

Title: Parables – Mustard Seed and Yeast

Tim Shelley / 27th March 2011 (Compiled by Gordon Palmer)

Aim:

God uses the small, unimpressive and insignificant to bring about his great purposes.

God's purposes are not effected immediately. They are often a long process.

What does God's Kingdom look like today?
In what ways can we recognise God's Kingdom breaking in?

For the crowds in Jesus' day they had difficulty in recognising God's Kingdom at all. Their expectation was massive. They didn't expect to see it being fulfilled in Jesus.

How much do we suffer from similar misapprehensions?

Two short parables
Read Matthew 13:31-35

1) The Mustard Seed.

The parable tells of a small seed growing rapidly and becoming a large herb big enough for birds to 'perch in its branches'. We don't know what sort of plant this is, but large mustard plants in the Jordan valley can grow to quite a height and the birds come in the late season to take the seeds. The parable has many parallels in Scripture e.g. Ezekiel 17:22-24 – this passage is normally interpreted as being the coming Messiah whose Kingdom would be great and fruitful and to whom all the nations (birds) would come. In Daniel 4:12, the birds resting in the tree of Nebuchadnezzar's dream similarly indicate the nations.

But the imagery of the small becoming great is also common in Scripture. David's brothers lined up before Samuel and they all looked great but David was nowhere to be seen. (1 Samuel 16)

Similarly Jesus describes his disciples as 'the little flock' (see Luke 12:32-34).

What spiritual principles are coming out here?
How does it apply to you personally and to us together?

2) The Yeast

Sometimes yeast in the Bible means something that is evil (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5:7). However, it is dangerous to take a meaning from one part of the Bible and apply it indiscriminately to another. Here the meaning is obviously something that grows and spreads.

Yeast is inconspicuous when it is in the flour. But it goes on working and its results can be quite overwhelming. The process of turning the yeast into bread is a long one. The crowds expected something immediately. They wanted something quick and visible.

What, if anything, do you see by way of evidence around you that the Kingdom of God is growing? Why do you think that is?

Think about what you know of either Bible history or church history. There are long gaps when nothing seems to be happening spiritually (e.g. the 400 years that the Israelites were in Egypt or the 400 years from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New). What do these tell you about the Kingdom of God?

How often does it seem to you that God's Kingdom is not growing at all especially at 9:00 a.m. on a Monday morning? How do we overcome the evil one who tries to bring us down?

Going on:

What expectations do you have of the Kingdom of God in your life?
What does God expect of you?
Discuss!