whole. If you remember back The Parable of The Soils (**Mark 4:1-20**) emphasized the responsibility of the hearer, the heart, *the ground* on which the *seed* is cast. Jesus even called the hearers to *listen* and *hear* as He spoke that parable (**Mark 4:3, 9**). As we moved to the Parable of The Secret Growing Seed (**Mark 4:26-29**) we saw an emphasis on God’s work, the work of The Holy Spirit , Divine Sovereignty in the matter of the growth of the seed. The Parable of The Mustard Seed helps tie this entire theme together as well as broadens the picture before us of God’s Kingdom in its growth and spread. After Jesus tells this parable in **verses 30-32**, Mark sums up this portion of His Gospel record by speaking about Jesus and His use of parables in communicating to His disciples. Let’s begin our look at the text. **Mark 4:30-31** “*Then He said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth;”* Jesus starts this portion with a question, a common method of teaching in His day and He sharpens the attention of His hearers on the matter at hand. Jesus is not at a loss as to what to say next so He figures He will just tell another story; rather, He now by way of illustration is going to further help His disciples understand what *the kingdom of God* can be compared to and how this seeming small and tiny truth they are to preach and proclaim will blossom and flourish and take hold in the world as God desires. Much has been made and said about Jesus words that *the mustard seed* was *smaller than all the seeds on earth*. The mustard seed is not in fact the smallest seed known to man but we must remember to listen to this parable in the context in which it is being told. This statement of our Lord would be understood by all who were listening to Him. The Mustard Seed, (of the black mustard plant) was the smallest of the seeds sown in the garden and used in the farming of that day. Luke helps us see that Jesus in context is speaking of garden plants (**Luke 13:19**).

The Word Applied: *Are you working on being an attentive listener to God’s Word? How so?*

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, help me to confess sin daily and come before Your Word to listen.*

**TUESDAY** – **Mark 4:31-32** “*It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.*” We spoke yesterday of Jesus speaking to the size of the mustard seed in its beginning, as it is planted in the garden. It was the smallest of seeds and yet it grows into a very large tree like shrub which reaches heights and size not known to any other garden plants; and all from a tiny seed, a very small beginning. Christ gives details; it has *large branches*, and they are so large that Jesus said *the birds of the air may nest under its shade*. Jesus is not merely telling these people information about garden plants which they already knew; but instead He is helping them see that the *kingdom of God*, possibly seen in their eyes as small, local, insignificant and having very “humble” beginnings, will have tremendous growth and influence reaching out globally. In these days that Christ was speaking this parable, *the kingdom of God* was represented on earth by a very small band of genuine disciples and followers. These were truly humble beginnings for men who would earn a reputation as those who *turned the world upside down* (**Acts 17:6**). Jesus always spoke to the small number of true and genuine believers. He called His men *little flock*, labeling them as His flock of helpless and defenseless sheep that were in need of a Great Shepherd yet He said *it is Your Fathers good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (**Luke 12:32**). It is no wonder they needed to be encouraged, their very Shepherd and leader was despised and rejected of men (**Isaiah 53:3**). In spite of the seeming insignificance and even opposition to the message of the kingdom, God’s kingdom would nevertheless grow and His *little flock* would grow to a great multitude that *no one could number* (**Revelation 7:9**). As Daniel prophesied in time past, *the stone cut without hands*, Jesus Christ who personifies the *kingdom of God* with His salvation, rule and reign *became a great mountain and filled the whole earth* (**Daniel 2:34-35**). We understand both in Daniels prophecy and our Lord’s parable that there is progression of this kingdom rule seen. The kingdom was inaugurated in Jesus first advent and will be consummated in its fullness at His second advent as the eternal state will begin and go on forever and ever. Our parable is teaching that comparatively and similarly to this growing and expanding mustard plant, the *kingdom of God* is established and will expand.

*The Word Applied: Take heart Beloved that if you are in Christ Jesus, you are under the care of the Great Shepherd and are part of the Kingdom which will have no end (Luke 1:33).*

*Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You that it was Your good pleasure to bring me to faith in Christ for Your glory. Help me to live as an obedient son of the kingdom each and every day.*

**WEDNESDAY** – **Mark 4:32** “...but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.” We read that this plant grows to such an extent that the birds of the air may nest under its shade. We are told in **Mathew 13:32** that the birds actually come and nest in its branches. There are a few differing thoughts as to the birds mentioned by our Lord here in the text. Some see the birds as the enemy, Satan, demons, false converts, as the point to the immediate context where Jesus spoke of the birds (Satan) coming and snatching and devouring the seed from the wayside soil (heart)

**(Mark 4:4, 15).** Although Jesus mentioned the enemy and His work and compared him to a bird, this is not most likely what is in view here. Remember we are seeing that Jesus is speaking to the massive globally spreading scope of the kingdom of God. Most likely, He draws on the prophet Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 17:23**) where we read that birds here are taking refuge in the Messiah and His Kingdom. The point in Ezekiel and in Mark is that the birds (symbolizing the Gentile nations) take refuge in The Messiah Jesus Christ and share in the God's covenant blessings. There is shade from the heat of the sun and there is rest from the burdens of the soul in Jesus Christ to ALL people who come to Him in faith, repenting and believing. Read **Matthew 11:28-30, Romans 1:16, 1 Timothy 2:1-7.**

*The Word Applied: Meditate on and thank God today for His amazing grace towards you. Whether you are an ethnic Israeli or a Gentile, in Christ you're blessed to find shade and rest in Jesus.*

*Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for such grace to such an undeserving "bird" as I.*

**THURSDAY** – Let's stop and review or sum up some of the thoughts we have seen so far in our text. **Mark 4:30-32**, *"Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."* By way of summary, let me list a few quotes taken from some patristic (pertaining to the early church fathers) writings and sermons. Understand these are not God's inspired Word but do give us some interesting and helpful insights. *"From the tiny mustard seed, which resists infection and adversity, comes the magnificent tree of the boundless, worldwide community of faith offering its branches to the whole world"* (Clement of Alexandria). *"This great tree is known by its extension into the whole world and is not adequately embodied by an inwardly turned or detached or separated branch"* (Augustine). *"The mystery of the Word is gradually revealed to us analogically by grace through parables, not by simple analysis of the literal words"* (Origen). Finally, this quote from Tertullian leads up to and brings us to the point made by Mark in the last portion of our text. *"In all things essential Jesus made His identity sufficiently clear to those who were called to proclaim His coming"* (Tertullian). The text of **Mark 4:33-34** reads, *"And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples."* We see that here Mark refers again to a topic He has addressed before in His Gospel as He has recorded Jesus desire and reasons for speaking in parables. We find that Mark contains just a brief chapter of a sample of Jesus parables. He is quick to inform us however, that *with many such parables Jesus spoke the word to them as they were able to bear it.* In all of the Gospel records we find some 39 Parables of Jesus but in keeping with his quick upbeat style Mark hits only on a few and then moves on. Jesus told many parables which contain immense volumes of eternal truth. Interesting is the fact that only those graciously given ears to hear were and are able to comprehend what Jesus was saying in them.

*The Word Applied:* Does the Word of God make sense to you? Do you “see” what God’s Word is saying to You through the power of The Holy Spirit? How do you know that to be the case?

*Suggestion for Prayer:* Father, thank You for ears to hear as well as power and desire to obey You. May I never take for granted Your marvelous grace & gift of The Holy Spirit to teach me.

**FRIDAY & SATURDAY – Mark 4:33-34** “And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” An interesting phrase is found in this portion; namely, *He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it*. A few things could possibly be in view here. First, Jesus condescended to their finite minds weakness, and took the simplest comparative illustrations and taught them eternal truth dressed in obvious, known, and understood everyday things. Or, Jesus spoke the word to them in parables, “*as they were able to hear it*”, which we know to the masses was without understanding. They were able to hear in such a manner that they did not hear and understand. Some feel this meaning to be true in that it points to the fact that if they (the mass crowds) fully understood what He was saying, in their depraved, wicked, selfish, proud, sinful state they would have “flipped out” as the vernacular would say and at once rose up against Christ and attempted to destroy and kill Him. The most important “reason” He spoke in parables is the reason that God gives us black and white in **Matthew 13:34-35**. Boiled down it is “*that the Scripture be fulfilled...*” God fulfills His Word and He had prophesied He would speak in Parables for His own reasons; it was His choice to do so and in parables to conceal truth according to His ever wise sovereign providence. But Jesus does not conceal the truth from *His disciples*. They, through the enabling power of God are able to see, hear, and comprehend. Again, hear from Tertullian as he summarizes the thoughts of this portion of our text concerning God making clear and proclaiming the way and the person to hear and believe in order to know Him. Also he comments on the grace shown to those of us who He has entrusted to proclaim this kingdom message: “*Christ Jesus our Lord clearly declared Himself as to who He was while He lived on earth...Who then of sound mind can possibly suppose that those whom the Lord ordained to be leaders and teachers were ignorant of anything essential to salvation? Who could suppose that He who kept them, as He did, so close to Himself in their daily attentiveness, in their discipline, in their companionship, to whom, when they were alone, He used to expound all things which were obscure, telling them that ‘to them it was given to know the mysteries’, which it was not permitted the people to understand—now would He leave them ignorant?*” (Tertullian-Prescription Against Heresies)

*The Word Applied:* Examine your attitude and obedience toward what you hear from Sacred Scripture. How do you receive the Word of God when it points out your sin? Are you convicted of your sin and what do you do about it? What should you do?

*Suggestion for Prayer:* Father, help me genuinely confess my sin to You & please cleanse me.