

Parables of Growth and Great Value – February 14 2021

Introduction — how are you on generosity? Lucille case told of what her parents saw one Sunday: a young family regularly sits behind my parents during morning worship. Every Sunday when the offering is taken, the father gives each of his children a dollar to put in the collection plate. One Sunday, their little boy Dusty brought a friend to church. As my father passed the offering plate to his family, Dusty, without a second thought, tore his dollar bill in half, then handed a “half dollar” to his friend to place in the plate. These parables tell us of God’s generosity...

I. What do these parables teach??

1. First — remember: what made the parables of Jesus so effective in telling the people God’s truth, were that they told simple stories based on everyday things around them.

2. So— what about the mustard seed??? — In the Middle East, there is a very small seed — a mustard seed. Not actually the truly smallest seed on the planet, it is still very small. Yet, the bush that grows from one mustard seed can be nearly the size of many trees in the region— and everyone who heard Jesus knew what he meant

3. What about the parable of the leaven?? — In fact, the parable of the mustard seed leads directly into the parable of the leaven.

— like leaven spreads throughout the bread dough, and strengthens the dough and makes it rise — in similar fashion, as the Christian faith has grown, among every people group on earth, the Christian church has had more positive impact on every nation, every society . Certainly not perfect, but Christianity, with our high ideals, challenging us to live up to the highest of ideals . . .
. Makes a difference

4. What about the two parables of great worth??? — There can be no doubt, that Jesus here was telling his disciples and those who listened, that the gospel of God’s love and salvation is worth more than anything else!!

II. What is the main point of these parables?

1. In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus meant that though the Christian church started small, he predicted that the church would grow. . . — that didn't seem likely at this time, to Jesus' disciples. It didn't seem likely even to those who first heard Matthew's gospel written and read to them, 30 or 40 or 50 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Yet we know, that the Christian church, in barely 300 years after the first Christian Pentecost which was the birthday of the church— (Acts 2) the Christian faith became the largest and the favored religion in the roman empire. Later, when the Roman Empire collapsed in the west, it was the Christian church that held people's lives and society together across Europe and Greece and Turkey and east of there.

2. The parable of the mustard seed, and of the leaven, remind us of the growing, positive influence that Christianity has around us . . . — Norman Vincent Peale, I believe, often taught a quotation, given almost 200 years ago, by the missionary William Carey — “expect great things from God; attempt great things for God”. That is an important goal and attitude for Christians to hold.

— What Jesus taught in the parable of the mustard seed is that God can do far more than we can imagine or dream on our own. That is what the apostle tells us in Eph. 3:20– 21

— “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

— What are things affected by dedicated followers in Jesus Christ, in terms of the Christian faith “leavening” society?? William Wilberforce grew up in England in the late 1700's. As a teen-ager, he was greatly influenced by the Church of England ministers who were founders of the Methodist evangelical movement, George Whitfield and John Wesley. When he was 25 years old, after he had been to college and entered politics, his faith deepened and one of the things that he and others like him felt were important to their Christian faith was— to end slavery. He made friendship with John newton, author of the hymn “amazing grace,” who had been a captain of

slave ships that sold African persons to colonies in the Caribbean, before his conversion to Christ and going into the ministry as a pastor in the Church of England. Wilberforce worked for years, with others, to convince the people of England to abolish slavery. Finally, in February 1807, parliament voted 283 to 16, to end slavery. On March 25th, 1807, King George III gave his royal assent to the new law. — The growth of the sciences and the women's rights movements came out of nations which were predominantly Christianized. Some conservative Christian leaders have had to be convinced that these movements were God's will, but it was nonetheless Jesus' attitude that "if the son will set you free, you shall be free indeed" that helped in part to propel these movements.

3. And the two short parables?? (vv. 44— 46) — the gospel is of greater value than anything!!! — For any person, if there is any activity or possession that keeps him or her from committing their lives to follow Jesus Christ— give it up!!! It is not worth it!! Knowing Jesus as our savior, knowing the life transforming love and power of his strength and wisdom in our lives, is worth more than all the gold in fort Knox, or the most precious pearl on earth ! ! ! !

Conclusion — do you remember learning about the gladiator battles in the roman coliseum in the days of the ancient Roman Empire? You may have seen the movie "Gladiator" which showed this. Part of the sport consisted in watching as human beings battled with wild beasts or against one another until one or the other was killed. [Modern bullfighting in Spain and Mexico are all that is left of the gladiator games that 18, 19, 20 centuries ago were held weekly not only in Rome, but in all of the Roman provinces. They were the equivalent of the college and professional football games of today, and of baseball and basketball games in their seasons.] in the first and second centuries, Christians were burned at the stake in the coliseum, or made to face wild lions or bears, who would rip them to shreds. But— whatever happened to the contests in the coliseums???? By the year A.D. 400, when Honorius was emperor of Rome, Christians were no longer put to death there — Christianity was the favored religion in the empire by then. But the great coliseum of Rome was still often filled to overflowing with spectators. They came from far and near to view the state games. The assembled multitude made Roman holiday of such sport and found its highest delight in the death of a human being. It was on such a day when the

vast crowd was watching the contest that a Christian monk from Syria by the name of Telemachus came to the coliseum. He had come to Rome to visit the sites of the graves of the apostles Peter and Paul, and to see the great city. Visiting the coliseum, he was stunned at the violence on the floor of the coliseum, and appalled at the slaughter in the arena. Telemachus was torn by the utter disregard for the value of human life and so he leaped into the arena in the midst of the gladiatorial show and cried out, “this thing is not right! This thing must stop!” He was knocked down but got right back up and shouted loudly, with passion and compassion, “this thing is not right! This thing must stop!” Some people shouted that he should be stoned, but others grew quiet to hear him. Because he was interfering with their pleasure, the authorities gave the command for Telemachus to be run through with a sword, which was done by one gladiator. Thus Telemachus died, still crying out, “this is not right! This must stop!” But a hush fell over the crowd — a holy man, a Christian minister of peace and grace had been struck down, as if he were just another beast to be killed. In dying he kindled a flame in the hearts and consciences of thinking persons. History records that because of the courageous act of Telemachus, within a few months the gladiatorial combats began to decline and very shortly they passed from history. Why?? Because one man had the courage to speak out for what he knew was right, and against what was wrong. There are still wrong things for Christians to demand to be made right, in our nation and in our world today. Lynching has largely been rooted out, through our laws and the diligent work of federal and state law enforcement, and the promotion among all people that lynching — murder, for reasons of hatred and de-humanizing other persons— is wrong ! ! ! ! However — even the hanging of ropes in a noose, to imitate lynching— is wrong!! If it is meant as a joke— it is not funny. And if it meant as a serious threat— then Telemachus was right!! “This is not right!!! This thing must stop!!!”

The enslaving of women, and teenage girls, for prostitution still happens around the world, and even in this country!! What I mean, is young women and girls, as young as ten years old, taken from their home country and sold as sex slaves, to be sent to other countries as forced prostitutes!!! It even happens— in the U.S.A.. In recent years, law enforcement experts have said that one of the highest trafficking events in the U.S. for forced teen prostitution is — Super Bowl Sunday. There are still things in our nation, and in our world, that need to be corrected, that need

to be changed — wrong things, even sinful and criminal practices, which the people of God must stand against. If Jesus Christ is truly our savior, if the gospel is truly that pearl of great price that is worth more than anything, then let us share that message, and tell people to put hatred and violence and destructive behaviors behind us and follow Jesus Christ every day, every night, every hour.