

Study Notes: Matthew 13:31-35
September 28, 2025: “Don’t Despise Small Things”
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He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

- As Jesus continued to teach in parables, He used two shorter parables which were more sayings than they were stories. The truth of both of these parables is the same, that while the Kingdom of Heaven sometimes has small beginnings or appears to be having a minor impact, it produces great results that go far beyond the meager beginnings.
 - The Pillar New Testament Commentary explains, “Over against the mighty numbers of the worshipers of heathen gods and even of the Jews who acknowledged the true God, those who proclaimed the kingdom were a tiny minority. Jesus teaches them not to be hypnotized by size. These tiny beginnings would grow into something greater by far than any of the religions found in the disciples’ contemporary world.”
- A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds, yet it produces one of the greatest plants in all of the garden. The mustard bush in this instance, became like a tree, because birds made a home in its branches. The man simply planted the seed and trusted that God would produce the great increase.
 - While the mustard seed isn’t the tiniest seed and does not produce the largest bush or tree, Jesus chose this image because it would have been familiar to the people. It is possible that Jesus even pointed out some nearby mustard plants when He was speaking this parable.
- The Pillar New Testament Commentary adds, “The kingdom may be considered insignificant in its beginnings and was doubtless despised by many in Jesus’ day because of this. But in the end its growth would be extensive; it would be a very great kingdom indeed. There is also the thought of the continuity between the seed and the grown plant; it is from the mustard seed and that seed only that the mustard plant grew. So it is from Jesus and his little band that the mighty kingdom of heaven would emerge. And if we can reason from the connection with all the nations in Ezekiel 31:6 (which implies that the birds refer to people from other nations) passage, there will be representatives of all peoples in the kingdom.”

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

- Much like how the small mustard seed produced a large plant, mixing a small amount of yeast in a large batch of dough produced the desired result. The yeast impacted the entire batch, causing it to rise and expand.
 - The Faithlife Study Bible reminds the reader that while yeast is used as a negative symbol in Scripture, here it is positive, “Normally, yeast or leaven has negative connotations in the Bible, symbolizing sin or impurity (e.g., 16:6; 1 Cor 5:6–7). Here, Jesus uses it positively to symbolize the kingdom of heaven’s expansion.”

- In the same way, the Kingdom of Heaven may seem to be small in comparison to the rest of the world, but in the end it will have a great impact.
- The New American Commentary explains the significance of these parables together, “Together the parables of the mustard seed and leaven pair illustrations of typical male and female tasks of Jesus’ day and probably reflect his concern to relate well to women as well as men in his audience. Neither parable depicts the culmination of the kingdom so impressively as to justify grandiose dreams of Christianizing the earth, but each does caution against a defeatism or siege mentality when Christian witness seems temporarily ineffective. One day God’s causes will triumph.”

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

- After these two parables, Matthew comments again to remind the reader that Jesus primarily taught the crowds in some form or parables, either longer stories or shorter sayings.
 - The Pillar New Testament Commentary explains that parables do not just refer to the stories we commonly think of, “In this context *parables* indicates wise sayings of a pictorial kind in general and is not to be limited to the stories with which we are familiar from Jesus’ teaching.”
- In teaching this way, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 78:2. This Scripture is a reminder that parables serve the purpose of revealing truth about God, through the use of everyday imagery.
 - The Pillar New Testament explains this reference: “From his affirmation of his intention to speak in this way the Psalmist goes on to affirm that what he will say has been *secret from the foundation of the world*. That is to say, he intends to utter no commonplace, but things that God has revealed. That they have never been known from the beginning of the world indicates that they are not attainable by human search.”