

The Future of Christ's Kingdom

Matthew 13:31-32; Isaiah 2:2-4

December 2, 2018

Greg L. Price

The Scriptures are filled with many prophecies in which God through His prophets declares what shall happen in the future before the events actually come to pass. In this sense, divine prophecy is a preview of history before it occurs. Why has God given us prophecy in Scripture? (1) To reveal His glory by demonstrating that He alone is the Creator and Lord of history, and the Savior and Judge within history. (2) To His people hope by revealing to them how He will graciously save His people and righteously judge His enemies. Thus, the study of prophecy is not a mere intellectual pursuit wherein we gather information to satisfy our curiosity about the future. To the contrary, the study of prophecy is intensely practical in humbling us before the eternal, sovereign God, knowing it is He that controls the future—not rulers, nations, or Satan.

The Lord has not only given to us chapters and entire books of the Bible that deal with prophetic events (Revelation), but He has also given us prophetic parables that likewise teach us the progress of history in the future. The Parable of the Mustard Seed is one of these prophetic parables. What does the Lord Jesus tell us about the future in this parable? (1) The Smallness of the Gospel Kingdom (Matthew 13:31-32a); (2) The Greatness of the Gospel Kingdom (Matthew 13:32b).

I. The Smallness of the Gospel Kingdom (Matthew 13:31-32a).

A. The parables of the Lord Jesus were given both to hide truth from those who were obstinate toward Christ and to reveal truth to those who were tender toward Christ (Matthew 13:10-11). To God's elect, the Lord grants His Word and Spirit to teach them the meaning of the parables, while to the non-elect, the Lord gives not understanding; this is to them a sign of His judgment. It is of the greatest blessing that God has opened your spiritual eyes to see and understand His truth and to receive it by faith and apply it to your life (Matthew 13:16-17).

B. The Lord likens the kingdom of heaven (i.e. the Visible Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world) to that of a mustard seed ("The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed" Matthew 13:30). It is called the kingdom of heaven, because it is the power of heaven that comes in the gospel to break our proud hearts and to grant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the salvation He has brought. The Parable of the Mustard Seed is intended to illustrate the gospel kingdom established by Christ the King in conquering His enemies through His death and resurrection. Many people want Jesus as Savior from sin in order that they might escape the fires of hell, but they do not want Jesus as King and Lord to rule over them. Dear ones, you cannot come to Jesus as Savior to be rescued from hell and refuse to bow before Him as King and Lord over your life. The evidence that Jesus is your Savior is your willing submission to His rule and to His commandments, and likewise the evidence of a hypocrite is an unwillingness to submit to the authority of the King and His Moral Law (struggle—yes; unwillingness—no).

C. The smallness of the gospel kingdom is likened to that of a mustard seed which proverbially was used to illustrate that which was very small and seemingly insignificant in the eyes of man (Matthew 13:32a). The mustard seed was considered among the smallest of seeds. When Jesus illustrated the smallest degree of genuine faith in a true believer, what did He use? He used the mustard seed (Matthew 17:20).

D. The first truth taught by Christ in the Parable of the Mustard Seed is that the gospel kingdom would begin in a small, seemingly insignificant way ("which indeed is the least of all seeds" Matthew 13:32).

1. The King of this kingdom would not be ushered into a royal palace and crowned as an

earthly king with all the pomp and circumstance that one might expect. He was laid at birth in a manger, and He deliberately avoided all attempts on the part of men to make Him such a king (John 6:14-15). This gospel kingdom (“kingdom of heaven”) did not originate in this world; its power was not wielded by the sword, nor was its authority conveyed by man (John 18:36). The kingdom of grace was spiritual in nature, for it came by the Holy Spirit applying the redemption purchased by Christ to the hearts and lives of believing sinners and delivered them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light over which Christ reigned (there are only two kingdoms).

2. Although this gospel kingdom has its individual application to the lives of particular believers (God’s elect), it also has its corporate application as well in bringing all those who profess Christ under His government and rule (in the Visible Church of Jesus Christ over which He is the Head and King). This corporate and visible aspect of the gospel kingdom includes all those who profess the true religion and their children throughout the whole world. For the well-being and growth of this universal, visible gospel kingdom, Jesus Christ, the King, has given His royal Word and His church officers to teach and to rule on His behalf according to His Word (Matthew 28:19-20). It is not the will of man that is to rule in the doctrine, worship, and government of Christ’s kingdom; it is the will of King Jesus revealed in His Holy Scriptures. In fact, Jesus HATES all such introduction of man’s will into His Kingdom, for it subverts His royal rule and divine authority as King (Revelation 2:15; Matthew 15:9). Does Jesus hate Christmas? Yes, because He did not authorize it.

E. This gospel kingdom began with a few disciples (or a “little flock” as Jesus called them in Luke 12:32). Jesus desired to encourage His disciples that the kingdom of heaven would start small, but would take root and grow apart from the power of man (Zechariah 4:6). In fact, the gospel kingdom would eventually grow beyond all human expectations. Here is a parable then that is intended to instill hope in God’s people that in spite of their present smallness, in spite of their persecution and hatred by the world, in spite of the size and overwhelming resources of the enemies against the kingdom of God, God’s kingdom will grow until it fills the whole world and all nations are brought into it.

F. This small stage of the gospel kingdom in which it is likened to a small mustard seed that is sown in the ground began at the first coming of Christ, and we see it growing throughout the Book of Acts—yet not without great struggle against many enemies that seek to destroy it (whether it be the persecution of the Jews, the Romans, the papal antichrist, or Islam; whether it be the heresies and tyranny of the Gnostics or of Rome and other corrupt churches). In spite of these great struggles the mustard seed would grow gradually into a tender plant and then into a shrub and then into a tree large enough for the birds in which to rest and in which to build their nests.

1. The same truth is found in Daniel 2:31-35,44-45 (turn there) where instead of a mustard seed a stone is used to illustrate the growth of the Christ’s kingdom. Like the Parable of the Mustard Seed there are two aspects of the Christ’s kingdom considered (a time of smallness and a time of greatness).

2. The time of the stone’s smallness begins at Christ’s first coming and it will continue until it destroys the antichristian kingdoms of this world in Revelation 17-19 through the gospel of Jesus Christ which then burn the harlot and Jesus casts the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire.

G. This truth should teach us that during this present stage of the gospel kingdom we should expect persecution, opposition, and hostility from Satan and the corrupt rulers and nations of this world.

1. Although there have been periods in history in which the mustard seed (or plant) appears to manifest growth and reformation in certain parts of the world for a period of time (as during the first and second reformations), nevertheless, these periods of reformation were short-lived and soon issued in periods of backsliding from the truth. Dear ones, we are yet living in the period of the smallness of the mustard seed that has sprouted, but has not reached its greatness. We are living in the period in which the woman (the faithful church) has fled to the wilderness from the attacks of the serpent (Satan) to be protected

and preserved by the Lord Jesus (Revelation 12:14).

2. That doesn't mean that we ought to throw up our arms and quit. We must be faithful to Christ even if we stand alone against the whole world. It is not our job to usher in the millennium. It is our job to be faithful to Jesus Christ, to His gospel, and to His commandments. The duty is ours; the results are His. The mustard seed has been planted, and Almighty God will bring forth its increase in His appointed time. At the present, we should expect to be attacked, slandered, and persecuted for Christ, for His truth, and for His righteousness. But this period of the gospel kingdom will not remain forever—there is coming a time in which the mustard seed will become a tree in which the birds of the air will lodge. Let us not be cast down at our smallness; for the parable is not yet finished.

II. The Greatness of the Gospel Kingdom (Matthew 13:32b).

A. The second aspect of the kingdom of heaven is described in terms of the mustard seed growing into a tree far beyond the smallness of that tiny mustard seed that was sown in the ground at the time of Jesus Christ. Although the mustard seed was proverbially said to be the smallest seed, nevertheless, it grew to become the largest of the herbs (somewhere around 15 ft. in height). The point that Jesus is here making is the contrast between the smallness of the mustard seed to the greatness of the mustard tree. So likewise will the gospel kingdom increase and grow in size.

B. The Lord Jesus says that that this mustard tree will even be able to lodge birds of the air—something it would not be able to do at the stage that it was a mustard seed or just a tender plant that had sprouted.

1. To what do the birds of the air refer? The birds refer to the kings and kingdoms of the earth that will be brought into the gospel kingdom or Visible Church of Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 17:22-24).

2. This aspect of the gospel kingdom is what is known as the millennium wherein Christ will reign from heaven and draw the kings and kingdoms of this world unto Himself and into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ—Jews and Gentiles alike (Psalm 72:8,9,11; Isaiah 2:2-4; Romans 11:24; Revelation 20:1-6).

C. This millennium (the tree stage of the mustard seed in which the birds nest or kings and people of the world come to Christ and His kingdom) is not a pre-millennial millennium for there is no second coming of Christ between the smallness of the mustard seed (the present age) and the greatness of the mustard tree (the millennial age). Nor is this an a-millennial millennium for there is no second coming of Christ to be found between the smallness of the mustard seed (the present age which is the millennial age) and the greatness of the mustard tree (the eternal age). However, this parable accurately describes the post-millennial millennium wherein Christ established this gospel kingdom over which He reigns at His first coming. He continues His reign from heaven over the kingdom of heaven as the mustard seed sprouts into a tender plant and manifests His dominion over all as the same Kingdom moves into the stage of the greatness of the mustard tree in which all of the kings and kingdoms of the earth will be brought into it.

D. There will be many blessings enjoyed by those who live in this millennial period, but the chief blessing will be the world wide effect which the gospel of Jesus Christ will have in the hearts of men, women, and children, in families, churches, and nations. Christ's prayer (in John 17:21) that His church be one (not only spiritually, but visibly) will be realized to a degree unknown before that time. At that time the name of God (which is His doctrine, worship, government, and discipline) will be one by a covenanted uniformity throughout the whole world (Zechariah 14:9). It will be the gospel of salvation and sanctification of Christ's Church in doctrine, worship, government that will bring about the glory of Christ's reign in that period and finally worldwide peace (not by political parties, economic success, or military expansion).

E. Remember this prophetic parable is given for your edification and sanctification. God is still on

the throne. Christ has not abdicated His kingship. His gospel kingdom is not destroyed. Rather it has moved from its first stage (the mustard seed stage at the time of the Lord Jesus) and will become a tree into which all the kings and nations of the world will come into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. Our labor is not in vain in the Lord; rather we must view our labor in the Lord as preparing the way for the greatness of the Christ's kingdom. Thus, we must have a long range approach to work in the gospel kingdom (whether in the family, church, or nation). We are not victims if we presently suffer for the sake of Christ's Kingdom, but are rather victors (Revelation 12:11). Let us not lose hope in the heat of the battle, because our victory is guaranteed.

F. Dear ones, there is only victory in Jesus Christ; for only He has come to destroy the works of the devil by His death and resurrection. Put not your trust in your wisdom, in your abilities, in your intellect, in your works, in your riches, in your resources, in your church, in rulers or nations, but put your trust in Jesus Christ alone who is able to make you a conqueror over the world, the flesh, the devil, and even death.

Copyright 2018 Greg L. Price.