

Christ's Object Lessons

04 Like a Grain of Mustard Seed

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

When Jesus spoke these words, it drew great interest from the crowds. The Jews were expecting the Messiah to save them from the Romans who were occupying Israel and were therefore hated. According to the Jews the Messiah would not be a savior from sin. According to them the Messiah would be a prince who would make Israel a universal empire. This prince would make Jerusalem the capital of the universal kingdom. The Jews would be rich and honored. Thus when Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" the Jews were expecting personal and national prestige, wealth and power.

In the original Greek the word kingdom is "basileia." The word basileia can also be translated as "rule" or "reign." The kingdom that Jesus was talking about was not a worldly kingdom. Jesus was talking about the rule or reign of God.

In the kingdom of God, the principle that motivates action is love. Rules are obeyed because of love, appreciation and respect for God. There is no need of force.

The kingdom of God cannot always be seen with our eyes. Wherever God's principles are practiced, the kingdom of God is there. The kingdom of God is formed in our hearts because service springing from love begins there.

Luke 11:20 "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

In this verse the kingdom of God that Jesus is talking about is an obedience that can be given to God with a heart that is liberated of demons and free. The principles of God are dominant in this kingdom.

Thus Jesus would disappoint the Jews and including His own disciples. Because the kingdom He spoke about was not as they thought.

Many Jews and Christians are expecting God to make Israel a powerful empire in this world. When United States president Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital perhaps it supported this idea in many people's minds. But like the Pharisees and Jesus' disciples they will be disappointed because today's Israel will not be a universal empire. In the same way that the Pharisees and Jesus' disciples misunderstood the Bible, so too today many Jews and Christians misunderstand the Bible.

I don't want to get into it too much today because our time is limited. But let's look at three verses on this subject.

Jeremiah 7:7 "then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever."

When most Jews and Christians today read this verse they think that God, keeping His promise, gave Palestine to Israel in 1948 and that the territory will be theirs forever. Didn't the Lord say it? Does God lie? Impossible. Then it will happen, right? Let's read the previous verse.

Jeremiah 7:6 "*if* you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt,

Friends, the Lord put a condition on His promise. There is a condition. In Jesus' time the Pharisees did not give importance to the conditions and today's Jews and Christians are doing the same thing. Did Israel conform to the conditions? They did not. What did Jesus say?

Luke 13:35 "See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

When the Jews rejected Christ they abandoned all the promises of national greatness and the promise will not come back. O.K., the Jews are living in Palestine. But not on this promise of the Lord. They did not obey the conditions and they will not. In the same way that Satan took the attention of the Pharisees off Jesus and God's spiritual reign and put it on national greatness, so today he takes the attention of American Christians and Jews and puts it on modern Israel's national greatness and he deceives them. One of the reasons that America supports Israel is this wrong interpretation of the Bible.

That is enough of this subject for today.

Many people listening to Jesus were thinking like this: Jesus, you are talking about a kingdom, but the people who are following you are few in number. Your followers cannot not be something important. You have no power. You have no money. You have no prestige. Among you there is not important, influential person. They all come from the lower class. We will not join such a dishonorable group. We don't want to ruin our reputation.

Thus the crowds despised Jesus and His followers. Then Jesus said:

Matthew 13:31 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,³² "which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

In Jesus' time, among the cultivated seeds, the mustard see was the smallest. When Jesus said, it becomes a tree, he was talking about its size. Although the mustard seed was smaller than the seed of wheat and barley, it could grow from 2 to 4 meters in height. Its branches could be more than an inch in diameter.

When Jesus spoke, truly He had few followers. But from this small group a great religion would develop. How would this religion spread? Would it spread through war? No. Jesus said,

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Unfortunately, many supposed Christians throughout history have tried to forward the kingdom of God by war and politics. Many wars and terrible massacres happened because of them. Still many Christians talk about a worldly kingdom and don't hesitate to use politics and war. So Turks rightfully have a prejudice against Christianity. The reputation of Jesus and the Kingdom of God that He preached is stained with actions of those who made wars and politics.

Also in this country are those who are not Christian who are smearing the reputation of their own religion by trying to forward their religion through war and politics.

Jesus spoke concerning the principles of worldly kingdoms with these words:

Mark 10:42 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.⁴³ "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.⁴⁴ "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.⁴⁵ "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

In worldly kingdoms the notable ones want to control others and they want to receive honor and service from them. The leaders, in order to hold power, force the consciences of people. In the kingdom that Jesus was announcing, the notable ones are those that give service.

In worldly kingdoms, the principle that forms its basis is pride. The pride shows itself in various ways.

One way that pride shows itself is through racism. They say, "Our race is superior to yours. We are first class and you are second class."

Another way that pride shows itself is war. "We are more powerful. Our army is more powerful than yours. Even in sports, we can defeat you." Pride is like that.

Pride wants to give orders, it wants to be served by others.

There is no place for pride in the Kingdom of God.

In worldly kingdoms, to even establish righteousness, courts and police are necessary because obedience doesn't come from everyone's heart.

The kingdom that Jesus spoke about is not an army with weapons. It is not a group of soldiers armed with swords, tanks and rifles. It is not a power to crush others. Naturally people are selfish. The Bible clearly states this. But the Lord can change us:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

This new creation is something the Lord creates. This is not something we can do by personal development methods. How does a seed grow? In the seed is a life principle that the Lord Himself placed there. But the seed, if left to itself, has no power to grow. Only the Creator can call forth the

life that He Himself planted in the seed. Every seed grows, every plant develops by the power of God.

Thus it is in the spiritual life. We are dead in our sins. But if we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior God places a new life principle in our hearts. Then, He puts into action the life that He has put there. The seed grows and in the end it gives fruit of righteousness.

The seed that is planted in our hearts cannot be seen with the eye. But there is eternal life in it. The seed that is sown may be in a person who is unpolished in manners and his or her appearance may be simple or even repulsive. But just as a seed is sown and stays in the cold, dark, rough earth, in the end the plant that comes from the seed grows and gives fruit. In the same way, we cannot see the seed sown in the rough person's heart and we cannot denounce him or her. Only the Lord knows the heart.

The seed I like the mustard seed. It is very small. But it will be big. Its fruit is righteousness. The reward of righteousness is eternal life. Eternal life is so big!

This concept is valid for individuals as well as groups.

You can say to me, "Melek, your religious group is very small and among you are no important people. How is it that the Mighty God gave you a message to give to the world? No way. The Lord uses more important, greater means." My answer is Jesus' answer. The mustard seed, "which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

Our work is not set up a new political system or to interfere with or change existing governments. When Jesus comes all the governments of the world will end anyway. That is the Lord's work. Our work is not to extend Jesus' kingdom by wars or by force. Jesus' kingdom, The Kingdom of God is not like that. Jesus is the prince of peace. His kingdom is founded on love. Our work is not to make our denomination popular in the world. Our work is to sow seeds of truth in people's hearts in these last days right before Jesus comes. Our work is to announce the soon coming of Christ and to prepare people for that event. This is not a political work, it is a spiritual work.

Perhaps you don't see the seed that is sown. We appear low and unimportant to you. O.K. But in the day of the Lord, in the day He sends his angels to reap, from these small seeds the fruit of righteousness will be great and surprising. What side will you be on in that day? Will you be on the side of those who belittled Jesus' disciples or will you be on the side that gives fruit of righteousness?

Now is the time. What is your decision? Don't remain undecided. Accept Jesus!