

This is a portion of a larger book. In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis may have been added, and some sentences realigned.

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## Christ's Object Lessons (The parables)

Chap. 5

“Like a Grain of Mustard Seed”

In the multitude that listened to Christ's teaching there were many Pharisees. These noted contemptuously how *few of His hearers acknowledged Him as the Messiah*. And they questioned with themselves how this unpretending teacher could exalt Israel to universal dominion. Without riches, power, or honor, how was He to establish the new kingdom?

Christ read their thoughts and answered them:

“Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?” In earthly governments there was nothing that could serve for a similitude. No civil society could afford Him a symbol.

The Jews looked for the kingdom of God to be established in the same way as the kingdoms of the world. To promote righteousness they resorted to external measures. They devised methods and plans. But Christ implants a principle. By implanting truth and righteousness, He counterworks error and sin.

As Jesus spoke this parable, the mustard plant could be seen far and near, lifting itself above the grass and grain, and waving its branches lightly in the air. Birds flitted from twig to twig, and sang amid the leafy foliage. Yet the seed from which sprang this giant plant was among the least of all seeds. At first it sent up a tender shoot, but it was of strong vitality, and grew and flourished until it reached its present great size. So the kingdom of Christ in its beginning seemed humble and insignificant. Compared with earthly kingdoms it appeared to be the least of all. By the rulers of this world Christ's claim to be a king was ridiculed. Yet in the mighty truths committed to His followers the kingdom of the gospel possessed a divine life. And how rapid was its growth, how widespread its influence! When Christ spoke this parable, there were only a few Galilean peasants to represent the new kingdom.

Their poverty, the fewness of their numbers, were urged over and over again as a reason why men should not connect themselves with these simple-

minded fishermen who followed Jesus. But the mustard seed was to grow and spread forth its branches throughout the world. When the earthly kingdoms whose glory then filled the hearts of men should perish, the kingdom of Christ would remain, a mighty and far-reaching power.

So the work of grace in the heart is small in its beginning. A word is spoken, a ray of light is shed into the soul, an influence is exerted that is the beginning of the new life; and who can measure its results?

Not only is the growth of Christ's kingdom illustrated by the parable of the mustard seed, but in every stage of its growth the experience represented in the parable is repeated. For His church in every generation God has a special truth and a special work. The truth that is hid from the worldly wise and prudent is revealed to the child-like and humble.

It calls for self-sacrifice.

It has battles to fight and victories to win. At the outset its advocates are few. By the great men of the world and by a world-conforming church, they are opposed and despised. See John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, standing alone to rebuke the pride and formalism of the Jewish nation. See the first bearers of the gospel into Europe. How obscure, how hopeless, seemed the mission of Paul and Silas, the two tentmakers, as they with their companions took ship at Troas for Philippi. See "Paul the aged," in chains, preaching Christ in the stronghold of the Caesars. See the little communities of slaves and peasants in conflict with the heathenism of imperial Rome. See Martin Luther withstanding that mighty church which is the masterpiece of the world's wisdom. See him holding fast God's word against emperor and pope, declaring, "Here I take my stand; I can not do otherwise. God be my help." See John Wesley preaching Christ and His righteousness in the midst of formalism, sensualism, and infidelity.

See one burdened with the woes of the heathen world, pleading for the privilege of carrying to them Christ's message of love. Hear the response of ecclesiasticism: "Sit down, young man. When God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without your help or mine."

[This is true when it comes to receiving the new heart, but the would-be convert can be helped by being TAUGHT how this occurs. This is where the mature Christian is useful to God. See John chapter 3 and watch how Jesus worked.]

The great leaders of religious thought in this generation sound the praises and build the monuments of those who planted the seed of truth centuries ago.

Do not many turn from this work to trample down the growth springing from the same seed today? The old cry is repeated, “We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow Christ in the messenger He sends, we know not from whence he is.” John 9:29. As in earlier ages, the special truths for this time are found, not with the ecclesiastical authorities, but with men and women who are not too learned or too wise to believe the word of God.

“For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are” (1 Corinthians 1:26-28); “that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5).

And in this last generation the parable of the mustard seed is to reach a signal and triumphant fulfillment. The little seed will become a tree. The last message of warning and mercy is to go to “every nation and kindred and tongue” (Revelation 14:6-14), “to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14; Revelation 18:1). And the earth shall be lightened with His glory.

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