

## 14. Jesus Gave the Parable of the Mustard Seed

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to work effectively with the Trinity in evangelism by learning to share the Word of God in love. In our topic today, we are going to learn about another of the parables that Jesus gave and then see the way that Jesus taught the disciples to have faith in Him.

Jesus gave a parable about a mustard seed to illustrate the kingdom of God. Mark 4:30-32 says, “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.’” Here, we see that Jesus used the mustard seed as an illustration of the kingdom of God. In the land of Israel, the mustard seed was the smallest seed that the people planted for food as it was smaller than any of the other herbs.

Jesus taught several things about the kingdom of God through this parable about the mustard seed. The fact that it is the smallest seed planted for food is an indication that the kingdom of God started out very small. Acts 1:15 says, “And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said.” Here, we see that between the time of the return of Jesus to heaven in Acts 1 and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, there were only one hundred and twenty people gathered in the upper room. There were probably some others who were in Galilee, because 1 Corinthians 15:6 says, “After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” Here, we see that more than five hundred people called brethren saw Jesus at one time after His resurrection. The word “brethren” would indicate that they were also disciples. That was still a very tiny group in comparison to the people throughout the world.

We see that the mustard tree grows large enough so the birds can build nests on its branches. The mustard plant can grow to about fifteen feet high and develop some rather large branches, especially in comparison to the size of its tiny seed. That is why it is possible for birds to build their nests on the branches. In the Old Testament, several verses point out the fact that the Gentiles would also be included in the kingdom of God. Psalm 67:5-7 says, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. *Then* the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” In these verses, we see that it has always been the plan of God that people to the ends of the earth will one day fear Him. As a result, the birds probably picture Gentiles who will be in the kingdom of God.

Jesus also taught many other parables. Mark 4:33-34 says, “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.” The crowds heard the parables about the kingdom of God, but to most of the people they were just interesting stories. The religious leaders and many of the people in the crowds had no interest in becoming disciples of Jesus. Their hearts were like the three kinds of soil in the first parable in this chapter. The religious leaders were already showing their rejection of Jesus. As a result, Jesus spoke in parables

when He spoke about the kingdom of God.

In contrast to the crowds, we see that when they were alone, Jesus explained all things to His disciples. This was an illustration of what Jesus had said, in Mark 4:24-25, where we read, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” The crowds heard parables and enjoyed the stories. The disciples understood that the parables were about the kingdom of God, and Jesus explained what they meant. As a result, the disciples heard and understood, and they received more.

We also see that Jesus taught the disciples a lesson in a very different way that evening. Mark 4:35-38 says, “On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side.’ Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?’” Jesus had been teaching throughout the day. In fact, He had been teaching from a small boat because of the great crowd that had gathered on the shore. Jesus knew that the easiest way to tell the crowds to leave was to say to His disciples, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Jesus knew that once He and the disciples left by boat, most of the people would walk home around the edge of the lake.

However, some of the people had come in other little boats. As a result, these other little boats followed Jesus and the disciples when they started across the lake (Sea of Galilee). The disciples did not know it, but Jesus was planning to teach them a very important lesson as they crossed the lake. We see that a great windstorm arose as they were crossing the lake. The Sea of Galilee is about six hundred and ninety feet below sea level and is surrounded by mountains and steep valleys. In fact, Mount Hermon on the north side of the sea is about nine thousand two hundred feet high. Sudden wind storms commonly happen in this area, especially between the months of May and October. Since several of the disciples had been fishermen on this lake, they were used to sudden storms. However, this storm was much worse than the usual storms, even though the wind storms were often severe.

We see that this storm was so severe, the boat was already starting to fill with water. Luke 8:23 says, “But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling *with water*, and were in jeopardy.” Here, we see that the disciples realized their lives were in danger. This indicates that they had never been in a storm so severe in the past, because they thought that this storm would drown them. Meanwhile, Jesus was in the back of the boat and had gone to sleep on a pillow. Here, we see a real picture of the fact that Jesus was fully human, as well as being fully God. He was so tired after an entire day of teaching and healing that He slept right through the storm, in spite of the fact that the boat was going up and down with every wave.

Then, the disciples came to Jesus and woke Him up. They said, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” Matthew 8:25-26 says, “Then His disciples came to *Him* and awoke Him,

saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ But He said to them, ‘Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?’ Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.” Here, we see that the disciples were filled with an extreme fear, because they thought that they would soon be dead. That same fear probably controlled the lives of all of the people that were in the other little boats that were following them as they crossed the sea.

We go on to read what Jesus did after the disciples woke Him. Mark 4:39-41 says, “Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’ And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, ‘Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?’ And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!’” Jesus then got up and rebuked the wind. The word translated “rebuked” means “*to charge something sharply.*” As a result, we see that Jesus told the wind to stop immediately.

Usually, when waves are ten or twelve feet high, it takes a period of time for the waves to go down, even after the wind stops blowing. However, after speaking to the wind, Jesus spoke to the sea and said, “Peace, be still!” We see that the wind stopped immediately and there was a great calm on the sea. Jesus had just demonstrated that He was totally man, by the fact that He was so exhausted He could sleep through the storm, even though the boat was going up and down and beginning to fill with water. He now demonstrated, by this miracle, that He is also fully God, because He has total control over everything that happens on the earth.

Then, Jesus used the storm to help the disciples grow in their faith. Jesus asked the question, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” Here, we see that Jesus allowed this storm so that the disciples, and those in the other little boats, could more fully understand that Jesus is God. They could have faith in Him, because He has control over all things. The disciples were filled with fear and amazement when they saw what Jesus had just done. They were forced to realize that Jesus was not just a prophet. That was why they asked the question, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!” They would see Jesus perform many other signs in the days that followed this event. Mark 8:27-29 says, “Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do men say that I am?’ So they answered, ‘John the Baptist; but some *say*, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ.’” By the time Jesus asked this question, we see that the disciples had come to realize that Jesus is the Christ.

In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children come to a clear understanding of the fact that Jesus is the Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow to a full understanding of this fact.