



Week 4

These weekly studies are loosely based on the previous Sunday's sermon. If you missed it, you will find a recording on our website (www.knaphillbaptist.org.uk). They are designed for both Home Group discussion and/or personal reflection. Don't necessarily try to cover all the questions and discussion topics in your group at one sitting. You may like to think about them later in your own time.

... A Mustard Seed



Read Matthew 13:31,32

This is the fourth study in the series on The Kingdom of God. This was the principle theme of Jesus' teaching and of the New Testament church. When Jesus began his Ministry in Galilee, he proclaimed the Good News of God (the Gospel). 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe good news' (Mark 1:15). We have already seen that the fundamental, intrinsic, defining principle of the Kingdom of God is growth, increase, advance. So, is Jesus just saying the same thing in this parable? We have also learned in recent weeks that parables are stories that test us and make us enquire into the deeper meaning.

Questions and pointers for discussion/reflection

1. The mustard seed is certainly not the smallest seed we know today but it was the smallest seed used by first century Palestinian farmers and gardeners. Why do you think Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God is like the smallest seed that they knew about? It is good to know that as far as the Kingdom of God goes size is not an issue – which is encouraging for us as a small church!
2. What is the other reference in Matthew's Gospel to mustard seed? Read Matthew 17:20,21. What is the point Jesus is making about the size of our faith? See also Matthew 20:21 and Luke 17:6 What are the different lessons Jesus wants to teach us in each of these references? See also 1 Corinthians 13:2.
3. Mustard is, actually, a garden shrub so for it to grow into a tree indicates that the growth referred to is somewhat abnormal. In certain exceptional circumstances, it can grow up to ten feet high and that is what is being suggested here. In what way is this like the Kingdom of God?
4. The tree may be an allusion to the tree in Daniel 4:21. It is so big it becomes a roost for 'the birds of the air'. This could be seen as a very positive picture suggesting that the Kingdom of God will expand from the smallest of beginnings to world domination and people from all nations will find rest in it. See Daniel 2:35,44-45; 7:27; Revelation 11:15.
5. Some people see this parable as portraying an all-inclusive growth of the kingdom of God. Universalists see evidence here that everyone will be saved in the end. Post-millennialists find evidence that virtually everyone is going to be converted prior to the return of Christ. Can you support either of these views? If not why not?
6. For us to be saved and enter the kingdom of God/heaven we have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. See John 3:16, 11:25-26,14:6, Acts 4:12; 1 John 3:23. Where does this leave other faiths?
7. In verses 4, 18 and 19 of Matthew 13, the reference to the birds of the air is to the evil one, the Satan, the enemy of God and his people. If this is what Jesus is referring to, what could he be saying about his church and his kingdom?

There will always be things about God's kingdom that we do not understand. See Matthew 13:14,15,34,35. How can we grow in our faith whilst accepting that we will never know all there is to know. Are these parables helping you understand more?