

Notes on Mt 13 : 31 – 35 ‘The King and the problem parables of Seed & Yeast’

The parable of the Sower is a parable about time and we demonstrated it by looking at our watches. The parable says now is the time when God's promises will be fulfilled in Jesus and for us to know God's abundant fruitfulness in our lives. The parable of the weeds is about us shaking our watches and wondering if they're still working. It is a parable that reminds us God does keep his word but according to his timetable and not ours. So we need to be patient and to wait as God wishes to show mercy to all. These two parables are about us wearing glasses as these parables celebrate God's mysterious and extravagant way he keeps his promises. These glasses help us see, that is to believe, that God's arm has not grown short and neither has it been weakened but we need to learn to use our ears to hear and eyes to see.

The parable of the mustard seed is a story of exaggeration. It is an exaggeration to call it the smallest seed as well as to call the plant that grows a tree. Though neither of these claims are true we are invited to revel in this sense of exaggeration the parable speaks about. It speaks of the power of the small to change the world and you could say there is nothing smaller than a person. However, this is not just any person as Jesus is referring to himself as the mustard seed for it is in his Kingdom that people will find both refuge and shelter. Jesus in telling this parable is thinking of two other trees. He is thinking of the trees in Daniel 4 verse 21 and Ezekiel 31 verse 6. These two trees describe two different empires who both claimed to be places of refuge and shelter, as much as Rome did. Jesus rejects all such claims as it is only in him will people ever find true and authentic refuge and shelter. He tells another story of exaggeration. This parable involves a woman who alone makes enough bread to feed over 100 people. Jesus speaks of the power of the leaven to work through all the dough to describe how his word will work through all who hear and obey him and transform them. Jesus in this parable echoes the story in Genesis 18 verse 6 where Abraham feeds three guests three loaves of bread and at this meal God speaks mercy to Abraham as he predicts the birth his Isaac but also of mercy and judgment that will come upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Mercy and judgment are both offered to Israel by Jesus. For all who take his yoke they discover mercy but for all who reject him they will they face judgment. Jesus' use of yeast in a positive way in this parable was aimed to surprise and even shock people. Yeast as a metaphor was generally used in a negative way, like Jesus does in Matthew 16 verses 6 and 11 when he warns the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees.

What Jesus says here in these two parables is dynamite. He tells these parables so he would not be misunderstood but yet, these parables also reveal who and what he is about, for all who have ears to hear. He hides behind the parables to avoid being misinterpreted by the crowds who were willing make anyone King who claimed and demonstrated that through thm God was keeping his word; this

threatened to happen to Jesus in John 6 verse 15. The parables speak both of what God is doing now, but also of what God will do. The mustard bush, or tree, today is still growing as people continue to find refuge and shelter in Jesus as God's King and Messiah. The leaven of Jesus' words today continues to change the lives of all who it works its way through, lives of people like you and me.

The parables ask us all two things. They ask will you dare to find refuge and shelter in Jesus? Is today the day when you say yes I will find refuge in the branches of this tree, that today I will find shelter in the life of the Kingdom of Heaven? The parables also ask us will you dare to allow the leaven of the words of Jesus to work its way in and through all you are? Will you say yes I will live choosing leaven of him and for his truth to make me more and more into being like him. This is what Mosaic Discipleship is all about, of our being made more into his likeness. This is our present life for today as we learn to live like him, and it is our glorious hope for all our futures when he will say come and rest good and faithful servants.

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1. Why are these two parables about us learning to wear glasses?
2. Why is the parable of the mustard a story of sheer exaggeration? How does this use of exaggeration makes its point?
3. What does it mean for Jesus to be both the mustard seed and the tree?
4. What is the yeast in the parable and what does it mean for it to work through all the dough?
5. Why is this parable so surprising?
6. Why does Andy describe these two parables as being shocking?
7. Why are these parables to both hide and reveal, as in verses 34 and 35?
8. What is to be our response to these parables?