

The One About a Tiny Seed Growing into a Huge Tree
Mark 4:30-32
Parables Series #2
January 15, 2022

Introduction

- In 2020, I cut down a tree: still using the firewood!
- Lots of biblical imagery around trees ***Bible Project video and podcasts series***

The Bible and Trees

- Symbolic for **life** - fruit comes from trees, the “tree of life”, Noah after the flood
- Symbolic for **death** - tree of knowledge, idolatry underneath trees and carved wooden idols, hanged from trees,
- Symbolic for **authority** - Nebuchadnezzar’s 2nd dream in Daniel 4, the whole point is “the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms”

So much OT imagery around trees! So imagine you’re there, listening to Jesus speak, and he starts talking about trees. What might be going through your mind?

I. Understanding the Parable

Small to Great

Mark 4 ³⁰ And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to describe it? ³¹ It’s like a mustard seed that, when sown upon the soil, is the smallest of all the seeds on the ground. ³² And when sown, it comes up and grows taller than all the garden plants, and produces large branches, so that the birds of the sky can nest in its shade.” ³³ He was speaking the word to them with many parables like these, as they were able to understand. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable. Privately, however, he explained everything to his own disciples.

Understanding the Parable

*This parable is not one that Jesus gives an explanation for. And while it looks fairly simple, it has raised a couple of questions.

Question #1: Is this parable about the spread of evil?

- Reason 1: In Matthew and Mark, it’s with the birds and seed. And in Matthew it’s with the yeast in the dough. Birds in the soils are evil, and leaven is a metaphor for sin, so this must be about evil.
- Response 1: leaven is sometimes good. Lev 7 & 23 (first fruit offering)
- Response 2: The parable of the eagles in Ezekiel 17
 - A foreign policy parable: Judah’s king is acting foolishly, and it won’t work out well for him to look to Egypt for help from Babylon

The Eagle Parable

Ezekiel 17 [parable, explanation that warns of judgment on Babylon]²² “This is what the Lord God says: I will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it. I will pluck a tender sprig from its topmost shoots, and I will plant it on a high towering mountain.²³ I will plant it on Israel’s high mountain so that it may bear branches, produce fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind will nest under it, taking shelter in the shade of its branches.²⁴ Then all the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord. I bring down the tall tree, and make the low tree tall. I cause the green tree to wither and make the withered tree thrive. I, the Lord, have spoken and I will do it.’ ”

- Positive imagery of birds
- Also, “I make low tree tall”
- The point: God will plant his kingdom people ***himself***

Question #2: Did Jesus get mustard seeds and trees wrong?

- Reason 1: mustard seeds are not the smallest seeds there are, and mustard trees only grow to be about 10-12 feet tall, more like a shrub
- Response 1: don’t import modern framework on ancient agricultural people

****Craig Bloomberg** While not technically the smallest of all seeds known today, it was the smallest of all those that Jews regularly planted in their gardens, which is all that the proverbial language is claiming.

- Response 2: the tree growing super huge is part of the “exaggeration” of the parable.

Can you believe how such a tiny, unimpressive thing turns into this big shrub, and all these birds come around and hang out and enjoy it?

Interpreting the Parable

- Unimpressive origins - ragtag disciples
- Eventual glory - God will be in charge
- Room for everyone - all kinds of birds
- Wait and see

II. The Patience of God

**A lot of Jesus’ first hearers were impatient. “When will the kingdom come!”*

***Almost all of Jesus’ first hearers were familiar with agriculture...wait*

****Fair to say that we may live in the most impatient culture in the history of the world*

*- **imagine living without Amazon Prime!***

*- **Neighbor’s trees***

Kingdom Patience

1. Patient in sending Jesus the first time | Galatians 4:4
 - a. So much “how long” in the OT (advent)
 - b. When the time came to completion
 - c. All the signposts pointing to Jesus **GOSPEL**

- i. Abraham/Isaac: son, Leviticus: sacrifices, Jonah: resurrection, David: king
- 2. Patient in growing his kingdom | Acts 1:8
 - a. You'll be my witnesses to the ends of the earth
 - b. For 2,000 years this is becoming more and more true
- 3. Patient in sending Jesus the second time | 2 Peter 3:8-9
 - a. ⁸ Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹ The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.
 - b. While we wait, we invite all the birds to this tree

(Big idea) The good news of the kingdom is marked by God's incredible patience.

III. Imagining the Kingdom

(Big idea) How does this parable help me imagine life in the kingdom of God?

1. Christ is patient for us when we are sinfully impatient
 - a. Different people are impatient differently
 - i. Me with people, vs. someone else with traffic
 - b. Alien righteousness, something outside of us: **PERFECT** patience
2. Christ is patient with us while we stumble and grow
 - a. "I should be better than this, I should be different"
3. Christ is patient through us while we disciple and evangelize
 - a. Helping people grow as wholehearted followers
 - b. Telling the same person about Jesus over and over again
4. Christ is patient in us while we await his return

Scripture Reading

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