

HELP THE MUSTARD SEED GROW

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Backgrounder

What is a parable?

A parable is a story that helps to explain the Kingdom of God in a way that the people can understand. Each parable examines one aspect of the Kingdom of God using imagery that is accessible to the people.

A Mustard Seed?

Jesus was speaking to the people of Galilee, where mustard grew. In Canada, we often think of mustard as a green plant with yellow or white flowers. The kind of mustard that was and is grown in Galilee is a larger, shrub plant that produces fruit.

“The point of comparison is not the seed in itself, but what happens when it is sown. *Mustard seed* was proverbially minute, though of course it is not literally the smallest known seed. The point of the parable lies in the contrast between this insignificant beginning and the *greatest of shrubs* which results. The expression is literally ‘greater than the vegetables’ and contrasts the full-grown shrub (it normally grew to about 3 meters) with other edible garden produce. It is an exaggeration to call it a *tree*, but the language suggests that Jesus was thinking of the Old Testament use of the tree as an image for a great empire (see especially Ezek. 17:23; 31:3-9; Dan. 4:10-12; etc.). From these passages also comes the picture of the *birds... in its branches*; there the birds represent the nations gathered under the protection of the empire (Ezek. 31:6; Dan 4:20-22)... But the main point lies simply in the huge extent of this kingdom which has developed from such unimpressive beginnings... The way of God is not that of ostentation but of ultimate success. Little is great where God is at work.”¹

Our Role

Just as God gives us the gift of life, the seed that offers the Kingdom of Heaven is a gift. We have to make the choice to plant and tend that seed just as we have the choice to accept the love and eternal life that God offers us through Jesus. Just as a farmer tends the plant so branches can grow to support the birds, so too can our effort grow the reach of Solidarity around our globe. Through small efforts like this collection, students have the opportunity to respond to their call to build the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth.

Key Points

- Something very small and humble can be very powerful
- The Kingdom of Heaven is a gift to us from God (as is life itself)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is in movement (it does not stop growing), it is coming and to be built
- The Kingdom of Heaven is for all (all birds made their nests on its branches)
- The Kingdom of Heaven will extend over all the Earth

¹ FRANCE, R.T., *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1985 pp.231