

## **THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED**

Rev. Douglas Taylor

*Reading: Mark 4:26-34*

One day when the Lord was on earth He saw that His faithful disciples—the men who followed Him everywhere and listened to what He taught them—needed to be encouraged. He could see that they needed to be convinced that it is always worthwhile to keep on trying to do the Lord's will, that the kind of life that leads to heaven is not as difficult as some people imagine, that we should never feel hopeless and give up, and that if we keep on trying, we will eventually, and without doubt, be prepared for heaven and be accepted there.

The Lord had been telling His disciples by means of parables that they would come into heaven only by obeying the commandments that He had given in His Word. If they did obey His Word, then what they had learned would be just like seed planted in good ground that produced trees that brought forth much fruit. The good actions, the good deeds, that the disciples would do because they obeyed the Lord's Word would be like the delicious fruit that eventually comes from seeds planted in the ground.

But it seemed to the disciples that this was very difficult to do. They were becoming discouraged because they thought that obeying the Lord's Word was too hard for them. They needed encouragement. The Lord could see this, so He told them the parable about the grain of mustard seed.

He began by reminding them of something they knew already—that the mustard seed was the smallest, tiniest seed of all the seeds in the world. You all know that a tree comes from a seed planted in the ground. It is very exciting to see a plant come forth from the seed and to watch it grow and grow. But this is most exciting with a mustard plant, the plant that gives us mustard. It begins from the tiniest seed of all. But the plant that comes forth from this tiny seed grows and grows until it becomes a huge tree—large enough for the birds of the air to come and make their nests in it. It is hard to believe, when we see a tiny grain of mustard seed, that it will one day become such a big and useful tree. And yet that is what happens, and we can see it happen.

Of course, the seed itself cannot take any of the credit or honor and glory for this. That belongs to the Lord alone, because it is the Lord who makes it grow. The person who plants the seed and cultivates the ground and waters it, cannot take the credit either. The glory is the Lord's alone, because He is the source and origin of all growth. Without Him nothing would grow.

Now, in the parable, the Lord said that His kingdom or heaven was like that little grain of mustard seed. Let us see if we can understand how coming into heaven is like the way that a mustard seed grows.

You see, all those people who now live in heaven as angels have a very great willingness to do what the Lord wants. And we have to develop that great willingness to do what the Lord wants if we are to feel comfortable in heaven and be accepted there. But in the beginning we don't have any great willingness to do what the Lord wants. We much prefer to do what *we* want, when we want to do it, and how we want to do it. We have very little willingness to obey the Lord. Our willingness to follow Him is very small indeed—like a grain of mustard seed.

But provided we have *some* willingness—be it ever so small—the Lord can take that and make it grow. He can make it grow so that it is as big as a great tree, big enough for birds to make their nests in it. He can make our willingness to do what He wants become very great indeed, so that we are eager to help and serve Him. He can make it grow, just as He makes a grain of mustard seed grow into a huge tree. He can make it grow even while we are not aware of it.

We don't necessarily notice that we are becoming more and more willing to please the Lord rather than ourselves. It is hard to believe this will ever can grow into a huge tree. However, let us never forget that it is the Lord who makes things grow—not only seeds and plants and things like that, but also the things in our minds, such as our willingness to do His will. The credit belongs to Him. We have to give the honor and the glory to the Lord.

There are many examples in the Word where something small and weak eventually grew into something big and great. Who would have thought, for example, that Joseph, the despised brother of the Sons of Israel—who they left for dead in a pit—would have become the powerful ruler of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh? Who would have thought that Joseph's own brothers would bow down before him, trembling with fear? And who would have thought that the insignificant baby, Moses, under sentence of death for being a male-child of the Hebrews in Egypt, would have become the great leader of the Hebrew people and the one who would set them free from slavery? How absurd it would have seemed if anyone at that time had said that the name and fame of Moses was going to last much longer than that of the mighty Pharaoh who decreed his death? It would have seemed highly unlikely, and yet it did happen.

And what would the owner of that manger in Bethlehem have said if someone had told him that the Baby born there in the humblest surroundings was to become the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Again, who would have said that the pathetic little band of disciples—who were scattered and bewildered and very disappointed at the time of the crucifixion—would become the foundation of a church that would spread all over the earth?

Who would have thought that such wonderful things could ever come out of such obscure and insignificant little beginnings? And yet these things happened, just as surely as a grain of mustard seed grows into a huge tree. Wherever the Lord is present, there is growth, no matter how insignificant its beginning.

The Lord told the disciples the parable of the mustard seed in order to encourage them. He tells it to us, too, so that we won't become discouraged. When we feel that we will never grow into an angelic kind of person, when we feel that obeying the Lord gladly is too hard for us to do, when we feel hopeless, let us remember the grain of mustard seed. Let us remember that if we play our part, the Lord will certainly and without fail play His part. He will make what seems like a grain of mustard seed grow into a huge tree.

Amen.