

“Stories ~ The Mustard Seed” [9. 27. 09]

In 1969 my family was stationed in Taipei, Taiwan.

- Living on a tropical island allowed us to experience a culture that was very foreign to all of us. I saw my 1<sup>st</sup> bamboo forest living in Taiwan.
- Have you read much about the Chinese Bamboo Tree? fascinating fact
  - When the bulb of this tree is 1<sup>st</sup> planted, watered, & nurtured for an entire growing season, it only grows about an inch out above the soil.
  - The 2<sup>nd</sup> growing season the farmer takes extra care to water, fertilize & care for the young bamboo tree, but the tree still remains only an inch high.
  - So it goes as the sun rises & sets for 4 solid years = the farmer, has nothing tangible to show for all his hard labor trying to grow the bamboo tree.
  - Then, along comes YEAR 5. In the 5<sup>th</sup> year that Chinese bamboo tree bulb finally begins to grow; in just 3 – 4 months it grows up to 80 ft high!
- As I read this I couldn't help but wonder, what was happening to the bulb all this time underground?
  - Was it lying dormant for 4 yrs, only to grow exponentially in year 5?OR
  - Was the bulb growing underground ~ developing a root system strong enough to support its tremendous trunk in the 5<sup>th</sup> year & beyond?

It's not hard to guess the answer: for the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 yrs of life; the bamboo tree was forming an incredible root structure that could sustain its phenomenal growth!

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God will have a similar unimpressive beginning; but DON'T UNDERESTIMATE its future prominence.

Dramatic Reading + “Little is Much”

I. Parable of the Mustard Seed

A. (R) Mark 4: 30 or p. 764 in pew Bible

1. ‘The Kingdom of God’?

- a. The concept – phrase = the Kingdom of God is never used in the O.T. in fact, it was a borrowed idea from the Roman Empire.
- b. This borrowed phrase was clearly hated by the Jewish population; its origins came from the idea of ‘The Reign of Caesar.’

2. In N.T. times, the Kingdom of God literally meant the ‘Rule of God.’

- a. [Clarity] the Kingdom of God is not a geographic location with specific boundaries & physical limitations.
- b. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual realm where ‘God rules’ in the hearts & lives of Christ-followers!
- c. (R) Luke 17: 20 – 21 = (1) book to the right
- d. Cleaner translation = “the Kingdom of God is within you”

We join the Kingdom of God when we place our trust in Jesus as our Lord & Savior!

If the concept of Kingdom of God is somewhat mysterious & confusing to you, YOU are in good company this morning.

B. Jewish nation of Israel was expecting...

1. The Messiah to come in power as a 'Warrior-King', to subdue Israel's enemies & establish in Jerusalem an 'earthly kingdom' that would literally rule the world. They anticipated an immediate + perfected kingdom; INSTEAD...
2. They remained on the fringes of society = small & despised + poor & weak! The EXACT OPPOSITE of what they were hoping to receive! Notice what adjectives Jesus uses to compare the Kingdom of God; nothing like a magnificent mountain nor a raging river is used;

INSTEAD, Jesus says,

C. (R) Mark 4: 31

1. Jesus says, the Kingdom of God is "...like a tiny mustard seed."
  - a. In Jesus day the mustard seed was the smallest of all agricultural seeds.
    - i. It takes about 750 mustard seeds to make up a single gram; & there are 28 grams in an ounce.
    - ii. So, there are some 21,000 mustard seeds in an ounce. It's a tiny seed, but produces a very large plant.
    - iii. The mustard tree grows to a height of (8) to (12) ft
  - b. Today we know there are smaller seeds; but don't miss the point!
    - i. Many critics of the Bible says this verse proves that the Bible is not inerrant = without errors in the manuscript; because the wild orchid seed is smaller than a mustard seed.
    - ii. If Jesus didn't know that then there is no way for Him to be the Messiah = Son of God.
  - c. The Greek word for 'seed' & 'seeds' in verse 31 is the word 'sperma'.
    - i. The usage of the word 'seeds' here refers to seeds sown in an agricultural manner. It refers to intentionally planted seeds.
    - ii. It refers to that which is planted as a crop to be eaten, as opposed to something that grows wild.
    - iii. Of all the seeds sown in the East & all the seeds that are sown today to produce edible products, the mustard seed was & still is the smallest seed.
    - iv. In the context of agriculture – Jesus was absolutely correct!
2. Jesus was not making a scientific statement ~ He was describing the very small + unimpressive beginning the Kingdom of God would have.
3. Sounds exactly like Jesus' biography = very unimpressive beginning
  - a. Born a tiny baby in an inconspicuous stable; in the village of Bethlehem to peasant parents without any refined credentials.
  - b. But like the mustard seed Jesus' influence grew over His (33) yrs of life until one day the entire nation of Israel was talking about Him.
4. Sounds exactly like the beginning of the church in the Book of Acts:

- a. Acts 1: 15 indicates a group numbering about 120 met in the upper room following the ascension of Jesus into heaven.
  - b. A relatively small gathering of people - - that were not all that impressive themselves; no movers & shakers; simply plodders!
  - c. But from that tiny beginning the church expanded & gradually grew; on Pentecost 3000 people responded to the msg & were baptized.
5. Typically this is how grace works - - it begins in a small, inconspicuous manner.
- a. 16<sup>th</sup> century = Middle Ages; it appeared that the Kingdom of God had been completely obscured.
  - b. The Church that should have been the visible evidence of God's holiness & hope of the world had digressed & lost its purpose.
    - i. The church was filled with corruption = selling indulgences for relief from sins; adding more silver to the Vatican's coffers.
    - ii. Priests were literate & kept the Bible from the people = thus the Dark Ages academically.
  - c. Thankfully (1) Augustinian monk serving in a small town within the Roman Empire studied scripture for himself & was determined to correct the false teaching of the Church @ this time.
    - i. Martin Luther nailed his (95) thesis to the door of the parish church in Wittenburg, Germany; 1 single monk challenged the Holy Roman Church – exposed their corruption.
    - ii. Very quiet & inconspicuous beginning for the Reformation was launched, because of his courage, WRCC is here today!

D. (R) Mark 4: 32

- 1. Don't underestimate the potential of the tiny seed ~ it gradually becomes the largest of all the garden plants!
  - a. Matter of fact – it grows long branches that the birds can make nest in its shade.
  - b. These birds are different than the birds in the parable of the Sower; the birds in the parable of the Sower represent the minions of the devil who sweep down a steal the seed off the hardened path.
    - i. The birds represent the Gentile nations that are now included into the Kingdom of God.
    - ii. (R) Ezekiel 31: 6 – 9 or p. 650 in pew Bible
- 2. Although the Kingdom of God had a tiny-unimpressive beginning it will grow to be dominant in this world!

The story of the Mustard Seed has remarkable parallels-similarities for our spiritual journey = our spiritual growth.

II. Personal Spiritual Growth

A. 1<sup>st</sup>, Gradual growth is the norm

- 1. It does not explode overnight - - the Kingdom of God (His rule) takes time to be firmly established in your heart = all of us would like dramatic, instantaneous growth & transformation.
- 2. We pray...oh Lord please,

- a. Make a miracle out of my mess – now; no shortage of people who will promise quick fixes - - simple steps to overcoming = addictions??
- b. Don't misunderstand me - - God could completely change our circumstances if He chose to do so; but for His own reasons, He chooses not to.
- c. For most of us 'God's rule' in our hearts begins with a toehold in our hearts; small like a mustard seed.
  - i. Slowly but surely we shed our sins & become more like Jesus; gradually we are transformed; gradually less selfish, less prideful, less aggravating [Philippians 3: 12f] "not that I've reached perfection, but I press on."
  - ii. (3 steps) forward & then 2 steps backward = falling is inevitable

Don't give up if you have fallen ~ persistence will pay off!

- 3. Sanctification [biblical term] for becoming holy = life long process
  - a. The external evidence is the fruit of the Spirit is seen in growing Christ like character, increasing love for God and people, and the fruit of the Spirit.
  - b. The best evidence of true salvation is not having raised a hand or prayed a prayer, or having been baptized. Instead, the true test of an authentic work of God in one's life is changed life & attitude!

B. 2<sup>nd</sup>, Victory is inevitable!

- 1. Slowly but surely = God will have His way with us; old nature put to death + self-control will defeat our sour tongues + moderation will defeat our excesses!
- 2. (R) Hebrews 12: 27 – 29 or p. 928 in pew Bible