

## THE MUSTARD SEED

**Luke 13:18** Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? **19** It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

The Lord Jesus was in a Jerusalem synagogue on the Sabbath and His conversation was causing no end of hostility from the religious elite. They became further aggravated when He enquired, **Luke 13:18** Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble [*compare*] it?

They had their own fixed ideas as to what the ‘Kingdom of God’ meant. They had two sources upon which their beliefs were founded, - the Old Testament (the Torah), and their commentary on the Old Testament, often referred to as the ‘oral tradition’ or ‘the *unwritten* Torah’, comprising of the ‘Talmud’ and the ‘Midrash’ which were the teachings of the rabbis. The unwritten Torah interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures in line with Jewish tradition. ... And the priests and Pharisees who were among the crowds to which Jesus spoke already believed they knew what the Kingdom of God is like. Therefore, how dare this ‘upstart’ from Galilee broach such a subject in their company! They believed the Kingdom of God would be established when the Messiah, - a man from the lineage of King David, - would arrive. He would rid the land of invaders, and restore again the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6).

As far as they were concerned, Jesus fulfilled none of the criteria required for the Messiah ... And so, this was a particularly sensitive subject, **Lk. 13:18** Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble [*compare*] it? ... Instead of engaging with them on their Pharisaic traditions, He employed a different approach, **19** *It [the kingdom of God] is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast [βάλλω] into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

**ITS SIMPLICITY** ... That was not at all what they were expecting! Basically, the Lord Jesus was using a grain of mustard seed to describe something as glorious as the kingdom of God ... *a single grain of mustard seed!* ... They had never heard anything like this before! Jesus was illustrating how the Gospel message was like a man sowing a grain of mustard seed into his garden. It could not be any simpler, in fact, it was *too* simple! ... He spoke about a sower taking a single grain of seed out of a pile, ... so small, but in his mind he had determined to sow it, and to see it grow. He knew where he was going to sow it ... the type of soil into which it would fall ... he knew what he was doing!

How can we relate this in Kirkcaldy in a rapidly approaching post-Christian era? ... How can we explain the Gospel message today? ... When you consider speaking to someone about the Lord Jesus, you might be confident in your ability, or you might be timid ... You could 'hit your listener between the eyes' with a full-blooded proclamation of the Gospel, with every intricate doctrinal detail ... Or you could make it so easy and amenable, you omit anything which might sound offensive. ... Or, when you speak to someone who is not used to talking about the Lord Jesus, your words come out all wrong and you miss the opportunity altogether.

How you approach witnessing for Christ ultimately comes down to how important you consider the task to be. If He is precious to you, you will make every effort to convey Him as Someone you know and love. You will make every attempt to keep the conversation focussed on Jesus, ... as this man was focussed on sowing the grain of mustard seed.

It is another simple observation, ... you will notice he had a [garden](#). For a garden to be called a garden, it has plants, - if round your back you have slabs or tarmac or stones, you cannot call it a garden! ... Many people

are happy with that for they don't want the bother of keeping a garden and looking after it. They don't want to mow the lawn, prune the roses, or pull out the weeds, and they have no interest in planting new seeds and watching them grow.

Some Christians look after their 'garden' well, spiritually-speaking, but there are some who do not have a spiritual 'garden' for they have never sown any seed. They are happy with laying down the slabs, or tarmac, or stones, or mono-blocking, or anything else which makes being a Christian comfortable and convenient. ... The idea of 'putting their hand to the plough' is 'not for them'. Yes, they are fine with letting other believers 'into the garden' to share Christ ... but they themselves are quite happy not to do any 'garden-work' ... not to sow the Gospel seed, but to leave it to others. Of course, they can tell you how to look after *your* 'gardens' ... and especially when weeds or thistles or dandelions are showing ... but they won't take a garden for themselves.

An opening story in the Bible is about a gardener, Adam, [Gen. 2:15](#) And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. ... In this parable Jesus was comparing His followers to gardeners responsible for sowing the Gospel seed so sinners would be saved and God would be glorified with the 'beautiful garden'

You will also notice this man did not wrap the seeds in golden foil or plant them in an ornate pot ... he simply sowed them in his garden. It begs the question ... why do some people think we need to reinvent the Gospel to make it appealing to the sinner? Why do they think we need to change it, to bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Why do we not simply credit *God* with the greatest story ever told, the Gospel of saving grace?! It needs no human editing, and no revisions. It is perfect the way He gave it! ... The sowing of the seeds of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus is able, - when planted, - to begin growing in men and women, boys and girls ...

*Jesus saves* ... not a church, a pastor, or anything else, but *Jesus saves!* ... It might be a 'slow-growing plant' which could take many years, or it might be more rapid. Either way, when God plants a seed, it is sure to grow. ... We do not need to 'dress the Gospel up' ... Just simply sow the Gospel seed as it is ... as we are told, and God will see to the rest for, after all, salvation belongs to Him.

Another issue that is so plain here is the fact this man's business was considered menial. He was simply an ordinary man sowing seeds without needing an agricultural degree or special tuition. He simply got up each morning, went into his field, and sowed. ... He was particular about his work for the Lord Jesus indicated he did not grab a handful of grains of mustard seed, but specifically only took a [one] grain of mustard seed! ... What is the point of that?! ... A single grain of mustard seed? ... He was not intending to make 'big money'. It did not seem to make much sense, but Jesus said, the kingdom of God ... is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. ... **Its simplicity.**

**ITS SUPPLIER** Look closer at this grain of mustard seed ... What exactly was he sowing? ... Now, I don't know if I have ever seen a grain of mustard seed ... but apparently it is usually only about one or two millimetres, - it's so tiny! The experts say there are three main types of mustard plant, and each one can grow to a decent size! ... The Gospel seems a very simple thing too ... and it is often dismissed by its enemies ... but when the seed of the Gospel is sown in the hardest of hearts and it germinates, salvation is the consequence (e.g. John Newton, Billy Bray, Martin Luther). Its seed germinates and grows and prospers in the life of the worst of people, and they can be saved.

This is too simple for those who like to deal with complicated issues ... but what is more straightforward than a man going into his own garden

and sowing a grain of mustard seed! ... We don't need to re-invent or re-brand the Gospel for the supply we already have is more than sufficient! Those who mock the Gospel, or preach another gospel, or accuse us of not keeping up do not understand what it is that one single Gospel seed sown can accomplish. When one seed is sown, and one seed takes root, and one seed grows to the height of a shrub ... go over to that shrub and see the seeds that are on that shrub ready to fall over and produce more ... and so the process continues.

The seed that falls is a living organism, - it is alive and living! Plant the tiniest seed beside a rock ... *and watch which one grows!* Apparently, it takes three to ten days for a mustard seed to germinate ... you will never get a rock to germinate in a thousand years! *Why?* ... Because there is *life* in the seed, no matter how small it is, there is *life* in that seed.

Is it not amazing that from a little seed there comes branches, and leaves, and flowers, and more seeds, - *from that one little seed!* It is all there! Isn't it a wonderful work of grace how God takes the Gospel and plants it in the heart and waters it by the Holy Spirit, and it grows into something beautiful to the glory of God! *That is our Gospel!* There is nothing more miraculous than how God takes a sinner, removes the blindness from their eyes and the hardness from their hearts, and raises them from the dead, - spiritually-speaking, - and causes them to come to Him and be saved ... There is no greater Gospel than that!

... Does the sower supply the growth? No, he simply casts it on the ground. *God* is the Supplier. Can the sower do anything to make the seed grow? ... He can water it, keep the weeds out ... but no, when it comes to making the seed grow, that is what God does! ... And we must also notice, it was only *one* grain, - it cost nothing. You would not find a coin in any currency to equal how little a single seed cost! ... It costs *less* than nothing! But, even so, the seed this man had, it was so important, he was

intent on sowing it ... and he had the faith to believe it would grow ... and the produce from that seed would benefit many.

Our work in this fellowship, - I trust, - is a work of faith. Often, all it seems we have is a 'grain' ... it doesn't look much, and yet, we believe God can fulfil His purposes through our meagre efforts when we do them for His glory. ... Bearing this in mind then, what honour did the sower receive? None. He wasn't there for glory or honour ... he simply enjoyed what he had been commissioned to do for he was the sower. ... **The simplicity**, God was **the Supplier** ...

**ITS SATISFACTION** ... and it grew ... It is yet another obvious statement, but it is worth making anyway ... he cast the seed into his garden trusting and believing it would grow. There would not have been much point sowing the seed if he had any doubts! ... When you do something for the Lord, you don't simply go through the motions, but you believe God can produce good fruit from your efforts and you are *expecting it!* There is not much point otherwise!

Of course, we cannot *make* it grow, but we should *expect* it to grow ... and do everything in our power to provide for it to grow! We can put the seed in the soil, we can water it, we can make sure it is not in the shade so it can benefit from the sun, we can help and hope for growth ... but we cannot make it grow! But God can *make* it grow! ... The seed of spiritual life is in God's hands. He *convicts* the unbeliever of their sinful condition, and He *convinces* them to turn and cry to Him for forgiveness ... and He *converts* them. A preacher cannot do it. The person themselves cannot do it. ... It is God alone Who can do it ... It is God Who places the hope and joy of Heaven in their hearts and brings them to realise their need to believe and be saved.

Imagine the joy when the sower saw the seed sprouting! In the same way, it is a joy when you plant a little spiritual seed in your 'garden', and you see it begin to come up out of the soil, and you see it growing, and little leaves and buds appearing ... and then, year after year, you see it getting taller ... it's amazing! ... When you see someone along whose path the Lord has used you to bring salvation, and you see them coming to the Saviour, and you watch them maturing in the faith ... Yes, the sower simply cast the grain of mustard seed into his garden ... **and it grew!**  
**The simplicity, the Supplier, the satisfaction.**

**ITS SHELTER** the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. The picture Jesus is showing here is that from the seed which turned into the mustard tree the birds could take refuge from the wind, they could rest, they could flock together ... These were only some of the blessings which would spring from this seed becoming a tree. It is another picture of *Jehovah Jireh*, how God faithfully provides for His people.

If you were only to read the opening phrase from v. 19 and the closing phrase from v.20 you would not see any correlation, - a seed, ... and the birds lodging in its branches. It was a process, though, worked through by God. ... He uses the simplest of forms to do the mightiest of works.

Whatever we do for the Lord, our responsibility is to do it with all our strength, and to do it unto Him the way He prescribes. Leave the results with Him, trusting He is working and can do great things, - far more than we can ask or think ... that out of the little seed you 'cast into your garden' a great tree grows.

It is not easy to sow the Gospel seeds in these days, but it is eternally worth it. The ground is hard but we must keep sowing ... and we must encourage each other to keep on sowing, even if it is only one **grain** at a time.

In this parable, Jesus began with a grain of mustard seed and made it into a great tree. ... Eph. 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.