

The Mustard Seed and the Leaven

Matthew 13.31-35

Because Messiah is being rejected, the inauguration of His kingdom is delayed. What will happen during the intermediate time? Jesus reveals that although His kingdom is not yet established on earth, it will enjoy unstoppable growth and influence far beyond any expectations.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like...”

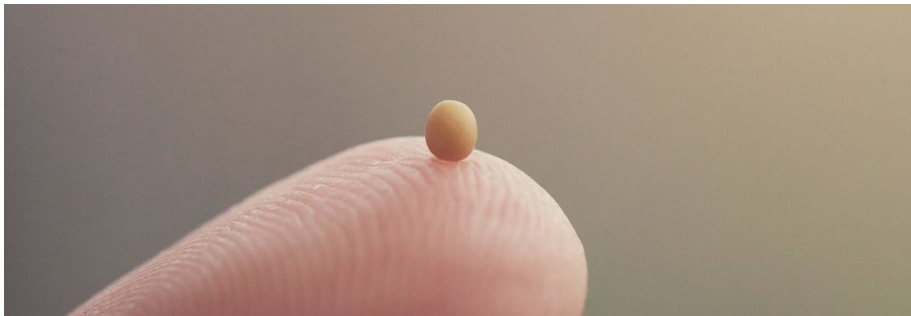
- A mustard seed
*Although only a tiny seed, it grows into a large tree.
Though few believe at first, the kingdom will grow quickly.*
- Leaven
*A pinch of yeast spreads and ferments a large lump of dough.
The influence of the kingdom will permeate the world.*

From humble beginnings...amazing growth...invisible power!

- Despite consistent attacks and persecution
- The good news of Jesus Christ has filled the earth
- The love and grace of God has impacted the world

Encouragement and a ‘Call’ to Christians today

- Nothing can stop the growth of the Church: Are you involved?
- Like leaven, our faith should ‘infect’ our world: Is yours?



1. The interpretation of parables is notoriously subjective – views of the meaning of some parables differ significantly. Why is this? What do Jesus’ words in Matt. 13.11-13 suggest is the reason for this? Because we are all able to make mistakes, we should avoid any rash interpretations. Keys to correct meaning are: 1) Know the historical and cultural setting (these are often very different to our thinking today); 2) Look for the central truth of a parable; avoid giving significant meanings to insignificant features in a parable; 3) Remember that the primary meaning of parables always relates in some way to the kingdom; look for the relationship of Jesus and the gospel to that kingdom; 4) Never base a questionable doctrine on a parable, unless it is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. Now that you have some guidelines, let’s use them to interpret the meaning of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven.
2. The parable of the mustard seed is applied in different ways. How many can you find doing an online search? What features of this parable are similar to other parables Jesus told? What is the main idea of this parable? What aspects of the mustard seed and what it grows into are significant? What meaning do different interpreters give to Jesus’ mention of birds?
3. The Gospel writers record Jesus telling the parable of the leaven in connection to the parable of the mustard seed (Mt.13 and Lk.13), so it is natural to view them as parallel in their central meaning. What is the property of leaven Jesus highlights? Leaven signifies impurity or evil many times in Scripture; do you think Jesus has that idea in mind here? Why or why not?
4. The historical context of these parables is the offer of the kingdom to Israel, and their rejection of their Messiah-king, Jesus. In light of this, Jesus said His kingdom would not be inaugurated till ‘the end of the age’ (Mt. 13.37-43, 49). Understanding that we are presently living in this ‘kingdom-in-waiting’ period, called the ‘Church Age’ or ‘Age of Grace,’ what features of this time are reflected in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven?