

## 27-The Invincible Seed: Growth in God's Kingdom

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*Series on Mark*

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**Bible Text:** Mark 4:26-29  
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This evening we want to continue our study of the Gospel of Mark 4 and we'll read verses 26 through 29, and then I want to read three verses from 1 John 2 as well. Mark 4. Hear the word of God as it comes to us this evening, verses 26 through 29.

26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. 28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. 29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

And then 1 John 2:12-14.

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. 13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. 14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

Thus far the reading of sacred Scripture. May God add his blessing to it.

Dear congregation, the Lord Jesus has told us that we can know a tree by its fruits, that a bad tree will not bring forth good fruit and vice-versa, and so the call to examine ourselves in preparatory week is a call to look for fruit and to explain what that looking for fruit is like scripturally so that we may not wrongly but rightly examine ourselves both objective, as we heard this morning, and subjectively, as we hear this evening.

So the fruit of a Christian is such that though a Christian never has as much fruit as he desires, he also cannot deny that something of the marks and fruits of grace are evident in his life, and that that something is something that he could never produce himself; that

this is, indeed, the work of God and the work of grace within him. And that fruitful life is something that when our spiritual life is healthy is always growing, graduating into different degrees in which Christ becomes more to us and we become less to ourselves. And that really is the message behind Jesus' parable from Mark 4 that we look at this evening from Mark 4:26-29 when he says particularly we'll read again just verse 28, be "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

So with God's help we want to speak with you this evening about the invincible seed. The word "invincible" in the dictionary I looked up defines it this way: incapable of being conquered, overcome or subdued. It's a seed that can't die. The invincible seed. Growth in God's kingdom. That seed will produce fruit. So three thoughts: the tender blade; the ripened ear; and the full grown corn. Growth in God's kingdom, the tender blade, the ripened ear, the full grown corn.

Only Mark presents us with this parable which is unusual. In fact, it's the only parable in which Mark is the only one to present it because the Gospel of Mark doesn't have as many parables as the other synoptic Gospels Matthew and Luke. This parable particularly speaks about a sowing time, a growth time, and a harvest time. It talks about the activity of a farmer, the activity of the seed, and the activity of the soil. It tells us that the seed sprouts and comes up like a little blade of grass. The farmer doesn't know how it grows, all the farmer can do is sow the seed. It's not in his power to make the seed grow. You can see that already in the opening verse, "the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how." So the farmer has to acknowledge that the growth happens mysteriously. It grows by a supernatural power. The seed of the word, Jesus is saying, in his kingdom grows in the heart of a sinner when it's watered by the Holy Spirit in a way that no man can produce, no minister casting the seed or elder casting the seed or Christian casting the seed in the life of some unbeliever can produce that seed. Then Jesus begins to explain in this parable this different activity, this activity that men cannot perform and it leads to a growth time to a reaping time in verse 29, "But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

So the idea here is that God works in the life of his people through the ministry of the word, in that sense it's a continuation of all the parables in Mark 4, especially the big long one we looked at in the first 20 verses about the sower going forth to sow, but now the specialty of this parable is that it begins to look at how as he grows and matures from the blade, to the ear, to the full corn in the ear, that God ripens his people for glory and when the time is ripe, he then puts in the sickle and he harvests them and he says, "My child, come home to me." So this graphic depiction of the invincible seed with invincible growth and invincible development until the harvest is ripe, is just a beautiful comforting picture that God will do his work in all those given to his Son and he'll do a complete job of it until the sickle is brought in to every ripened believer and he goes home to be with the Lord to that eternal Lord's Supper forever and forever.

So like a farmer who goes out and looks at the seed he's sown and maybe even gets down on his knees and looks along the soil to see if he can't see just a little bit of a blade coming up, so you see those who are invested with casting the seed of God's word upon the congregation are looking for fruit. Whether it be a minister or elders or deacons or godly believers who long for the conversions of others, we are looking for this word of consolation here, this sure word that though we don't understand how it can be, and thought despite all our imperfections in preaching or teaching, God will do his work, God will cause the seed to germinate, God will cause it to spring up, God will cause it to penetrate the surface, no longer be hidden, and then we will see it first as a little blade, then as an ear of corn, then as full corn in the ear.

So this text is really setting before us the certainty, the comfort that this will happen but also in the very language Jesus uses there's an element of mystery, isn't there, the mysteries of the operations of grace in the establishment of the kingdom by God alone. The wind blows where it listeth, where it desires, and you hear the sound of it but you cannot tell, Jesus said, from where it's coming and whither it goes, so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. That is why self-examination can often be a difficult thing because it's challenging. You often can't see the growth in yourself. Others can see it better in you than you can see it in yourself and often the more we grow, the less we think we're growing because the more we grow, we grow closer to Jesus, and the more we grow closer to Jesus and his holiness, the more unholiness and sin we see in ourselves.

So Jesus unveils just a little bit of that mystery through this metaphor of farming, talking about the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, and our forefathers, especially men like John Newton in particular, have preached sermons about that and compared these two stages of life, stages of growth in grace, as you can see it also in 1 John 1 about the babe in grace, the young man in grace, the father in grace. There are degrees in faith, in saving faith in the lives of God's people. There is such a thing, therefore, as what we call growth in grace. Reformed fathers used to call it weak and strong in faith or they talk about little faith, or faith as the grain of a mustard seed, or full assurance of faith. But the point that Jesus is making here and the point that John is making in 1 John 2 and the point that the 300 texts in the Bible that encourage spiritual growth is making, is that where there is life, there is growth. Where life is healthy, that is, there is growth. If someone has a baby and the baby doesn't grow at all, they take him to the doctor. Something's wrong. Little lambs grow up into sheep. Vine buds grow into vine branches. Children grow into adults. Babes in grace grow into young men and fathers in grace. God's people grow. That's why Peter said, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now in one sense, of course, everyone grows. Hypocrites grow in hypocrisy. Pharisees grow in self-righteousness. Perfectionists grow in fleshly perfection. But the true Christian grows in Christ. That's where he's positioned. That's his status. That's his condition, to grow into grace and knowledge of his Lord and Savior. So that raises the question, the question this text seeks to answer: how does that growth happen, that divine life, how does it grow in a sinner? And Jesus is teaching here that the normal way, though, of course, God could do everything in 24 hours, couldn't he, but the normal way is that this growth is gradual. It's like a crop that is harvested. First you see the blade, then

you see the ear, then you see the full corn in the ear. Few believers are born again with a full assurance of faith. It's not impossible, with God all things are possible, but God's normal way is to begin, first of all, with a quickening of a dead sinner into life.

That begins the work and when there is that beginning, you don't always see any fruit for a little while, do you, because it's underground; it's in the heart that a sinner is going through something that is hard for him to express and old habits die hard, and at the very beginning of the way maybe it's not so obvious, you see. And yet a sinner is born again and there's life, that seed has been germinated and it will pierce through the soil into the air but it begins with being born again. Regeneration. The new birth, we call it. They're all synonyms for each other. Ephesians 2:1, "You hath he quickened," that is, brought to life, "who were dead in trespasses and sins."

So this life that will grow until the harvest and then will have the sickle come and gather it into the eternal harvest to be with Christ forever, it begins with being born again. John 3:3, "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." It begins with the entrance of supernatural light into the soul so that the sinner begins to see the truths of God, the truths of his word with the reality that he's never seen them before. The word of God comes alive. There's light. There's life. 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts." You see, all these biblical expressions teach us that saving religion begins with the work of God, not the work of man. True religion begins with God bringing life and light to a dead sinner. It's God sovereignly breathing upon the valley of dead dry bones.

So true religion has a beginning, it begins with a work of God. It's sort of like a recreation which resembles the first creation. You remember how God began creation, "Let there be light and there was light." How does God begin the recreation? "Let there be light and there is light." Paul describes the unsaved as being darkened in understanding. Left to ourselves, we're unable to perceive the seriousness of our lost condition, unable to perceive our dire need for a Savior. We need light and that's what God does when he regenerates us. He sets us before himself as the living God and then God is no longer just a name or a word, but God becomes reality when there's light. He becomes reality and sin becomes reality. We begin to know, as John Calvin put it so well, we begin to know at the same time, we can't say which one comes first, we begin to know God and we begin to know ourselves. We begin to feel that God is bringing us to stand before him naked and undone, and we see him in his holiness, his majesty, his glory, his reality, and we begin to see ourselves, we begin to say with Job, "I've heard of thee by the hearing of the ear but now mine eye seeth you wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

So a genuine sense of the reality of the living God also produces within us a genuine sense of conviction of sin, the conscience where light and life come, the conscience is awakened not just to dread sin because of the consequences of sin but now the conscience is awakened out of a deadly sleep and it discovers a great need in the soul, and it begins somehow inexplicably, mysteriously, begins to love that God that becomes real. Even though he's holy and I cannot meet him, it begins to hate sin because God hates sin.

So the question arises in the soul: what must I do to be saved? Is there no way by which I may escape divine punishment, Lord's Day 5, Question 12, and be again received into God's favor? We begin to cry out, then, for mercy, "O God, mercy!" We begin to feel the reality and the weight that we have a soul for a never-dying eternity. We understand and Christian in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" as he put his fingers in his ears when people said, "Come back," and he just cried out, "Eternity! Eternity!" And he ran for the Wicked Gate. "I must be saved! I'm without God! I'm without hope! I'm without Christ in the world!"

So that's the beginning and God uses his law, you see, at that point, doesn't he? That's his normal way and I know you know this if you're a believer. Your eyes go open and you've heard the law read many times but now it seems like God is using the law to expose your sin all the more and your eyes see it and your heart feels it, and you understand the spirituality of the law, that it demands perfection, and you see its spiritual character, and you hear its dreadful curse that, "Cursed is he who continues not in everything in the book of the law to do it," because you begin to understand then that even if you have one unforgiven sin, you could never stand before a holy living God who cannot take anything sinful into heaven, and you begin to feel the reality that you can die the way you are, and you look into the mirror of the law and the law teaches you the truth about yourself, that you're accursed by God. Oh, how that can drive a sinner to cry out for mercy all the more.

In the past, you see, you thought you were fairly decent. You thought you weren't really such a bad person, maybe better than your neighbor, at least. But now you see that so much, yes, everything is wrong with you. You're nothing but a transgressor. You know, when Reverend Kuivenhoven read the summary of the law this morning, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God above all. Thou shalt love the neighbor as thyself." Has it ever become real to you, congregation, that by nature you have never for one second in your life loved God above all? You have never for one second in your life loved your neighbor as yourself? You're sinning against the law every tick of the clock, every second of your life. "I'm lost! I'm a sinner! I need to be saved!" That's what becomes real when God begins in our life.

Now some are drawn to Christ through this law work, coming to the end of the law, coming utterly undone, totally hell-worthy. Christ is the end of the law to him that believeth. Others are drawn to Christ with less law work, like Levi and Zacchaeus, upon one word of Christ, they left all and followed him. We don't read of a profound law worked, at least not yet. Some have a deeper law worked after they first received some hope in Christ. Some are led in more gentle evangelical ways. But it doesn't matter. In all cases, you see, you see enough of your sin to see your need for a Savior. That's what's important. When someone asked the great Prince of the Puritans, John Owen, how much law work do I need to know in order to come to Christ, to need him, he said, "Just enough to need him. Just enough to need him." So some are led to a point where they need him more quickly, some quickly powerfully, some are quickly gradually, some are gradually, it maybe doesn't even go so deep even though it takes longer. There's all kinds of variety here but the point is that that law work, that conviction of sin does not miscarry but leads

us to Christ so that it penetrates the soil and we really look to him and life springs out in him and the blade becomes visible.

You see, genuine conviction of sin will always lead to Christ sooner or later. In fact, in the genuine conviction of sin, there's already an outgoing of the soul to God in Christ to some degree even if the soul is ignorant of Christ almost entirely, but there's a hope there. Even though the soul can't define it very well, there's a hope there in mercy. Like the prodigal, I'm sorry, the publican. When he came in the back of the temple, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner!" smiting on his breast, he had some hope in God outside of himself, didn't he, or he wouldn't be pleading for mercy or he wouldn't have been in the temple where he was despised. He's going to God.

And even though a sinner, you see, sees men as trees walking, doesn't see very clear like the man in John 9, he can say, "One thing, I was blind, I knew I was blind, but now I see. I see something. I don't see very clearly yet but there's a little blade coming up. There's a little blade coming up." I begin to see my need for the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for a righteousness better than my own. I begin to hunger and thirst after that righteousness. I begin to see my need for the Savior. I can't go on without him. Some come to that point in just incredible overwhelming despair. Others come to that point without a great deal of distress. But the point is this: have you needed experientially the Lord Jesus Christ and has he worked in you so that his blood, his satisfaction, his salvation becomes precious to you? Have you found Jesus in the word of God and has he spoken that word whether it's preached or read or talked about powerfully to your soul? Have you been risen from the dead spiritually? Has he called to you, "Lazarus, come forth!" Has a dark soul's night receded? Has a dawn of Gospel light appeared? Has the blade broken the surface of the soil so that it was as if Jesus called you personally, privately? "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." And you couldn't stay away. You fell upon him. You cried out to him. Your heart was impacted. You were drawn by the glory you beheld in him and him crucified. And what a change there was within. It became a springtime within for you. You began to see that he's a Savior for the greatest of sinners. That you're not excluded but that all your sins only includes you because he came for people exactly like you. And as you began to see him and began to see that he's the greatest of Saviors for the greatest of sinners, oh, then he becomes sweet to you and you say with the Queen of Sheba, "The half of it is not told me about the beauty of the greater King Solomon." And your soul becomes conquered by Christ and you fall in love with him.

And now everything changes. Again, everything changed from when you were an unbeliever to the time you became aware of your sin. There was just a huge change. Your desires changed, your loves changed, your hates became your loves, your loves became your hates, but now, now the ordinances of God are very sweet and full. Now you can't wait to get to church, you can't wait to hear Jesus preached in every sermon, and it seems like your heart is warmed every time you pick up the Bible, every book you read seems like Jesus is speaking, seems like Jesus is present, seems like your eyes are fixed on him. You confess he's fairer than the children of men. Or like a tree that is most valuable when bursting with fruit, you begin to blossom. You begin to enter a time of first love. It's a

spiritual springtime and all is blooming within. You really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only God becomes real to you but Jesus becomes real to you and you look upon him as never before. You taste the word of God. It's sweeter to you than honey in the honeycomb and though your faith is yet weak, though you still rely too much on your feelings, yet these are the things that cause the blade to break out and spiritual life grows up and one day you will look back with fondness, or you do look back with fondness on such a time, maybe even with a kind of regret because everything was so warm and so alive. You had so much zeal in these first beginnings. The blade has penetrated.

But when the fruit is brought forth, you see, bringing forth fruit, the earth bringing forth fruit of herself, that is the Holy Spirit, of course, it means you don't do it yourself but the fruit, the Spirit gives the soil, the Spirit gives the seed, the Spirit gives the life. First the blade. The blade. What joy a farmer gets when he sees the blade. There's growth. There's life. What joy a preacher has when he hears someone beginning to see some sweetness in Christ as a poor, needy, hell-worthy sinner. Oh, it could just make you dance for joy. God is bringing someone up from the dead, spiritual death. What a joy. Whether it's a boy or girl, a teenager, a young man, an elderly person, it doesn't matter, it's just wonderful. Just wonderful. It's a minister's real wages and a minister looks at that and says, "I don't know how it happened. I don't know how. I'm like the farmer, I sow the seed but I could never make it to grow. This is God's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." When you see the sweetness of that first love, oh, there's so much you want to tell that soul that he has so much more to learn; that the blade has yet to become the ear, has yet to become the full corn in the ear. But it's sweet to see the blade and the blade does grow into the ear.

You see, when we're so taken up with the love of Jesus, we can no longer see the wrath of God against our sin but our hopes are in him and we find satisfaction in him, and we feel like at moments that our souls are on the borders of heaven and Jesus seems near and dear to us. We might feel at such a time that we can never fall easily into sin again. It seems like we've been lifted up and we're consumed with the things of God. It's like Israel when they defeated their enemies. They witnessed the drowning of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea and they sang on the banks of the Red Sea the song of Moses and the Lamb. They thought, "Now we're gonna make rapid strides through the wilderness and we'll soon be in the Promised Land." But there were enemies, there were difficulties, there were trials and so the time of first love, we may see our enemies defeated, we may sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, we may expect to go on rejoicing and soon enter the Promised Land, but there's a wilderness to pass through. There's problems in the climate. There's days when it doesn't rain.

How will the blade grow into an ear? Well, the seed has to grow. God wants it to grow. The blade, the tender blade cannot always remain a tender blade. God loves to grow his people and he tells us in John 15, "Every branch in me that bears fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit." And so that's what God does with us. That's what he does with us when we're young converts, not just young in years but I mean young in grace. We need to be purged for together with the tender blade there are usually shoots that shoot up with harmful undergrowth, undergrowth of spiritual pride, of self-righteousness, of confidence in the flesh, and all of that must be purged away.

Sometimes, I remember the time when I was in my first love. I actually looked down a little bit on some of God's older people who seemed to complain so much about indwelling sin. I feel really stupid for doing that now, but you see, you find this in the life of Peter, too, don't you? He was so bold. The time of first love, he was just, he was full of life. He said, "Now at the Christ, the Son of the living God, though all men be offended because of thee, I will never be offended. I'm gonna stand when everyone else is gonna fall." Jesus says, "Peter, before the cock crows you're going to deny me and when thou art converted again, that is, when you're turned around again," not two conversions but a daily conversion here, "when you're led deeper, Peter, when you grow more, when you become an ear instead of a blade, strengthen your brethren. You've got more to learn, Peter, much more to learn. You need fresh deeper repentance. You need to be led on by the Holy Spirit. You need Christ to increase within you and yourself to decrease, Peter."

So it is with a young convert. We don't like it but we need to be led into the wilderness to humble us, to show us what is in our heart. You see, in the beginning of the way, that tender blade just has so many feelings, so many experiences, so many little tokens of God's mercy that we tend to rest on those things, and there's a danger of making a Savior out of our feelings and experiences. Now we wouldn't say that perhaps, but in practice it's almost as if our feelings and experiences give us a title to heaven and we're prone to forget that not our feelings but only Christ's blood and righteousness can give us a title to heaven.

So we need much more self-knowledge as we grow into that ear of corn. We need to learn how deeply we've fallen in Adam, how depraved our nature still is, how powerful the old man still is, how totally corrupt we are apart from grace. We need to learn what Peter learned in the hall of Caiaphas. We need to learn what Hezekiah learned on his sickbed, "O Lord, I'm oppressed. Undertake for me." And you see, God has all kinds of ways and all kinds of means to lead us into the barren wilderness of our miserable selves so that we learn experientially the truth of those solemn words of Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil."

So we begin to learn painfully, powerfully, when we would do good, evil is present. We cry out, "O wretched man that I am!" And we're weaned away from our feelings and experiences and we see more and more that our foundation for everything lies outside of ourselves. In the media, as we heard this morning, even the feeling of Christ's nearness cannot save me. He alone can save me. And sometimes that goes through deep ways, as if Christ withdraws himself and hides himself and we can't look upon him as we did before. Sometimes we feel as if we've lost our true religion, our comfort, our joy, but you see, what God is doing is he teaches us more and more that there's nothing in us. He purges us that we may bear more fruit. He cuts us back. And God knows exactly how much to cut us back. We don't know.

You know, years ago, years ago there were two elders at my home, many years ago, and they were coming to do a little trimming of the bushes, and the one elder was arguing

with the other elder, they actually had an argument about how much to trim, to purge the bushes back, how much to cut off. And the one said, "Only so far." And the other one said, "No, you've got to do it more." And I never told them when they were alive but what happened was the one who wanted it cut back even more, when the other one turned his back and went to work somewhere else in the yard, he did cut it back even more and the bush died. It died because he cut it back too far. You see, the Lord doesn't do that. He cuts us back, he purges us, he trims us back so we think less of ourselves, but he knows exactly how to do it and how much to do so that we still live. And when you trim back rightly, you see, then out of that new plant that's trimmed, there's even more fruit. It's heavier. It's thicker. That's what the Lord does.

So increases and we decrease and more and more then we rest on his promises, on his word, and, yes, that generates feelings, yes, it generates experiences, but we don't rest on those things, we rest on him. So we rest on him as our substitute, as our surety, as our scapegoat and it's the one who took my place on Calvary's hill.

Yesterday I was talking with Wilma a little while about the loss of her brother, Pete, from Kalamazoo, and I knew Pete very well. When I was a boy, my dad would talk to him all the time about spiritual things. All the time. Many many hours. And so I wanted to hear how did things go at the end of Pete's life. How was he. "Oh," she said to me, "he was well. He was well." And she said something I hope not soon to forget. A nurse came in and the nurse said, "Pete, we've gotta do some more blood work on you one night," and she said, he said, "All my blood work has been done long ago. It's all been done 2,000 years ago." And you see, when you grow in grace, that's what you learn. My salvation has already been accomplished in Christ. I'm just a recipient, a grateful, humble recipient. I have nothing to offer. He has everything to give. He must increase, I must decrease. My hope is built on nothing less. Oh, the ear of corn comes out now. My hope is built on nothing less than on Jesus' blood and righteousness. And you see, then, then I'm able to answer all the objections from unbelief, from Satan, from sin, even from the justice of God, because then I can testify, "Who is he that condemns? Who is he that condemns me? It is Christ who died, ye rather who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who also makes intercession for me."

Now my faith is established. It's in Christ. It's all in Christ. Now I'm made conscious of my acceptance in the Beloved. Now I grow in assurance of faith. Now I glory only in Jesus' blood and righteousness. Yes, the blade becomes the ear but under the care of the divine husbandman, that ear will grow into full corn in the ear, and that's our third thought. "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," which is ripe for harvest. So how do you explain that? Well, there are a lot of parallels between a really good marriage and a good spiritual healthy relationship with God, and I think God purposely made it that way. You know, when you first get married, there's just so much excitement, so much electricity in the air, so much ecstasy. It's so wonderful. A couple comes back from their honeymoon, they really are in Cloud 9, aren't they? They're just so happy. It's the same thing when you first have a baby. You're just amazed. It's just so exciting, so wonderful. You're so happy. What about 20 years later? 30 years later? It's hard to explain, isn't it? Somehow some of that

ecstasy is trimmed back but there's a deeper love, a more genuinely self-sacrificial love, and you love your spouse also because of your spouse's track record and faithfulness and love for you.

So in spiritual life, you see, the more you grow, the more you trust God and the more you distrust yourself actually to the point where you trust God more than you trust you, you trust his plans more than your plans, his ways more than your ways, and so you mature in faith. And the ear grows into a full corn in the ear until you can say as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:30, "But of him, of God, are ye made in Christ Jesus." Are ye in Christ Jesus who is your righteousness, your wisdom, your sanctification, your redemption, your all and in all? You are brought to hang upon Jesus for everything because you learn more and more there's nothing you can do that's acceptable. Everything is a continual committing of yourself and your entire life to Christ. You look at yourself and you're so disappointed with your lack of progress in spiritual sanctification. You just can hardly believe how easily you can stumble over some small sin and you fly to Jesus again. It's almost a continual going to Jesus. Life is a constant going for the mature believer from your emptiness to Jesus' fullness, from your darkness to Jesus' light, from your sin to Jesus' cleansing blood, from your prayerlessness to Jesus' prayerfulness, from your thanklessness to Jesus' thanksgiving, from your unfruitfulness to Jesus' fruitfulness so that you can say, "Lord, you were right when you said for me is thy fruit found." I just love those words from the Belgic Confession of Faith when it speaks about those nine marks of God's people in one of the articles of the true church, and then it says this, that a believer takes continual refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ and his blood.

Wilhelmus a Brakel in his great classic, "The Christian's Reasonable Service," said, "I find myself going to Jesus every day. I've gone to him thousands and thousands of times and he's never disappointed me." That's what the mature believer learns, more and more taking refuge to Jesus. He's a poor sinner still. Others may boast of what they've done for Jesus but the mature Christian boasts of what Jesus has done for him and that what Jesus means to him daily, and when that becomes real, when the full corn in the ear becomes manifest and Jesus becomes everything and the kingdom of God grows in us to ripen for harvest, you see, then all the graces of God get matured within us, they become more balanced, they become stronger in their diversity, for example, and then we grow in humility. Not in talking about humility but in living humility. Maybe before we talked about it, now we don't.

Life is a daily confrontation with indwelling sin. We don't dare trust our own heart. We must battle daily. We must say with Paul, "I am less than the least of all saints, of sinners I am chief." And yet we cannot deny that we think more of Christ than we did one year ago, five years ago, and so there's growth and you think less of yourself and you think more of Jesus. There's growth. There's growth. There's growth in holiness even though you can't see it. True holiness grows between the rocks of self-righteousness on one side and the rocks of Antinomian security on the other side. Many have made shipwreck on both sides of the road but there's a path of sanctification that lies between these two beacons and in that path of sanctification we're just crying out every day, "Show me thy

way, O God. Teach me thy paths. Lead me a step at a time. Help me to look to thee. Make me useful today. Make me fruitful today. Keep me from sin today."

It's a daily life, a daily life. If you don't know something, you see, of some of these things, then you're missing that inner life that God's people know, then you don't have the work of God within you. No, I don't say you have to be the full corn in the ear to come to the Lord's Supper, I don't say you have to be the growing ear, what I do say is there's got to be a blade. The Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 28 says so well in the questions, so unembarrassedly, unashamedly, that God commands me and every believer, every believer to partake of his Table. That means also the blade. That means those that see their sinfulness and those who are looking outside of themselves to Jesus, who cannot live on without him, who feel their need for him. They belong at the Table of the Lord. It's not just for strong faith, it's for weak faith. It's to make weak faith stronger, that's the purpose of it, to strengthen our faith. It's for those who can say, "One thing I know, I was blind but now I see. One thing I know, I have a hatred for sin and a love for God I never possessed before. I'm not satisfied with my knowledge of God. I'm not satisfied with my knowledge of myself but I've seen something of both and it makes me want to know Christ more. I want to be with him. I want to be by him. I want to eat and drink of his fullness. I'm hungry for him. I'm hungry and thirsty for his righteousness." He says, "Come, my child. All who are hungry and thirsty after my righteousness are welcome."

Well, let me close this sermon with two applications. If you know absolutely nothing of these things subjectively, don't think you possess saving grace. We preach about the need for objective salvation outside of ourselves, that does not mean that we say that that objective salvation happens to us and we feel nothing of it and there's nothing subjective going on. No, the foundation of our salvation is totally objective, 100% outside of ourselves, but when that is made real by the Holy Spirit and he works these things in us, as we say in the Catechism language, misery delivers in gratitude, or as you could say here, the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear, when that is worked in us even a little bit, you see, then we will hate sin and we will love Christ and we'll long to commune with him, and then what he's saying to us in the Lord's Supper is he doesn't want one hungry child of God to stay away from him. It's his delight to feed his people.

Have you ever noticed how much mothers like it when you eat their food? I don't know, at least maybe the women I've been around but it seems like they all like it when there are teenage boys in the house and they eat a lot. They just love it because, "Ah, I like to see people eat the food I've prepared."

Well, in the Lord's Supper you don't need a lot of food, just one bite, one sip, but when you taste and drink the Lord Jesus, you see, you always get a lot because in him there's fullness, there's bread enough to spare. And he loves, he loves to give himself away. He loves to commune with his people. Don't stay away. Don't bring darkness upon yourself/ If you know what it means to grieve over your sin and to long for the Savior and if you've known him in the past and you've backslidden, don't stay away. Repent of your sin and come just as you are, poor, needy, dependent. But if you know nothing of these things, if everything I said tonight seems like foreign language to you, you've never grieved over

your sin because God hates sin, you've never truly had your soul go out to Jesus Christ to find your hope in him, if you don't know these things, you don't belong at the Lord's Supper. How can you remember him when you don't know him at all?

But secondly, my last application tonight is this: remember that where growth happens, and growth is necessary, we grow always differently than we expect. He increases and we decrease. You've got to remember that otherwise you'll just beat up on yourself all the time. Those who grow the most in the kingdom of God are precisely those who learn to love Christ more and more and put their all in him, and the more we commune with him, the closer we're brought to him, the more we read of him and treasure him and find our pleasure in him, and the more he increases, the more lovely he is, the more he becomes our Savior, our nearest kinsman, our elder brother, as Paul puts it, our all and in all, the more we will see our own sinfulness and the lower we will come in ourselves and that's growth. That's growth.

Andrew Gray who died when he was 22 years old and who asked the Lord on his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday because he was so tired of his own sin, if he could please take him home this year before his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday, and the Lord answered his prayer. He died when he was 22. A very mature saint. He was a ripe corn, full corn in the ear. Andrew Gray said God matures his people by reading two books. The first book is called Jesus Christ, and the second book is called self, and he said, if you study and search and read in these two books every day, Christ will increase and you will decrease and you will grow, you will grow from the blade into the ear, into the full corn in the ear. Amen.

*Lord God, help us examine, help us examine whether we have grown in the knowledge of self, the knowledge of thyself and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and do help us to grow in self-knowledge, in faith in Jesus, in humility, in holiness. Plant life where there is no life. Call sinners out of nature's darkness into thy marvelous light. O God, be a wonder-working God that the invincible seed be planted and spring up how we know not, only we know it's by the Holy Spirit. Spirit of God, come and work in us. Come and bless us this week. Encourage us. Comfort us. Draw us. Feed us. Give thyself away to us and help us in response, in humble response, to give ourselves away to thee. Covenant thyself to us that we may covenant ourselves to thee and give us a good week, some sweet communion not only but a week of solid conviction, "I have only one righteousness and that is Jesus Christ. On him I stand. I know no other place." Lord, may we come to thy Table to behold the King in his beauty and meditate on Jesus to find him amiable and sweet and approachable and the lover of the souls of sinners who put all their trust in him. We ask all this out of free and sovereign grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.*