
a *Grace Notes* course

Life of Christ 300

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Lesson 304

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Contents

Parable of the Seed	1
Parable of the Tares	2
Parable of the Mustard Seed	9

Parable of the Seed

Mark 4:26-29

“(26) And He was saying, ‘Thus the kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the earth, (27) and he lays down and rises up night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows - how? He himself does not know. (28) The earth is productive automatically, first a blade then a stalk then a full grown wheat grain on the stalk. (29) Now whenever the crop matures, he immediately sends the sickle, because the harvest has stood together.’”

Introduction:

This is the second of the kingdom parables, following the parable of the sower.

Its intent is to teach a truth about the kingdom of God; the millennial kingdom which Jesus the Messiah is introducing to the world at this time.

Remember that although this is the millennial kingdom of Christ some of these things may indeed be dispensational constants - things which are true in every era of human history.

We may therefore find many truths that apply to us in these parables.

II. The Interpretation.

The imperfect tense of the verb LEGO here depicts Christ as saying this particular parable over and over. Again there is the record of repetition unto inculcation.

Christ compares the kingdom of God to a man who casts seed upon the earth. All of the verbs in this verse and the next are in the subjunctive mood. Mark does this in order to communicate the fictional nature of the parable, because the subjunctive is the mood of unreality. It delineates action that is not real. He is not talking about any man in particular, but a fictional man, an example for the sake of illustration.

The point of comparison is to the man, not to the seed. ANTHROPOS is the predicative nominative of this first sentence. So we will concentrate on the perceptions and actions of the man, and compare them to the kingdom of God.

The first thing that the man does is cast seed on the ground.

Next, he lies down at night and gets up in the morning. This is a literary way to tell us that some time has past. The few days and weeks of the germination period of the seeds goes by.

Then the man comes out one morning and notices that the seeds have sprouted, and on succeeding days he sees those young sprouts grow. His perception is interesting, though. He has no clue as to how all of this has happened.

From his point of view, the earth has automatically produced a blade and then a stalk and then a stalk laden with grain.

Now the verb KARPOPHOREI is in the present indicative.

This indicative mood tells us that this is not hypothetical, but a general principle of plant growth.

AUTOMATE means that the ground is seen as producing this plant all by itself. This is an observational truth, even though there are many more details than meets the naked eye.

But it does not matter to him how it has occurred, when the crop has matured, he goes and gets his sickle and harvests the crop.

This man is a typical farmer. He has no master's degree in agronomy or a PhD in botany. He really does not know how the plants grow - it is a great wonder to him. But by golly when those stalk-heads are full with the grain he sure knows what to do - he gets his sickle and starts harvesting.

Now the kingdom of God is like this man - not like the plants, but like the man.

This cannot be the point of view of God toward the kingdom of God; God is not at all ignorant of how things work in His kingdom.

Therefore, it must be the viewpoint of man, and even of believers who reside in the kingdom and observe its happenings.

The harvest then would be the vagaries of human volition as observed by anyone in the kingdom of God.

Think about it: this parable follows the parable of the sower, which classifies bad and good decisions related to the kingdom of God.

From the outside, we may observe that a person is distracted from the plan of God - their life is in the thorns. Or we may observe that their life is the seed sown on the road and they are refusing to understand the impact of the gospel they have heard.

But how can we know every influencing factor? Even if we may know some, we can never know the microcosm of someone's decision making.

The human mind is incredibly complex. Add to it years of unique experience that no one else can experience, and you can see the difficulty in understanding the decisions that people make.

Although we can observe results, it is not often that we have a clear picture of the reason. This parable exhorts us not to take concern over what we do not understand. Rather, it is up to us to do our duty.

As the farmer does not understand the microcosm of the growth of his crop, and yet he goes out with his sickle and harvests, so also are we to bring in the spiritual harvest of the kingdom of God.

This is certainly a dispensational constant, true as ever in our time as in the time of our Lord.

You do not have to be a great psychologist in order to plant the seeds and bring in the harvest of the Lord.

You do not have to have the least bit of education in order to take up your own sickle.

Although the human soul is complex, and the reasons for becoming a bad patch of ground for the gospel seed are many, there are no excuses for negative volition. God in His holiness will not allow a single excuse to impugn the integrity of the work of His Son on the cross.

Their excuses are not really our business. There are going to be excuses that you will never understand and never come to know. But it will be obvious that the excuse is in operation when the person becomes one of three bad soil types.

A person refuses to understand the gospel; does it matter why?

A person refuses to undertake spiritual growth immediately after they are saved; does it matter why?

A person becomes distracted and rejects the doctrinal way of life; does it matter why?

Their excuses will make them accountable before the judgment seat of Christ, or even the Great White Throne.

The farmer is accountable for the harvest, and not for understanding the microcosm of botany.

Likewise, we will be accountable for our spiritual harvest, but not for understanding the microcosm of psychology behind the positive or negative volition.

Being accountable for the harvest means doing your duty as an ambassador for Christ and as a team member in a local church.

(1) When you have an opportunity, give the gospel. Make your own opportunities and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

(2) When you run into excuses and negative volition, you can take appropriate action:

(a) When you get the chance, reiterate the truth. Their excuses do not matter.

(b) Continue to demonstrate in your life what the benefits to a relationship with God are. Show everyone what it is like to be content in God and live an abundant life. Demonstrate to them by your happiness just what the eternal advantage is.

(c) Continue to pray that God will intervene in their lives so that they will realize that they are living lives full of excuses, and relinquish them.

But you do not have to become involved to the point where you are analyzing their excuses and counseling their negative volition. Christ specifically says here that this is not a requirement.

Parable of the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43.

Introduction:

Two parables have been told related to the kingdom of God; they form the immediate context for this third one.

The first was the parable of the sower, where Christ related bad decisions to spiritual failure.

The second was the parable of the seeds, where Christ told His followers how to deal with excuses.

Now we turn to a third parable that has a close relation to the first two. In this one, we will study the actions of the enemy related to Christ's desire to produce a spiritual population for His kingdom.

This parable is more of a dispensational variable than the others, because it focuses on a group called 'sons of the kingdom,' which is pretty narrow. There is also an unfolding of certain elements of the end times which will bear a looking into.

Verse twenty four introduces this third parable: "He presented another parable to them, saying: 'The Kingdom of the Heavens is compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.'"

Matthew kicks off the narration with the aorist indicative of PARATITHEMI - 'present.' Christ presented another parable to them.

The idea of this verb is to lay something next to someone as a gift or an offering.

So Christ offers this to His disciples; He makes a formal presentation to them.

The adjective ALLEN modifies PARABOLEN. This adjective denotes another something in the same category as the first something.

The something here is a parable with agriculture as its point of illustration. But also there is a spiritual comparison.

The spiritual point of comparison is in the realm of evangelism, according to the proper interpretation of the first two parables.

So here is a man who sowed good seed in his field; sowing seed is of course giving the gospel.

The twenty fifth verse goes on with the narrative: "But while the men were sleeping his enemy came and sowed weeds also among the wheat and left."

TOUS ANTHROPOUS denotes men plural - the men who work for the landowner. These men are asleep when a second sowing is done.

EPISPEIRO denotes a sowing of seeds on top of the original one. What can be done?

The weeds become evident after a while. They cannot possibly be noticed immediately, since they are just seeds among seeds.

And once the weeds are noticed coming in among the wheat - well that's what happens in verse 26.

ZIZANIA is according to A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament "... 'darnel,' a bastard wheat... This bearded darnel, lolium temulentum, is common in Palestine and resembles wheat except that the grains are black. In its earlier stages it is indistinguishable from the wheat stalks so that it has to remain till near the harvest."

The most obvious interpretation of this element seems to be Judas Iscariot.

He was indistinguishable from the other apostles, and yet he was the seed of the devil.

Verses 26-29 record the recognition of the disaster, "(26) And when the wheat grew up and bore fruit, then the weeds also became evident. (27) And the slaves of the landowner after coming forward said to him, 'Lord, didn't you sow good seed in your field?' (28) And he said to them, 'An enemy man has done this. But the slaves say to him, 'Therefore do you want us to go out and gather them up?' (29) And he said, 'No. Lest while gathering the weeds you might also root out the wheat with them.'"

So time passes and the wheat grows and the weeds are recognized. Thus a meeting ensues.

The slaves of the landowner come forward with an honest question - because they did not do the sowing, the landowner did.

Remember verse 24, 'a man sowed good seed in his field.' This work was done by the landowner alone, and the slaves had nothing at all to do with it.

So in seeing the weeds there, the slaves are compelled to ask whether he sowed good seed.

The landowner would naturally understand their question, and would say - "Of course not." Well actually he says, 'An enemy man has done this.'

The slaves would then as matter of course desire to know their responsibility. All of those weeds

would add up to an awful lot of work for them, and they need to know how it is to be done.

The landowner concludes that pulling the weeds will pull up the crop of wheat with them, and so he has a plan.

The thirtieth verse contains that plan: "Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the harvesters, 'Gather first the weeds and bind them into bundles in order to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

So it turns out that the work will not fall on the slaves at all, but rather on another group of workers altogether, the harvesters.

There is some danger and loss in letting them grow together; the weeds will choke out some of the wheat as they grow. But it is better than losing the entire crop.

The weeds are to be gathered and bundled and burned first, and then the wheat is gathered into the barn.

The interpretation of this parable comes in Matthew 13:36-43. Christ there identifies the elements of the parable in this way:

The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man - Christ Himself.

The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom, while the weeds are the sons of the evil one.

The enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age. The harvesters are the angels.

This does much for us in the way of understanding what is going on here, and how we can apply these truths.

How this parable applies to our function as ambassadors for Christ.

Again this parable concentrates on the issue of responsibility.

You will notice that Christ never identifies the slaves in His interpretation. They must be human beings as well, even though they do not do the work of the harvest. Perhaps they are a category of

angels who do not participate in the final harvest of mankind.

The landowner is Jesus Christ, and He always plants good seed.

He plants good seed through us, His ambassadors in His absence. And He insures the goodness of the seed through the common grace ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, people who because of their belief, and more than that, because of their maturity are chosen to rule with Christ during the millennium.

Our Lord was at that time hoping to develop a ruling class, an aristocracy for His kingdom. Since He is royalty, He intended to make these mature believers His royal family.

But there was negative volition among the Jews, and they rejected His policy. Therefore the church age began.

Two timelines will help you to understand the contingency of the church age.

The Jews are positive to Christ's kingdom.

(1) Christ dies, and pays for the sins of mankind through His death on the cross.

(2) He rises again on the third day, and ascends on Pentecost to right hand of the Father, where He sits down on His own exalted throne as King of kings and Lord of lords.

(3) The tribulation ensues shortly thereafter, and continues for its 7 required years.

(4) Christ returns for the second advent, and the millennium begins, with the mature Jewish believers as co-rulers with Jesus Christ.

(5) The millennium goes on for its 1000 years and concludes after the Gog and Magog revolution.

(6) The final judgment occurs, including the judgment of all unbelievers, the judgment of all Old Testament believers, and the passing through of all believers into the eternal state.

The Jews reject Jesus Christ (the historical result).

(1) Christ dies, and pays for the sins of mankind through His death on the cross.

(2) He rises again on the third day, and ascends on Pentecost to right hand of the Father, where He sits down on His own exalted throne as King of kings and Lord of lords.

(3) The church age follows for its appointed period of time, known only to the Father.

(4) The rapture of all church age believers ends the church age, and the tribulation ensues thereafter, and continues for its 7 required years.

(5) Christ returns for the second advent, and the millennium begins, with the mature Gentile believers from the church age as co-rulers with Jesus Christ.

(6) The millennium goes on for its 1000 years and concludes after the Gog and Magog revolution.

(7) The final judgment occurs, including the judgment of all unbelievers, the judgment of all Old Testament believers, and the passing through of all believers into the eternal state.

Jesus Christ never directly causes anyone to believe in Him or to become the sons of the kingdom; all who believe and mature do so freely and without direct cause. He does influence them through the provision of the gospel and intervention in their lives, but that is not the same as overruling volition.

The field is the world; the KOSMOS according to Matthew 13:38. In this field there are good seed and bad seed.

The good seed is planted by the Son of Man, and the bad seed is planted by the devil.

It is the desire of the Son of Man to harvest only the good wheat, the sons of the kingdom.

But this parable has a stronger grounding in dispensationalism than the others, because of the phrase 'the end of the age.'

Christ is here desiring 'sons of the kingdom,' which excludes even some believers.

The enemy man is the devil. He plants the bad seed into the world of human history.

Through his system of counterfeits and lies, through his development of false necessities, the devil deceives man.

As a result of the devil's activities, there are many false 'sons of the kingdom.'

These false sons of the kingdom are virtually indistinguishable from the true ones. They speak the same language, have the same edifice of morality, etc.

There are many today in this church age who are analogous to this. Religious and moral types who put on a personality facade that is very deceptive to their real motives and lives.

Spirituality means that you have a vital relationship with God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ. Spirituality means being consistent in fellowship and fulfilling the plan of God through persistent study of God's word under your right pastor.

The Satanic counterfeits are many and subtle.

The counterfeit gospels.

(1) Mankind is perfect, and therefore does not need a savior (this for the really stupid).

(2) Mankind is imperfect, but can save himself.

(a) Various systems of good works.

· Works of compassion, such as feeding the poor and helping the helpless.

· Works of religion, such as baptism, fervent prayer, feeling sorry for your sins, etc.

(b) Psychological growth and self-improvement.

(c) Asceticism, or giving up various things in life; even things that are perfectly acceptable in God's eyes.

(3) God does not exist, and there is no after life (communist conclusion), and therefore no need for a savior.

(4) Mankind needs a savior, but must add something to the saving work of Christ, such as works, asceticism, rites of passage, or schlock psychology, such as the baptism of the spirit, speaking in tongues, and other ecstatic experiences.

The counterfeit plan of God.

(1) The Pseudo-purposes.

(a) To grow psychologically.

- (b) To witness to others and perpetuate Christianity.
- (c) To do good works.
- (d) To participate in the rituals of the church.
- (e) To give up lots of things.
- (2) Pseudo-spirituality.
- (a) Spirituality by morality.
- (b) Spirituality by rituality.
- (c) Spirituality by good works.
- (d) Spirituality by mentality.
- (e) Spirituality by asceticism.
- (f) Spirituality by personality and charisma.
- (3) Pseudo-characteristics.
- (a) Consistency in fellowship with God is replaced by consistency in the cosmic system, 1 John 1:6, "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."
- (b) Spiritual self-esteem is replaced by the personal love/personal hate binary system.
- (c) The personal sense of destiny is replaced by dispensational ignorance or disorientation.
- (d) Contentment independent of circumstances is replaced by unhappiness and circumstantial dependency.
- (e) Grace orientation is replaced by humanistic orientation.
- (f) Objective mental ability is replaced by subjectivity, emotionalism, panic, and mental disability.
- (g) Integrity is replaced by compromise without virtue.
- (h) Humility is replaced by human arrogance.
- (i) Doctrinal orientation is replaced by experiential relativism.
- The historical counterfeits.
- (1) Evolution replaces creationism.
- (2) Revisionist histories replace consensus histories.
- (3) False conclusions based on humanism replaces the concept that Jesus Christ controls history.

So Christ decides to leave the bad wheat in the world until the final harvest.

Why do the wicked remain on planet earth? Why do the wicked prosper?

Jeremiah asked this very same question in Jeremiah 12:1, "Righteous are You, O Lord, that I would plead my case with you; indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?"

Jeremiah was the prophet who endured the destruction of the Jewish kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom of the divided monarchy of Israel.

He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem, and even remained on the ruins of that great city for a while. This is where he wrote the book of Lamentations.

Col. Thieme has suggested three reasons for this:

Identification with an invisible hero. This is the blessing by association of the mature believer.

Logistical grace blessing from God, imputed to the divine righteousness in every believer. Even wicked believers may receive logistical grace blessing.

They are evil in an evil society, and so they prosper within the framework of that society. Because it is the devil's world, Satan has the power to bless them.

All three of those reasons provide testing to believers in the plan of God. You must never get your eyes on others, because it will distract you from fulfilling the plan of God.

It is a strong temptation to feel sorry for yourself as a believer who is doing the right things and see the wicked prosper.

The temptation becomes even greater when you experience lean times by yourself.

You think to yourself: "I deserve what they are getting; they do not live the same sacrificial life that I am living for God, and yet they have everything. This is unjust!"

Principle: the wicked cannot take their blessings with them.

Principle: God will bless you with blessings in time and in eternity; it is a promise from His integrity!

Principle: with the grace assets, you are the richest person in the world.

So God leaves the wicked on planet earth in order to provide testing to growing and mature believers.

Their blessing may become blessing for you, if you continue to focus on God's plan for you life.

Because when the wicked prosper it is a test of undeserved suffering, and it offers to do many things for you.

(1) They are designed to refine the testimony of the believer, in preparation for the witness stand, 1 Pet 1:6-9.

(2) They eliminate hidden arrogance and flaws in the character of the believer.

(3) They are a preview of what the believer can expect on the witness stand.

(4) They accelerate the spiritual growth of the believer.

(5) They develop spiritual muscle in the life of the believer.

(6) They develop personal love for God in the heart of the believer.

(7) The sufferings bring about great blessing from God, and therefore should be endured with a smiling face.

(8) It is also a good idea to keep in mind that you are suffering for the sake of the one that saved you, Philippians 1:29, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for Him"

Should you become distracted by the prosperous wicked, you will lose your blessings for time and eternity.

(1) The wicked lack capacity for blessing. They do not enjoy what they have and are filled with fear about losing them.

(2) Death waits ominously to devour them and all the blessings that they have. Their prosperity will be completely ravaged by death.

Death has no victory over the believer in Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, "(54) But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. (55) 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'"

AA. The final verses of this passage give us a reason to undertake a quick review of eschatology.

The purpose of the end times is to bring final glory to God in the angelic appeal trial. The end times follow the outline of the closing phases of a trial.

The tribulation forms the final arguments of Satan. It is his presentation of the earth's environment under his complete control. This will turn into an unmitigated disaster, because Satan, though the most brilliant of a brilliant race, is not capable of ruling this planet, even when everything is under his control.

(1) The tribulation begins with the rapture of the church. This is where all church age believers are taken from the earth and meet Jesus Christ in the physical universe. It is there that they will receive their resurrection bodies.

(2) The second advent of Jesus Christ ends the tribulation. The battle of Armageddon results in the total destruction of the armies of Satan, and he and his fallen angel minions are imprisoned in the Abyss. Thence follows two judgments.

(a) The baptism of fire, which is the judgment of all unbelievers of the tribulation, both Jew and Gentile, Matthew 25:31-46; Ezekiel 20:33-48.

(b) The evaluation of all tribulational believers, both Jew and Gentile, Matthew 25:31-46; Daniel 12:2-3.

The millennial rule of Jesus Christ forms the closing arguments of God in the angelic appeal trial.

(1) With the fallen angels bound, and Christ together with the mature believers from the church age ruling over the planet, the environment is truly fantastic. The establishment code for the millennium has total and successful implementation.

(2) There is no more war, and on top of that, there is prosperity of every kind. Man and nature will live in complete harmony.

(3) This makes a complete rebuttal of the chaos of the Satanic attempts at perfect environment.

And then there is a final judgment. At the great white throne, there are three categories of judgments.

(1) The judgment of believers.

(a) All believers who lived before the incarnation, both Jew and Gentile, are judged at this time.

(b) All Millennial believers are judged at this time.

(2) The judgment of unbelievers. All unbelievers in history, except those of the tribulation, are judged at this time. Matthew 25:31-46, Ezekiel 20:32-38, Revelation 20:7-10.

(3) The judgment of all fallen angels at the end of the Millennium. Their sentence was passed before time began, but its execution is not carried out until the end of human history.

So now we have a frame of reference for the last part of what Christ says. “(41) The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather from His kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who manufacture lawlessness (42) and they will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The one who has ears, let him hear.”

This is the end of the millennial kingdom, where all the unbelievers of the millennium are gathered up and judged.

They are cast into the furnace of Fire, where there will be [forever] the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But the righteous enter into eternal bliss with the Father; they will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

And then Christ finishes with the exhortation toward hearing.

BB. And this is the true application of the parable: it is the business of the Son of Man to execute

final judgment on all the people of the world. He has not given us that authority at all.

Blanket judgment is when you conclude that someone is beyond the point of no return.

There is no such as that of someone who is beyond the ability of grace. God’s grace can always act as long as that someone is alive and able to comprehend truth in an academic sense.

Therefore, unless the matter is a case for the establishment authorities, or within a realm of our personal responsibility, we are to stay clear of judging.

The Bible issues stern warnings about judgment. Listen to a few:

Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

You receive Divine discipline for the mental attitude sin.

You receive Divine discipline for the verbal sin.

You receive Divine discipline for the sin of the other person.

It is not worth it.

Romans 14:10-13, “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”

1 Corinthians 4:5, “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.”

Ultimately, the right to judge is reserved for our Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge all church age believers at the judgement seat of Christ.

Many times, people will judge because they fear they will not be vindicated. When you have confidence in the justice of God, then this fear will be removed.

Jesus Christ will be perfectly fair at the judgment seat. No detail will escape His attention.

Jesus Christ is the only person who is perfectly qualified to judge the human race. He died for those sins. He, too lived a human life, and was tempted far beyond what we will ever encounter.

When we overstep the boundaries of our legitimate right to judge, then we presume to take the place of Jesus Christ. James 4:12, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?"

Parable of the Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

"(31) He presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man after taking sowed in his field; (32) which is the smallest of all the seeds but whenever it has grown is greater than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and rest in its branches.'"

Mark 4:30-32

"(30) And He was saying, 'How should we liken the kingdom of God, or in what way should we place it? (31) [It is] like a mustard seed, which whenever it might be sown upon the earth, though it is smaller than all of the seeds of those upon the earth, (32) yet whenever it is sown, comes up and becomes greater than all of the garden plants and forms large branches, so that the birds of the heaven are able to rest under its shade.'"

Introduction.

Well, another parable from the agricultural frame of reference; this from the herb garden at the house and not the crop in the field. This may more properly be a city or town parable than a country parable.

Christ does not interpret this parable - He considers that part of it obvious, and so leaves it to

the reader. But we are not left without the ability of comparison.

The previous parable was the parable of the weeds, where the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom.

In the parable of the sower, the seeds represent the gospel. But our present parable follows more closely on the weeds, and so we should take that as the principle of greater influence.

Again Mark uses the Greek imperfect tense of the verb 'LEGO,' 'to say.' The imperfect tense tells us that Christ spoke this parable to the disciples again and again.

This would account for the apparent discrepancies between Matthew's and Mark's accounts.

The language differs somewhat significantly between the accounts; but if they record two separate statements of the parable at about the same time, there is no difficulty at all.

Exposition.

Mark employs a combination of grammar that is called the deliberative subjunctive. Its purpose is rhetorical and it generally ponders an ethical theme. The deliberative subjunctive puts a question in the subjunctive mood.

This serves as a rhetorical device; a way to get your audience thinking about what you are saying.

This deliberative question has Christ asking His audience - 'What is the right way to illustrate the kingdom of heaven?'

When He goes on with the illustration of the mustard seed, you immediately assume that this is the perfect illustration of the kingdom of heaven.

The essence of this parable is easy.

The mustard seed is a small seed.

Surprisingly, it grows into the greatest of all the garden plants (those known to the people of Christ's geography).

It becomes useful to the birds as a home and for shade.

Let's look at some of the details.

The mustard seed is the smallest (MIKROTERON) of all the seeds which are upon the earth (EPI TES GES).

The mustard seed was indeed the smallest in their ancient frame of reference for seeds.

EPI TES GES is not necessarily a reference to the entire world; in fact, the Jews commonly referred to their country as 'the land.' The Greeks translated this phrase as TES GES.

So Christ's proclamation does not cover the entire earth at all, but just that portion which encompasses the Holy Land.

The mustard tree is the greatest (MEIZON) of all the garden plants (LACHANON).

Again Christ's proclamation is limited. The mustard plant grows to a height of 4-15 feet in the promised land, and that is under ideal conditions.

This has to do with the cultivation of a house garden. The LACHANON is the sphere of the plants of the garden, and therefore does not include the plants of the field and regular agriculture.

Both gospels employ the verb KATASKENOO to describe the resting of the birds in the mustard plant. This means to 'camp' or 'rest.' The idea comes from the military bivouac - an overnight but not necessarily permanent resting spot.

This parable is therefore a description of God's spiritual plan for the kingdom:

See the Review of the Beatitudes.

The spiritual code for the millennium - that little bit of truth - brings forth a big and restful tree.

In fact, Christ has already presented us with the restful nature of His plan; it is His yoke that is easy...

Matthew 11:28-30, "(28) Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The learning yoke of Christ has to do with the rehabilitation of the soul. The soul under the cosmic system is in a burdensome slavery; thanks to rehabilitation and reestablishment of the proper relationship with God, the burden is removed and rest ensues.

The mustard seed is therefore the gospel, and when it grows up it produces peace and rest in the soul.

Philippians 2:12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

Romans 5:1, "Therefore having been justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Poise and psychological tranquility are key elements of spiritual maturity; they are signs of a strong personal love for God. 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

And personal love for God is the fulfillment of the greatest commandment, Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."