



19 Minutes With the Messiah

The Mustard Seed

(Matthew 13:31,32)

Jesus' Body as the Temple
The Living Water
New Cloth
New Wine in Old Wineskins
The Salt of the Earth
The Light of the World
The House Built on the Rock
The Two Debtors
The Sower
The Weeds
The Growing Seed
▶ The Mustard Seed
The Yeast
The Hidden Treasure
The Fine Pearl
The Net
I AM the Bread of Life
Becoming Childlike
The Unmerciful Servant
I AM the Light of the World
I AM the Gate
I AM the Good Shepherd
The Good Samaritan
The Friend at Midnight
The Rich Fool
The Wise Servant
The Barren Fig Tree
The Great Banquet
The Lost Sheep
The Lost Coin
The Lost Son
The Shrewd Manager
The Rich Man and Lazarus
The Unworthy Servants
I AM the Resurrection and the Life
The Persistent Widow
The Pharisee and
the Tax Collector
The Workers in the Vineyard
The Ten Minas
The Two Sons
The Wicked Tenants
The Wedding Feast
The Fig Tree
The Householder
The Ten Virgins
The Talents
The Sheep and the Goats
A Lesson About Foot Washing
I AM the Way
I AM the True Vine
The Woman in Labor
I AM the Alpha and the Omega

³¹[Jesus] told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³²Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

1. Use the following passages to define Jesus' kingdom.

"Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is within you' " (Luke 17:20,21).

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:15,16).

2. The small, unimpressive mustard seed astonishingly grows into a plant that is 10 to 15 feet tall. In the parable, this seed represents Christ and his gospel. List at least six details from Jesus' earthly life and ministry that reflect the small and unimpressive beginning of his kingdom.

3. From a worldly point of view, Jesus' claim of a vast kingdom made little sense to many in his audience. This is also true today. Explain.

4. Read the following passages. By what power does the kingdom of God grow and become vast? What are the implications for us and our congregation?

"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

"From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel" (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14).

5. Why might Christians and Christian congregations be tempted to doubt the power of God's Word to build Christ's kingdom?

6. Agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Although the forgiveness of sins is the heart of the gospel message, the concepts of sin and guilt are foreign and offensive to many people. It is unwise to preach and teach these concepts if we really want the church to grow.
- More people would come to our church if our worship services were more entertaining.
- Explosive growth in a church is a sure sign of faithfulness to the gospel, while a church in decline is a sign that the gospel has been abandoned.
- God wants our congregation to grow by any means possible.

7. Comment on each of the following:

"In those days [the ten days between Christ's ascension and Pentecost] Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty). . . . [On] the day of Pentecost . . . those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. . . . Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand" (Acts 1:15; 2:1,41; 4:4).

Christ's kingdom as seen in our congregation and/or mission fields.

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

For Further Study

8. The prophet Elijah was ready to throw in the towel when he lamented, "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said to him, "Go. . . . I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went . . ." (1 Kings 19:14-19). Relate this account to the gospel ministry of our church and its members.

Helps: (1) Unlike earthly kingdoms, Jesus' kingdom is not visible or physical but rather a spiritual kingdom in which King Jesus rules in the hearts of believers by his Word. (2) Answers will vary and may include his humble birth, his obscure childhood, an unimpressive group of disciples, the desertion, in time, of most of his followers; his suffering, crucifixion, and death. (3) The Lord claims a vast kingdom, yet the kingdom has no visible realm, no army or navy or imposing ruler. In fact, its ruler and subjects are often the objects of ridicule, hatred, and persecution. (4) The Holy Spirit uses the gospel in Word and sacrament to call people to saving faith and to build a vast kingdom. The Christian church on earth with its members will use the same tool of the gospel to carry out its mission. (5) The kingdom of Christ is invisible; he rules in human hearts by his Word. Christians are tempted to make their judgments about the kingdom's growth on the basis of what they observe in their church and others rather than on the basis of Jesus' promise. (6) While it is true that many people reject and are offended by the preaching of moral absolutes, sin, and guilt, a need for forgiveness must be instilled through the preaching of the law, because without instilling this need, the gospel becomes meaningless. A growing church does not necessarily indicate faithfulness to the gospel (examples: the Mormon cult, heterodox churches), nor does a church in decline necessarily indicate unfaithfulness, because many other factors may play into the decline, including the Lord's good and mysterious will. Nonetheless, Christian congregations will strive to be faithful in their preaching of the gospel, realizing that it alone can truly build and grow the church. Congregations will strive for excellence in their worship services. (7) In the first century, Christ's kingdom on earth, by the power of the gospel, enjoyed explosive growth. The kingdom continues to grow today and will become a heavenly throng so vast and numerous that no one will be able to count its members. (8) A lack of visible, outward success to our evangelism and outreach efforts may lead us and our congregation to discouragement too. In spite of what we may perceive, however, the gospel works powerfully, yet invisibly, in people's hearts and lives. We will be led to repent of our lack of trust in God and his Word and, like Elijah, will be moved and compelled to continue our saving ministry to the world, knowing that our labor is not in vain.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, your kingdom certainly comes by itself even without our prayer, but we pray that it may come to us and to many others. Amen.

