

Mt. 13:31-33 “The Growing Kingdom”

For the Children: Children grow at different speeds at different times. Perhaps your parents make marks on a door or wall to show how fast you have been growing. Maybe your parents have said to you, “Don’t worry. One day you will grow up and you will be taller.” But perhaps you grow slowly at first, then suddenly shoot up, then slow down again. It is much the same with God’s Kingdom. He has told us it will grow up into a big Kingdom, after a rather small start. He has told us that people in His Kingdom will grow more holy over time. But that doesn’t mean that the Kingdom of God will ever take over the world or impress unbelievers. Sometimes the Kingdom will grow more and at other times a bit slower. The greatness of God’s Kingdom will only be seen in full when the Lord Jesus returns. **Questions:** Why did Jesus talk about the mustard seed? Who do the birds in the branches represent? Why does the Lord not make His Kingdom grow to a size that impresses everyone in the world?

Introduction:

First Point: The Start of the Kingdom

- 1) Before and After: These 2 Parables are giving a picture of Christ’s Kingdom at its start (“sowed”), then jumping to its completion (“full grown”). It is not about how it grows in between.
- 2) From Small to Large: The mustard seed was the smallest of seeds used by the Jews to grow herbs. At its beginning, the Kingdom of God seemed very humble and insignificant. This was perplexing to Jesus’ disciples – and the Jewish leaders – who expected the Messiah to take over the world quickly.
- 3) The Internal Effect: The Parable of the Leaven is about the power of the Kingdom to change all its citizens. A little leaven initially has a little visible effect. But eventually it permeates and changes the whole lump of dough. This, too, was perplexing to many in Jesus’ day – and today: why are there so many sins still evident in believers and in the church as a whole?
- 4) Like King, Like Kingdom: The explanation for this is that the Kingdom growth reflects the pathway taken by its King. He went from humble origins in His earthly life, to the humiliation of the cross; but from there on to exaltation. So His Kingdom starts small and humble, both in size and effect on its citizens. This teaches us that both the growth and the change on citizens must come from God. See 1 Cor.1:18-31. A “golden age” in the Last Days” might undermine this message.

Second Point: The Completion of the Kingdom

- 1) Fast, But Not Spectacular: The growth of the mustard tree is fast, but it does not grow to a spectacular height by worldly standards. It is not like a cedar. However, it is able to shelter many birds. This is language taken from the OT, concerning empires that absorbed many nations (Ezk.17,31; Dan.4). God’s Kingdom is not so impressive outwardly, but it will prove able, at the end, to shelter all the elect, people from every nation – which is the purpose God has for it.
- 2) Nothing Unaffected: Similarly, the Parable of the Leaven describes a process that ends with every part of the dough leavened. At the end, Christ’s Kingdom will contain perfected citizens and a perfect church. Its invisible power for transformation will inevitably affect everything.
- 3) The Time in Between: As mentioned, these Parables do not describe the rate of growth in between Christ’s first and second coming. But they do teach us about the hidden power of the Kingdom (and King) to grow both in size and effect upon the citizens. This does not mean that the Kingdom will keep growing at the same rate in all eras, bringing in a “golden age.” But it will grow both in extent and internal effect, according to God’s purposes – until all His purposes are fulfilled.

Conclusion: