

# The BEACON

Published by the Newton church of Christ  
Meeting at: St. James Church St and Glendale Rd

Vol. 25, No. 9

Edited by John Cripps

September ,2011



## The Parable of the Mustard Seed by Mike Johnson

**Matthew 13:31-32** is one of the accounts where "The Parable of the Mustard Seed" is found, and it tells us about the growth of the kingdom. The passage says:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to 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 thereof.

### Mustard Seed

The mustard seed is said in **verse 32** to be the least of all seeds. Those familiar with the mustard seed today are well aware of its small size. However, the mustard seed is not the smallest seed known. There are several kinds of seed which are smaller. It was, however, the smallest seed that would normally be planted in the fields by the Jews. It seems that Jesus used the expression (the least of all seeds) in that sense. Also, the phrase "small as a grain of mustard seed" was a proverbial expression among the Jews. It meant something that was very small. Jesus used the expression again in **Matthew**

**17:20** when He said, ". . . If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place and it shall be removed . . ."

### Mustard Tree

**Verse 32** points out that the seed grew into a tree, and it was so large that the birds came and lodged in the branches of it. Most of us are unfamiliar with mustard plants which grow this large. However, it seems that in the Palestine area these plants could grow much larger than what we are accustomed to. The "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia" points out, "Several varieties of mustard have notably small seed, and under favorable conditions grow in a few months into tall herbs -- 10 to 12 feet." Barnes, in his commentary on Matthew, quotes from an individual who said, "I have seen this plant on the rich plain of Akkar as tall as the horse and his rider."

### Application

The kingdom is compared to a small mustard seed which produced a very large tree. The seed started out very small and produced a large plant. Similarly, the church

started out with small numbers and grew to a large size.

In Acts, we read of the beginning of the church and its growth. In **Acts 2** Peter preached to people who had actually been involved in the crucifixion of Jesus. He told them that they needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (**2:38**). Many realized their error and obeyed. **Acts 2:41** says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." The early Christians faced much persecution, but this did not stop the growth of the Lord's church. **Acts 4:4** shows that it continued to grow as it says, "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Only the number of men is recorded -- clearly there were many women who also obeyed the gospel, which would have added to this number. We can further see the growth of the church from **Acts 5:14** which points out that believers were the more added to the Lord. (This growth occurred in spite of the problem with Ananias and Sapphira recorded earlier in chapter five.) **Acts 6:7** shows the continued growth of the early church as it says, ". . . and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." After Stephen's death, the disciples went everywhere preaching the Word (**Acts 8:4**). The scattering of the church from Jerusalem, because of further persecution, only helped spread the Word even more.

Finally, in Paul's letter to the Colossians, he pointed out that the gospel ". . . was preached to every creature which is under heaven. . . ." The church, as is illustrated in the missionary journeys recorded in Acts, clearly grew and grew during this time period.

It would be very difficult to say exactly how many people became Christians in the first century. It is obvious, however, that the growth was tremendous as Christ indicated that it would be in this parable. The growth has continued even until today. Like the mustard seed, the church started out in a very small and humble manner, but it grew to large proportions.

## **FORGIVENESS: Seeking, Receiving and Giving.( Lk. 17:1-5)**

Forgiveness is something that all adults need — both from God and man. Such is the case because we all sin, have missed the mark and are thus responsible and have thus been separated from God (**Isa, 59:1-2; Rom. 3:23**) and will not be reconciled to God unless and until we receive forgiveness. Also, in our dealing with our fellow man, we miss the mark, at times we offend others and are perhaps offended by others, also. Therefore, we need to be careful to read, accept, and behave in the manner God tells us in each case.

The Lord tells us plainly how to receive forgiveness from God, through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ (**Jn. 14:6; 6:44-45; 3:16**).

To receive forgiveness initially, one has to come to Jesus by Believing, Repenting, Confessing faith in Christ and being baptized for the remission of sins. Then when we sin, we have to repent and confess the same to God, and ask His forgiveness, as His children (**Acts 8:20-24; 1 Jn. 1:9**).

The Lord speaks as clearly, it appears, relative to dealing with an offended brother and one who offends us. It appears that we may not be as careful about this as we are relative to having forgiveness from our Father in heaven. Let us examine this a bit closer, and then ask: Are we acting properly in this regard? First He reminds us that if we do not forgive others, we'll not receive forgiveness from God (**Matt. 6:12, 15**). Then He gives us some specific steps to be taken.

"Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." (**Lk. 17:1-5**)

I often say that these instruction are violated by many of God's children in every aspect of the teachings:

1. Often when one is offended, he/she runs and tells ten other people, instead of going to

that person as is instructed and "rebuking" him as Jesus said. We are told in (**Matt 18:15-18**) that if the first step corrects the problem, then it should be dropped there. However, another step is to be taken before it is made know to all in the church. How many violate this rule?

2. Often, then if one does repent, their word is not accepted. One may say, "He/she is not sincere, etc." So the reconciliation is not completed, and often results in a lot of space being left for Satan to move in and do great damage to the spiritual lives of a number of people.

3. The Number of times one is to forgive, is pointed to in a way that we may THINK surely that can't be — seven times in a day! (**Lk. 17:3-5**). Yea, not JUST SEVEN time, but rather, seventy times seven, at another time. Surely, it must means not to count the number of times that such is done, but be willing to trust the Lord and follow His plan! Hear the Lord on another occasion:

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." (**Matt. 18:21-22**). Can we understand why the disciples say: "Lord increase our faith"?

Do we, perhaps, need an increase in our capacity in this regard, FAITH? Is our faith strong enough to follow the Lord in following through in both directions: Rebuking the sin/transgression — the person when he so acts and then fully forgiving the repentant? Beloved it is something that we

need to work on. Let us pray about it, and carefully observe our behavior in this regard. Our salvation is at stake here. Heaven is to great to miss! By ---**William C. Sexton**

### **HOW FAR CAN YOU SEE?**

Sam, an old man, was a witness in a burglary case. The defense lawyer asked Sam, "Did you see my client commit this burglary?"

"Yes," said Sam, "I saw him plainly take the goods."

The lawyer asks Sam again, "Sam, this happened at night. Are you sure you saw my client commit this crime?"

"Yes" says Sam, "I saw him do it."

Then the lawyer asks Sam, "Sam listen, you are 80 years old and your eyesight probably is bad. Just how far can you see at night?"

Sam says, "I can see the moon, how far is that?"

One of our greatest spiritual needs is the need to see. The need to see ourselves as God sees us. The need to see our sins and shortcomings. And a vision of what God wants us to be and what, by God's grace, we can become. One of sad realities, though, is that those in the New Testament who are described as being spiritually blind are those who think they can see just fine. Like the Christians in Laodicea:

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked -- I counsel you to

buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." (**Rev. 3:17-18**) Have a great day! – by Alan Smith

### **Quote Worth THINKING about:**

"If you want to know how rich you are, just count up all the things you have that money can't buy." - Daniel Webster

Jesus said: "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Lk. 12:15).

### **Success Quote:**

"The only two words not allowed in our house are 'I can't'" —Chris Widener

#### **Chris Widener's Action Point:**

"I'll try" is okay. In fact, that's great! But not, "I can't." Almost nobody should use the words "I can't," because in reality, they can! And if, in fact they really can't, do you know what happens if they at least try? They get better! They learn lessons! They understand life a little more! They build courage that comes from trying new things! They realize that it wasn't as hard as they thought it was going to be! But what if they try and actually succeed? Then all the better because if they had said, "I can't," they would have never experienced the joy of accomplishing the task they set out to accomplish.

Remember, it is better to try and fail, than to never try.

**Action Point:** What have you been saying "I can't," to? Take some time today to stare it down and decide that you will try. Then take a simple, tangible step toward pursuing it. You can never win the prize unless you get in the game - get in today!