

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. <sup>29</sup> As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

<sup>30</sup> Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. <sup>32</sup> Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

<sup>33</sup> With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup> He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

### The Kingdom of God.

Leadership is very important. We have all heard stories of failing schools being turned around by a new and excellent head teacher, who identifies what is wrong, and how to fix it, and builds a culture among staff and pupils that is positive, encouraging, and which brings the best out of people. We have heard of great chief executives who have taken their businesses to new heights by their vision, dedication and example. And we also know of failures of leadership, in which bosses have been over-promoted, set a poor example, show cowardice before tough decisions, fail to prioritise the right things, or perhaps encourage a culture of sycophancy around them which fails to advise, question or challenge. Leadership is very important.

And we have always known this. It is present all the way through the Bible. **Moses** grows into an outstanding leader, because of the closeness of his relationship to the Lord. **Israel** demonstrates its failure of character to Samuel by demanding a human king — where they should be content with the Lord as king. **David** broadly lights the way in good leadership: all the time that he is close to the Lord he proves excellent. But he is fallible and the power leads him into corruption. It’s a common story.

The only wholly good kingship is when God becomes incarnate and leads by example. **Jesus** leads, but humbly and peacefully. He demonstrates his power over the wind and the waves (as the Father had done in parting the Red Sea), and his sovereignty over all of life and death through his resurrection. And the **Kingdom of God** is one of his most common subjects of teaching.

So what does he say? He says that the kingdom is like a farmer who scatters seed, and this seed grows, day and night. He doesn’t know how! But when the grain is ripe it is harvested. He also says that the Kingdom is like a mustard seed — a small seed that can grow in to a large shrub.

What does he mean by these sayings? In the first case we have a sense of the growth of the kingdom being both active and passive. The seed is sown, but then nothing more is required — the growth will happen! Furthermore there are times when this growth happens and we don’t understand how or why! I think that if we look for it, we can see God at work, shaping the world and society for the better, even when others are unaware of it. Despite the secularisation of society, many aspects of life are still becoming more shaped by compassion — which is of God, even if we don’t attribute these movements to God’s work. The mention of

reaping, however, is suggestive of judgement as well as salvation — in the end only the grain will be kept, not the weeds, nor the chaff.

The second story is simply speaking of surprisingly great growth. The mustard seed is small — the outcome, in the end, is huge. This is an encouragement. Jesus began his work with just twelve disciples around him and a few other followers. How can this movement keep going? And yet it did, and there are apparently 2 billion Christians in the world, and the church is still growing rapidly, especially in the southern hemisphere.

Now the kingdom of God is a very different kingdom to the ones we see on earth:

We belong to the United Kingdom. We were born as citizens. Others in the world were not. Some would like to be, yet cannot be. God's kingdom welcomes all who wish to be a part of the kingdom.

Kingdoms of the past have warred with each other. Depending on where you lived you might be a citizen of one country and then find that war has now moved the border — and your citizenship has changed. I knew someone whose place of birth was originally Poland, but is now Germany, because the border moved!

God's kingdom is different — while some may try to wage war on God's kingdom they cannot, by force or by any means redraw the map of where God's kingdom extends, nor make one person give up their citizenship. Equally — Christianity's spread was so remarkable because it happened with no force or violence — rather, despite their innocence, Christians were the object of violence, and yet the bounds of the kingdom still kept expanding.

Living in the United Kingdom, we have laws, and we expect everyone to keep those laws, whether they like them or not. God's kingdom is forced upon no one — you join the kingdom only by your own volition.

The disciples needed to hear this — it was too easy for them to suppose that they were part of a revolutionary Jewish conspiracy that was going to overthrow Herod and the Romans. Jesus therefore needed to teach them that the kingdom of God was not about geographical but Spiritual kingdoms.

We need to hear his message too, though. He gives us hope — we cannot lose our citizenship, and, whether we understand not, God's reign continues to grow, both in our lives and in the world — even if this means remains a mystery to us.

How then do we respond?

Firstly with hope and expectation. God's kingdom is growing — people are coming to faith. People's lives are being liberated through new and deepening relationships with God. This deepening faith is slowly healing the damage that sin does to people and to the world. You may not see it happening, but it is.

Secondly, God's kingdom expands faster when we are working with him. We must pray our part. Do we want a world of peace, kindness and goodness? Pray for it. Do you want to see an end to hunger, oppression, slavery, war, inequality? Pray about it.

Thirdly, play your part. And you know this bit already — you are ambassadors for God's kingdom. The good you do is real good. The good you do makes you more fulfilled, and your benefactors more blessed, and the kingdom richer and wider.

I began by speaking of the importance of leadership. The kingdom of God is simply about our recognition that the leadership Jesus shows us in the Gospels, and that Paul and the other early Christians reflect in the rest of the new testament, is real, important, world changing leadership — which we too can imitate, and should imitate.

Amen.

SDG.