

**Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

## **The Power and Influence of Christ's Kingdom, Part 1**

Scripture: Matthew 13:31-32

Code: 2301

Open your Bible, if you will now, to Matthew chapter 13. Again we go back to the parables of our Lord on the kingdom of Heaven as we continue our study of Matthew's gospel. Matthew chapter 13. I'm going to read verses 31 through 33 as we begin, and that encompasses two parables.

They really must be understood together, though we'll spend today studying the first and next week the second. It's helpful if we can look at them together, at least, as a setting. Beginning then in Matthew chapter 13 with verse 31:

“Another parable put He forth unto them saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds. But when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs and becometh a tree so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it.’ ” Another parable spoke He unto them saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.’ ”

Small things can have, ultimately, very large effects. All music, all symphonies, concertos, oratorios, hymns, songs, all music comes basically from eight notes. All the profound words that have ever been uttered or written in the English language come from 26 letters. Small beginnings; profound, extensive results.

Lord Kelvin provides us with an interesting insight into this by an experiment which he once made. He suspended a large chunk of steel weighing many, many pounds. It was hanging there in his lab to prove a point. He then proceeded to wad up little bits of paper about the size of a pea and systematically throw the wad at the steel. At first, that rather gentle tap had no effect at all. But, eventually, the steel was swaying back and forth and back and forth because of the relentless tapping of the little piece of paper. Small things, profound results.

That's really the lesson of these parables. And if you understand that you will understand what these parables are teaching. Now let me give you a little bit of background so that you'll be able to feel with the disciples what they felt as Jesus was teaching them. The disciples, basically, believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the King. Messiah means anointed one and that implies King, that He was the greater Son of David, that He was the promised King who would set up the kingdom.

And for them, the kingdom had very clear definitions. It would come in glory. It would come in power. There would be pomp and circumstance. There would be great cataclysmic events. There would be the punishment of evil doers. They were looking for the music and the horses, the triumph, the wonder, the glory, the show, the publicity.

They really anticipated a blazing display of power and glory and majesty and might as the Messiah established His kingdom. But it didn't happen that way. And that's why they kept asking themselves, "Was this the Messiah?" They struggled with that all the way along. And He would tell them again and again that He was and they would still struggle with it. And all the way into the book of Acts they are still asking, "Will You at this time bring the kingdom?"

I mean, they never quite understood because their expectations were so different from what they were seeing. Now, they thought, because they had read Ezekiel and they had read the other prophets, that when the Lord came, all of the rebels and all of the rejecters and all of those who turned their back on God would be blasted out of existence in the fury of God's judgment, and the kingdom would come.

But the rejecters kept mounting and mounting and getting more flagrant and more violent and more overt and more confrontive. And instead of Jesus talking about what He would do to them, He started talking about what they would do to Him. And instead of Him saying He was going to kill them, He started saying, "They're going to kill Me." Very, very hard for them to handle.

And so, even when Jesus said to them, "I must die," they violently responded as Peter, "Lord, let not this be so." It can't happen. And the very day that they were throwing palm branches at His feet, and He was coming into the city of Jerusalem and they were crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and it looked like this would be the moment. And the disciples' blood must have been pumping fast and their heart beating and the anticipation rising.

And when it was all at its peak, Jesus said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." And He started to talk about His death again. You see, they were looking for a kingdom of glory, a kingdom of power, a kingdom of majesty, a kingdom of worldwide wonder, a kingdom where the unbeliever and the rejecter was immediately devastated and destroyed. And it didn't happen. And so Jesus teaches them why in Matthew 13.

He says, "Before that comes, here is a form of the kingdom which now exists which you must understand so you're not confused." And He calls it the mystery form, verse 11. That means it's something that isn't clear in the Old Testament. It was not laid out so clearly that you would understand.

It was hidden. And now I will unfold it to you. This is a form of the kingdom you never really understood. And so He gives them seven parables which explain to them the kingdom in its mystery form, prior to the millennial blaze of glory that they were anticipating.

The first parable He gives them is about four kinds of soil. Three of them do not receive the message of the King. That tells them that this form of the kingdom will include rejection. Now, we're living in this form still, prior to that blazing millennial kingdom and we can agree with that, can't we? In fact, most of the world rejects. Most of the world is at the hard soil that doesn't even let the message in, or the rocky soil that lets it in a little while and then it withers, or the weedy soil that finally chokes it out because of the love of this world and the cares of this age.

Most of the world is rejecting. And so the Lord says, "In this form of the kingdom, I'll still be the King and I am still the sovereign over the earth and I'm still ruling but I am allowing for rejection." And, of course, the immediate question that would come into the mind of the disciple would be, "Well, what's going to happen to the rejecters? How should we treat the rejecters? I mean, if this is the kingdom and we're the subjects of the King, aren't we the most important people in the world and shouldn't we be upholding the honor and the glory of the King? So, how should we handle these rejecters?"

And see, they were thinking how, as in human life, why if you had a king and you were a loyal subject of the king and there were a bunch of revolutionaries and reactionaries and rebels in the society, you'd wipe them out, wouldn't you? So they're saying, "What are we going to do with these blaspheming rejecters?" And so the Lord tells them a second parable. He says, "The wheat and the tares, the kingdom citizens and the rejecters, are going to grow together until – " When? – "the judgment."

And what He is saying is it's not your job to be the executioners. That's for the angels in the judgment. Your job is to keep on being the wheat in the midst of the world so that you'll influence the tares or the darnels that are all around you. You're not to be the executioners, you're not to pull off the judgment, you're not to pull them out of the ground because you don't know what you're doing. You're liable to kill some Christians in the process and let some non-Christians go because you can't see the heart. So your job is not judgment. Your job is evangelism. They'll grow together until the end.

Now, what do you think the next question is that they're going to ask? They're going to think...I know it's what I thought. "Well, now this is the kingdom? And we've got all these people who reject? And they're all over the place because the parable of the tares said that the tares were sown throughout the field. And evil is so powerful and evil is so strong and evil is so dominating in its influence, if these two things are going along together, isn't that going to choke out the life of the kingdom? Isn't that going to strangle the power of Christ in the world?"

And so, the Lord gives them two more parables. That's natural that they would think that. I mean, they're looking at each other and they're saying, "It's just us guys, fellows. We're the kingdom of God in the world. And man, the odds are unbelievable. Aren't we going to get, literally, wiped out in this?" And so, He teaches them these two parables that show from very small beginnings, very insignificant, the kingdom is going to grow, in spite of the opposition, to ultimately influence the whole wide world.

The first two parables talk about the conflict. They talk about the antagonism of evil and good in the kingdom. They talk about the right and the wrong fighting one another. But the next two talk about the victory of the right. That, in the end, the little tiny mustard seed fills the earth, the little piece of leaven, leavens the whole loaf of bread.

What started very small ends up profoundly influencing everything. And so, we move now...watch this carefully...from the two parables that describe the nature of the kingdom; it will be with believers and unbelievers, side by side, to the two parables that describe the power of the kingdom, the power of the kingdom. In spite of its smallness, it will sweep the world.

You know, there's another way to look at this. And I was kind of struck by this as I thought through so many things regarding these parables. The first parable of the soils talks basically about the breadth of the kingdom. The seed is sown in the field and the field is the what? The world, the breadth of the kingdom. The second parable talks about the length of the kingdom. It will go on until the harvest. The third parable, the parable of the mustard seed talks about the height of the kingdom. We could talk about extent. The fourth parable of the leaven talks about the depth of the kingdom as it is hidden in the dough and influences from within.

So, you have the kingdom seen in its breadth and its length and its height and its depth. The Lord is describing it in every dimension. And after He has done all of this, the next two parables He talks about its personal appropriation in the life of an individual, after having described its general characteristics, marvelous progression of thought.

Now the Lord does not explain to us these two parables, but don't feel bad. The Lord gave us somebody to explain them to us. Who is that? The Holy Spirit. So we aren't cheated at all. He explained them to the disciples; the Bible tells us He explained all of these things to them. But for us, we have the resident Holy Spirit and we, because we understand God, and we understand the mind of God as revealed in the Word of God, can fit this in with His plan.

Now let's look at the first parable, this morning. And I believe you'll be absolutely fascinated by this one. The mustard seed which describes the external power of the kingdom. "Another parable put He forth unto them saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field.' "

Now here's a man who is, again, a farmer. And he's going to plant a crop. And he plants a crop of mustard. Why? Well, it was used for many things. It was used for its oil. And its oil, by the way, was used for many things as well, one of which was medicinal use. It was used also for flavoring. Even today, mustard seed is valuable commodity. It's very valuable. And they raised it as a crop, as we still do.

Verse 32, it goes on to describe the situation. It says that, "The mustard seed is indeed the least of all seeds –" or the smallest of all seeds – "but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and becometh a tree. In fact, it's so big that the birds of the air come and make their home in the branches of it."

Now basically, let me just give you a little botany so we know where we're going. This particular mustard seed causes to grow a bush, a shrub we would call it, like a garden plant. Normally it grows to about seven to eight feet in height. And that's a good size garden plant. That's a good size herb, and you'll notice it's put in the herb family, *lachanon* in the Greek, and we'll discuss that in a moment.

But very frequently it will grow to 12 to 15 feet in height. And there are many testimonies that have been written by eyewitnesses in the east who have seen these fields, both now and in past generations, who have testified to the fact that they get to be 15 feet high. One writer talks about them being higher than a horse and rider. Another writer says that the horse and the rider can ride under the branches of the mustard bush. Now, that's a big bush.

And what the Lord is saying is you have no real connection apparent between the smallness of the seed and the largeness of the end result. You have the very smallest seed issuing in the very largest bush that can grow. You can plant a barley seed and you'll get a barley plant that's fairly good size. You can plant a seed of wheat or of corn and you get a fairly good size thing. But you plant this seed and you get a 15-foot high bush big enough to ride a horse under. That's His point.

So, the parable is not an exaggeration. It is statement commonly understood as are all the parables. Their point is not an exaggeration; their point is that they are commonly understood facts of life. Now let me take you a little deeper into this situation. Jesus in verse 32 says, "This is the least of all seeds."

Now right at that juncture, theological war takes place. The critics who want to attack the Bible pounce on that statement. Here's what they say. "There you go. You see, that proves the Bible is not inerrant, because anybody knows that an orchid, a wild orchid seed is smaller than a mustard seed. Therefore Jesus, one, didn't know, and if He didn't know, guess who He's not. God." Or, "He knew they were wrong but He accommodated their ignorance."

And then we have what they call biblical or cultural accommodation, where sometimes the Bible writer doesn't say what's true. He says what people think is true just to be relevant. And once you've opened that can of worms, good luck, because who's to say which is which? The critics say, "You see, Jesus is wrong." Now either He's wrong because He's ignorant, or He's wrong because He's going along with their error. Either way we're in trouble, right?

You say, "Well, what do you say, MacArthur?" I say He's right. Can we prove that? I think so. Notice in verse 32 the word herbs, *lachanon*. That word refers to garden vegetables, garden greens that are grown purposely to be eaten. It is used in Romans 14 in that regard. It refers to that which is planted as a crop to be eaten, in opposition to wild plants. These are plants sown purposely. So the seed, then, is a seed sown, agriculturally, to produce edible vegetables and greens.

Now listen, of all of the seeds that were sown in the east, or are sown there today, in 1982, to produce edible products, the mustard seed was and still is the smallest. Jesus is speaking within a framework in which what He says is exactly correct. And recently this was affirmed by a man by the name of Dr. L.H. Shinnars. He's the director of the herbarium at SMU in Dallas. They have the largest herbarium in the southwest, 318 thousand botanical specimens from all over the world. He is a regular lecturer at the Smithsonian Institute.

And he said, quote, "The mustard seed would indeed have been the smallest of those to have been noticed by the people at the time of Christ. The principle field crops, barley, wheat, lentils and beans, have much larger seeds as do other plants which might have been present as weeds and so forth. There are various weeds and wild flowers belonging to the mustard, amaranth, pigweed, chickweed family with seeds that are small or smaller than mustard, but they would not have been known or noticed by the inhabitants. They are wild and they certainly would not have been planted as a crop."

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't it wonderful when Jesus talks about seeds, He's right? If I can trust Him with seeds, I can trust Him with eternity. Shinnars went on to say, "The only modern crop plant...the only modern crop plant in existence with smaller seeds than mustard is tobacco, and this plant of American origin wasn't grown in the old world until the sixteenth century or later." So, when Jesus said a man sowed the smallest seed that's ever sowed, He was dead right.

Further, they say, "Well, look what it says in verse 32. It becomes a tree and anybody knows it doesn't become a tree." Look, He's not talking about a timber tree; He's talking about a shrub so large that it has the properties of a tree. And what is the property of a tree which it has? What's the rest of verse 32 say? "Birds can live in it." There are a lot of bushes birds can't live in. By the way, the word lodge there in verse 32, that's a very intense Greek term that means to make their home there, build a nest and stay.

I mean, we've got little bushes in our yard but if a bird tried to build a nest, it would bend over and drop 'em on the ground and all the eggs would fall out. This one gets big. And they tell us, too...botanists do...that in a certain time of the year, the branches become rigid and birds build their nests there. Very accurate.

Now, Jesus was also speaking proverbially. He wasn't trying to give a lesson on botany and people don't need to get nit-picky about it. But if you want to be nit-picky, go ahead. He's right, but what He's basically doing is speaking proverbially, and to the Jew, because the smallest seed he ever dealt with was a mustard seed, mustard seed became proverbial for something small. I mean, we have proverbs. A person is as wise as an owl. Now we don't mean that the smartest thing in the world is an owl. Well, I don't even know where that comes from, but we use proverbs like that.

Now, Jesus just picked on one of their proverbs, it happened to be that this one was right. But it was proverbially used. For example, the Jews talked about a drop of blood as small as a mustard seed. They talked about a tiny breach of the Mosaic law being a defilement the size of a mustard seed. They talked about a blemish or a spot on an animal the size of a mustard seed. To this day the Arabs talk about faith weighing the amount of a mustard seed.

And our Lord even used the same little proverb in Matthew 17:20 where He said "If you had faith as a grain of – " what? – "mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Be removed,' and it would be removed." So, it was proverbial. And He was simply using a story with a proverb that they used. But in His marvelous infinite wisdom, He happened to pick a proverb they used that was right. Now you understand what the parable says.

Now I'll tell you what it means. First, the kingdom will start what? Small. It's going to start small. Can you imagine how this is important to tell the disciple? I mean, they were standing in a little group, being literally smothered by oppression and rejection and blasphemy, and they were saying, "Well, there's just a little handful of us against the whole world." And Jesus says, "It's okay. That's the plan. Everything starts from something very, very small." And boy, they were small. In fact, it was so small they couldn't even recognize the kingdom was there.

In Acts chapter 1, they're still saying, "Will You at this time restore the kingdom to us? Well, where is it?" I mean, it was so small and it was buried in the ground, it was practically imperceptible. I think that's why so many modern theologians don't know where to find it in the gospel of Matthew either. Luke 17:20 says this. Listen to this, "And when it was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come." The Pharisees said, "When is the kingdom of God going to come? I mean, You say You're the King, You go parading around that You're the King. When You going to bring the kingdom?"

I love His answer. "The kingdom of God comes not with observation." You can't see it. You can't see it. Not this form. So, you're not going to say, "Lo, here it is." And you're not going to say, "Oh, there it is." "For behold, the kingdom of God is – " what? – "in your midst, within you." It's already here, guys, but it's a little seed starting very small.

You can't see it. Just like when you plant that mustard seed in the ground, you can't see it, but it's here. And in that seed is the potential for a massive bush. And in that little seed planting of the kingdom is the potential for a kingdom that extends to the ends of the earth. It starts very small.

Think of a manger, a feed trough. Think of a stable, smelly animals, people wandering around ankle deep in the manure of that filthy place, and a baby born in obscurity in a country that was nothing but an infant wiggling in the arms of imperial Rome, with two districts, Judea and Galilee, that were just dots on the earth. And Samaria which was less than the other two. And think of Nazareth where Jesus spent thirty years uncouth, uncultured, uneducated Nazareth.

And think of the disciples. All of them put together wouldn't add up to a mustard seed. They were so small, so inadequate, so inconsequential, so unqualified, so fearful, so faithless, so weak. And that was the kingdom that was planted. But in the breast of that little infant in that feed trough in the manger was eternal life that would burst forth into an eternal kingdom. The seed was planted, small beginning.

You see, this is a marvelous truth because this is not seen in the Old Testament. This is mystery revealed. It starts small, just that little tiny group. And when Jesus ascended back into heaven, there were just 120 of them. If you talk to a pastor today who has a church of 120, he feels cheated. You'll hear people, "Well, our church is so small, we've only got 120." But when the kingdom started it only had 120, and so far it's doing very well. Before it's done it will cover the entire globe.

That takes us to the second lesson. The kingdom started very small, the kingdom ends very large. Very simple outline, right? It started very small, ends very large. The prophets saw a great kingdom. I mean, if you go through the Old Testament prophets and you read about what they looked for in the kingdom, it's...its extent is staggering. For example, in Psalm 78...in 72 rather, verse 8, it says, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and the abundance of peace as long as the moon endures. He shall have dominion from sea to sea from the river to the ends of the earth that they dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust.

"The kings of Tarshish and of the islands shall bring presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." Now that's the extent of the kingdom. That's how big the bush gets. I mean, from a very little seed to a massive bush and that's



the thing the Lord wants you to see. That you get the largest result from the smallest beginning in the case of the kingdom.

Isaiah saw the same end result. Chapter 54 of Isaiah verse 2, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitation, spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes." You better get this tent bigger and bigger and bigger, something is expanding. "Thou shalt break forth on the right hand, thou shalt break forth on the left, thy seed shall inherit the nations." Messiah's kingdom shall extend from shore to shore, from one of the globe to the other. Jeremiah saw it. Amos saw it. Micah saw it. Zechariah saw it.

And I could read you scripture after scripture after scripture that the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God would stretch from sea to sea, from land to land, cover the globe. And we know this to be true, don't we? Ultimately, the millennial kingdom comes; Jesus reigns over the whole earth. That's coming. In fact, it says in Revelation 11:15, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."

So, these parables actually take us into the millennium, into the fullness of the ultimate growth of the kingdom. Christ's rule, no matter how insignificant, no matter how despised, appears at first to be small. And I think they probably rubbed their hands when He died and said, "That's that with Him." But it will grow and its end and consummation will be amazingly out of proportion to its beginning, such as a mustard bush to its seed.

Now this parable is meant to encourage us, people. It really is. I mean, I don't know about you, but sometimes I get discouraged. I just think that no matter how hard we try we always seem to be crushed and crowded out by the evil world around us. If I feel that way, can you imagine how they felt? I mean, I know there are believing people in this city and in other cities and in other states and other countries and around the globe. God's people are there and people are coming to Jesus Christ.

But even then, I sometimes feel like the battle is intense and that we're sort of the minority. Can you imagine how they must have felt? When their very leader was being blasphemed in their presence, the sense of hopelessness, the sense of defeat, the bewilderment, the discouragement. And especially when, boy, once John the Baptist came, and he was such an impressive person and the cities were flocking out to him and it looked like boy, everything was going to happen.

And it was all so exciting. And John was saying, "I must decrease and this one who comes after me must increase." And they were all getting caught up in the sweep of the establishing of the kingdom. And then the crowds came and the miracles and the healings and the multiplying of food and all the wonders, walking on the water.

And they could see it all beginning to happen. And then something shifted, and there began to be a mounting hate and bitterness and rejection. And so the Lord says, "It's going to start small but oh, it's going to end big." We're going to win in the end. The kingdom is going to stretch across the face of the earth and on into eternity forever and ever, and we're going to be a part of that eternal kingdom.

Then there's another note that I think is so interesting. He says, "This thing gets so big that the birds of the air come and take up their residence, build their nest, live in its branches." Now, what are these birds to represent? Some people think they represent demons. Some people think they represent evil. And the reason they think they represent demons is because of the earlier parable where the birds snatch it away and it talks about the bird sort of representing Satan who takes the Word away.

But birds...keep this in your mind...could represent anything because they're simply an illustration. And I think you have two thoughts here. First of all, what the birds mean is that the tree is very big. It's so big birds can lodge in it, and it's Jesus way of telling us how big it is. But there's another thought too, that I think is just profound. These birds live in the tree. You know why they live there?

I'll tell you why they live there. Because there's...there's seeds in that mustard bush to eat and they could eat at home. They don't have to eat out. Now if I was a bird I think I'd go into a place where I could eat while I was there. You always read about mother birds going to find the food. The mother bird in this deal stays home. But more than that, they build a nest. There's shade, there's protection, security and food there. That's interesting.

Look with me for a moment at what I think is a great explanation of this, Daniel chapter 4. Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the greatest of all world Empires, has a dream. And this is his dream, really an interesting dream. Verse 10 of Daniel 4, "Thus were the visions of my head in my bed. I saw and behold a tree in the midst of the earth and the height of it was very great and the tree grew and was strong and its height reached unto heaven."

Now, that's a tall tree. "And the sight of it to the end of the earth." I mean, it goes up to heaven and its branches cover so that all parts of the earth can see. That's a big tree. "Its leaves were fair, its fruit was much and in it was food for everybody. The beasts of the field had shadow under it and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in its boughs and all flesh was fed from it." Now what is this? What in the world is he looking at? Daniel answers that in verse 21...or verse 20. Daniel comes in and says, "Let me tell you what that was."

"The tree that thou sawest which grew and was strong whose height reached to heaven and the side of it to all the earth, whose leaves were fair and its fruit much and in it was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation. It is you, O king. You are grown and become strong for your greatness is growing and reaches unto heaven, and your dominion to the end of the earth."

What's he saying? He's saying the Babylonian Empire has become like a tree, and all of the nations of the world are finding their comfort, their security, their food in that tree. You know, Babylon brought culture to the world, brought education to the world, brought architecture to the world, brought prosperity to the world, brought a sense of peace to the world. There were lots of nations...the birds are the nations lodging in the tree of the Babylonian Empire.

Look at Ezekiel chapter 31 now, Ezekiel 31, verse 3. And here we find Assyria described as "a cedar with fair branches, shadowing shroud, high stature, thick boughs at the top. And it was big because the waters had made it great, rivers running around it, little rivers and all this. Its height –" verse 5 – "exalted above all the trees of the field, its boughs multiplied, its branches long because of the multitude of waters it shot forth. All the fowls of the heaven made their nest in its boughs."

And all this is saying is when you have one great massive dominant world power, a whole lot of other little ones get sheltered in the branches. Now, we could take that politically into today and we could say that traditionally and historically, for example, the United States has been a great tree in which many, many other nations have been sheltered in our branches, true? Foreign aid, education, many, many ways. That's the secular illustration that he's using.

But when you bring it now into Matthew and to what our Lord is saying, He's saying that ultimately the kingdom of Christ grows so extensive that the nations find their shelter and protection in the kingdom. Now, the birds are not the mustard bush. They're not necessarily part of the kingdom, they just benefit by its presence in the earth, as the non-Babylonians benefited by the presence of the Babylonian Empire.

Now that's what you have to understand that as you teach the kingdom, sometimes the kingdom refers, specifically, to the true saints in the kingdom. Sometimes it's bigger than that. And in this sense, it's bigger. You're looking at the kingdom in terms of God's sovereign rulership over everything. And think of it this way. Wherever Christianity flourishes, the people who climb in the branches prosper because of the flourishing of Christianity even though they don't know Christ.

America is what America is today because of its Christian heritage and there are lots of birds in our bush. They're not Christians but they benefit, don't they? The dignity of life in America, the jurisprudence system, the law, the sense of right and wrong that's traditionally been ours, education, free enterprise, the dignity of a woman, the caring of children.

All of these rise out of Christian truth, every great reformation, every reform movement in history has had at its roots biblical truth. Wherever the kingdom has extended, you have an environment of protection for the people who aren't even in that kingdom truly. It's kind of like in...in macrocosm what I Corinthians 7:14 is in microcosm, where it says if you're married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever

wants to stay, let him stay because he is sanctified in the presence of a believer.

In other words, an unbeliever married to a believer benefits just by hanging around somebody receiving the blessing of God. I mean, if I'm married to you and you're not a Christian and God's pouring out blessing on me, you're going to get some of it, if only for here and now. And so you're sheltered in my tree. And on a macrocosm level, when the kingdom expands around the world, the people who find lodging within that kingdom...listen, you can look at it anyway you want. It all comes out the same...are the most blessed people in terms of human life.

You contrast what it is to be in part of western culture under the influence of Christianity as opposed, for example, to being in India or being in an aboriginal part of the world where Christianity's never been, where the mustard seed bush hasn't grown. That's what He's saying. The kingdom will grow so that many will find lodging in its branches.

And what the parable is trying to tell us is that in spite of the opposition, in spite of the three bad soils, in suite of the presence of the darnels, we're going to win. The kingdom is going to grow and grow and grow and grow and grow. That's the promise of the Lord to encourage us.

So we're not this poor little group of people trying to hold the fort. Hey, we're on the winning side and the kingdom is growing. And I'm going to tell you more next week about how, and give you some specifics as we look at the parable of the leaven. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You. We thank You that though it started small, the kingdom, in this age, will end by dominating the whole world. How gratifying to be a part of that. We cry with John, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Bring Your kingdom in its fullness. We pray that men around the world might realize that even though they're birds and not essentially carrying the life of the mustard seed, they have benefited by being in its branches.

May they turn to the Christ who can so bless, and know beyond the temporal benefit the eternal blessedness of salvation. And, God, thank You that even as we see our society falling apart, man's sin ever accelerating as if he were out of control going downhill, even though the church is maligned and persecuted, even though the gospel is rejected, Christians are unwelcomed in many places, the kingdom grows against all of that opposition.

Thank You for the power. Thank You that, ultimately, the extent will be global and eternal. And thank You, Lord, for the lesson that great things can come with very small beginnings. We pray, Lord, that in some way You might plant us as a very small seed and produce out of our lives a very large bush. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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