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More Than Meets the Eye

Religious leaders can often be found pontificating and expounding upon certain teachings to the utter confusion of their listeners. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day had a profound way of taking simple truths and complicating them with rhetoric and rules. Doubtless, there were many troubled individuals trying to parse out their responsibility amidst a Mt. Everest-like burden of laws and rules to obey.

The crippled woman (see vv. 10-17) stood straight. The crowd was in awe. Jesus had the attention of everyone at that moment. How did He pierce through the murmur of the verbose, self-important rabbis and the echoing questions of wonder and awe reverberating through the crowd? With simple and understandable truth:

¹⁸Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."

Luke 13:18-19 NKJV

God has not intended that knowing Him would be a complexity of labyrinth-type laws and systems. In fact, He ordained that to know Him one must simply enter into a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ—the fullness of God Himself. These people had become distracted from the essence of what it was to know God. Their ladder-like construction of laws only led them to an altitude no taller than the top of their heads. In effect, the hope that they had to offer for themselves was merely *themselves*—and that's no hope at all! Each would be *his own* savior.

In His impeccable skill to teach, Christ capitalized on the situation to reveal simple truth put forward in simple, illustrative, believable terms:

- The Kingdom of God is like something that appears to be insignificant, yet it is alive and growing.
- It seems underestimated, yet it is dominating.
- It seems weak, yet it is mighty to provide.

Synagogues kept records. They kept track of who was in their gatherings. While they did not take pride in greater numbers, nor were too caught up in comparing themselves according to size, there was still a sort of tangible-ness to who was "in" and who was "out." Their religious system was built upon predictability of performance and visibility of devotion. It wasn't so much the quiet, obedient faith that was seen as worth great value, but it was the outward displays of devotion that received laud.

The Kingdom of God is not like that. While there are certain and unmistakable evidences of the unseen work of God in hearts transforming sinners into grace-filled followers of Christ, the power of the Gospel does not rest *merely* on the evidences of only the explainable, predictable and visible—(remember the fig tree? vv. 6-9). God is doing His work in this world, calling out to all people to turn toward Him in faith and repentance, accomplishing greater things than the eye can witness!

The Kingdom of God is not subject to the limitations of human observation. It is growing as each individual, within the privacy of their soul, acknowledges his need for a Savior, and turns toward Him in full assurance of His saving grace. It seeps across both natural *and* national boundaries, entering even into the most remote and untraceable places on the globe.

Mustard seeds were known to grow into trees that would climb more than 8 or 9 feet tall, and wear branches that were able to sustain the weight of flocks of birds. Often,

the analogy of birds finding protection and provision from a tree was used to illustrate the power of a ruling nation and its relationship to the province nations that it governed.

Christ's power to save the sinner is dynamic enough to redeem any person, no matter the extent of their guilt or waywardness of their heart—all are equally condemned in their sinfulness. Yet there is nothing that can withstand the power of Christ to transform the life of a lost and desperate soul!

Knowing Christ as Savior transcends denominational, cultural, ethnic, racial, national, and economic boundaries. Such boundaries are merely man-made. The expansiveness of the kingdom that Christ was speaking about was outside of the control of those religious leaders who sought to have such dominating attitudes towards the people as to place man-made evaluations of importance on the positioning of individuals in the audience: healthy males in front; crippled females at the very back (vv. 10-17).

But the Kingdom of God is enough for everyone. Each can find shelter, protection and complete provision underneath its robust branches. Its unseen, yet obvious growth testifies of its pervasive tendency to transcend both human expectations and limitations.

Is Christ enough for your salvation?

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. What are some fatal flaws of the beliefs of the people gathered that day that Christ was exposing?
2. Truths are simple. Why do we complicate them with our teaching?
3. How was the restoration of health to the crippled woman like the illustration of the mustard seed?
4. What are some obvious characteristics of the mustard seed that picture the kingdom of God?

5. What hope is there for all people based upon this illustration?

