

Mark 4:21-34 – How the Kingdom Grows

Ronald Wallace in Baker's Dic. of Theology "Parables" p. 391-393

"The main theme of the parables of Jesus is the significance of his own ministry and work among men." See Matt. 21:33-41- the Tenants who kept the vineyard for the owner.

Intro:

In his gospel Mark records this statement about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry: ¹⁴ (A) Now after John was arrested, Jesus (B) came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, (C) "The time is fulfilled, and (D) the kingdom of God is at hand; (E) repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1:14-15

Prayer:

Lord God our heavenly Father, we thank you for the teaching ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for these parables that he used to teach us about his kingdom. Help us to understand them, to understand their spiritual meaning for the benefit of our lives. Teach us, O Lord, your truth today through your Word, we ask in our Savior's name. Amen.

So Jesus announces that the kingdom of God was at hand, the time of its coming had arrived. And it had arrived in his person, for he is the king of the Kingdom of God.

The gospel of the kingdom of God is a major theme in Jesus' ministry and in the apostles also. For example, we read in the last chapter of Acts regarding the apostle Paul's ministry in Rome where he lived in his own rented quarters:

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, (A) and (AS) welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ (AT) proclaiming (AU) the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (AV) with all boldness and (AW) without hindrance.

Jesus came proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom, and one of his methods of teaching was that he often used parables, and he often used these parables to teach about the kingdom of God.

What is a parable? It is a story about something common in life, something that most people can relate to, and it is used to teach a spiritual truth.

For example, we looked at the parable of the Sower and the Soils in Mark chapter 4 and we saw that Jesus took a common activity in agricultural life in Palestine in those days, something that nearly everyone had seen in the spring of the year, that that was the picture of a farmer going out and sowing seed – that is throwing and scattering seed on the ground as he began to plant his crop.

And anyone whose done this or been part of this, knows that not all the seeds will come up and sprout. Some will never germinate, and some will germinate and begin to grow, but then they'll die because the soil is too shallow, and others will begin to grow and get a good start but then the thorn bushes around them will wrap themselves around the tender stalks of grain and choke them so they can bear no grain.

But then there is another group of seeds that falls on rich soil and it germinates and grows and gets plenty of sunshine and rain and procures an abundant crop – 30, 60, or 100 times what was planted.

And so Jesus taught this parable to the crowd of people, and his disciples were there hearing it like everyone else, but later when they were alone with him they asked him to explain the meaning of the parable.

Then Jesus told them that not everyone is able to understand these parables, at least not their spiritual significance. Only those whom God determines and reveals the meaning will be able to understand them, understand the message God wants to give them.

And so Jesus laid out the spiritual truths in the parable: the seeds represent the Word of God, the Sower is ultimately himself, but it can also be anyone who spreads the gospel message, and the 4 different kinds of soils represent 4 different kinds human hearts and their various responses to the Gospel message, to the Word of God. In the first group of people, the seeds which fell on the hard-beaten path in which the birds came and immediately ate up all the seeds represented the fact as soon as they heard the Word Satan came and snatched the Word of God out of their minds so their hearing did them no good at all.

The seeds which fell on the thin, rocky soil which grew up quickly but then died just as quick when the hot sun came up and the soil was too shallow to allow the roots to take hold and get nourishment and so these little newly sprung plants also died. This represented people who had hear the Word, and it begins to grow in their lives – but then when tribulation and trials and persecution rose up – they turn back from embracing the Word – they turned back from following it – and returned to their old way of thinking and living. This is what happens in some people's lives. Jesus is like giving case studies of different but common situations in some people's lives.

And then there was that third group of seeds – those which fell among thorns – maybe this was on the edge of the field, and the plants of grain began to grow but the thorn bushes also began to grow and choke the life out of the plants of grain. These represent people who gladly hear the Word but them some distractions and allurements come their way. In Mark 4:19: ¹⁹ but (A)the cares of (B)the world and (C)the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Unfortunately, this is the experience of some people. They like what they hear about the Word and they embrace it – they think – “this sounds good, I’ll go with this.” But then as life goes on, certain things happen and look more attractive and inviting to these people: cares of this world, and riches, and the desire to gain some of the things of life that people devote all their time and energy to and they go after these things and the Word they had originally embraced falls to the side and is left languishing in the dust as they move on to other things that interest them more. They give up on the things of God in order to go after the things in the world. Not that everything in the world around us is bad, no, some is good and necessary such as our jobs and hobbies and families, but these things should not become idols to us – things which capture our exclusive devotion and energies.

But then, as you remember, there is one more group of people – those who represent the good soil, the rich fertile soil, in which the seeds are thrown by the Sower, the farmer. Here when the seeds land, they rest in the earth until the warmth of the soil and the moisture from the rain causes them to germinate, to put down roots, and then from the top of the seeds little stems push their way up and burst forth from the soil into the light of day. Like an infant coming out of its mother’s womb, into the light of day – into the air and sunshine – crying and screaming with life – life on the outside – life in the world.

And so these little plants grow and grow and began to produce grain and when the harvest arrives they provide an abundant yield for the farmer. He can harvest the grain, maybe its wheat, for his family to have bread, or to sell in the market to earn money for his family.

Of course this last group represents people who have hearts that are open and welcoming to the Word of God. They hear the Word and receive it and rejoice in it and keep it, and that Word begins to grow in their lives and produce spiritual fruit – lives of devotion to God and his kingdom – faithfulness and love and loyalty to God, service to God and to his church, and to the needs of lost people in the world. The Word stays in their lives and works powerfully all the days of their lives - they are, of course, not perfect people, they still sin, but they repent and cling ever more tightly to their Savior Jesus Christ as he holds them in his powerful hands so that nothing can snatch them away from him.

This is the parable of the Sower and the Soils. It is simple and it is powerful for it shows us from a common activity in ancient Palestine that reveals great spiritual truth – and that is, that the condition of the human heart makes all the difference in how the Word of God will be accepted, neglected, or rejected by various people.

And now we come to three more follow up parables in Mark 4 that I believe are related to the Parable of the Sower and the Soils. Let’s read the first in Mark 4:21-25, called in the ESV translation ...

A Lamp Under a Basket

21 And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? 22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” 24 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. 25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

This parable, the Lamp under a Basket, seems to be a natural follow-up from the previous parable of the Sower and the Soils

What is the most natural thing to do with the precious treasure of the Gospel? Would we not want to let it shine out and be seen so that others can benefit? We would not want to hide such a blessing from others.

If I am a scientist and have discovered a sure-fire vaccine to protect people from every possible strain of the Covid-10 virus, if I have an ounce of humanity in me, I would not want to withhold that information from others, but to share it with them, to get as many people as possible to learn about it.

Jesus says in verse 23: **23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.**” Jesus says, hear what I’m saying. Don’t take this lightly. Let your light shine so you can bring the light of my kingdom to others yet in darkness.

And the more we sow the light of the gospel to those around us, the more blessing will be given to us as well. The more we share, the more we will receive. A free-flowing stream has more health and vitality than a stagnant pool. It is with the exercise of muscles that they grow stronger.

But those who do not have the Word in their lives, even what they do have, will be taken away from them. They will end up totally destitute spiritually and poverty-stricken in the things of God. There are really only two groups of people in the world: those who have received the Word of the Gospel into their lives, that is, they have come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and those who have rejected him and his gospel.

What makes the difference? It is only the work of God’s Spirit in our hearts. I’ll talk a bit more about this later.

Let’s look at the next parable:

26 And he said, (A)“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; (B)he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once (C)he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

This parable also appears to also be a follow-up to the Parable of the Sower and the Soils and it focuses on the person, who having received the good seed of the Word in their lives, then go out to sow seed so that others may hear and believe.

I'd like to point out key word in this passage – v. 27 the seed grows.

Also if we look at the next parable – the mustard seed, we see in v. e32 it says “when it is sown it grows up...”

These parables are all related to the growth of the Word in people’s lives, but even more than that, the growth of the Kingdom of God in the world.

I'd like to suggest that we see in these 3 parables a unifying truth – the growth of the K of G. In the first section regarding the lamp, here’s what se see:

How does the Kingdom of God grow?

I. By the light shining out of its subjects- Shining Lives

In the 2nd parable the sower sows the seed and then goes about his business. But he does do the curial thing – he sows the seed.

The Parable of the Seed Growing

²⁶ And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Jesus tells his church in Mark 16:15: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned

The seed – is the Word of God.

1 Pet. 1:23 - ²³ (A) since you have been born again, (B) not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through (C) the living and abiding word of God;
KJV = Incorruptible seed

v. 27 - “He knows not how the seed spouts” – He is not a biologist or a plant scientist, but he know the seeds sprout. He can’t describe all the intricacies of natural growth – but he knows it happens. He doesn’t have to know. He knows it happens. Just like a common housewife who starts her car to go to the grocery store. She can’t tell you how the engine works, how the gasoline is ignited and causes the engine cylinders to go up and down and turn the drive shaft – she just knows if she turns the key and pushes on the gas pedal, the car moves forward and get her to the store!

V. 28-“The earth produces by itself” - “by itself” is the Greek word “automate” from which we get “automatic.”

The Sower can’t do nothing to make the seed sprout and grow. He is powerless!

So when we disseminate the Gospel, when we tell others about Christ – once we tell them, that is, we clearly explain the gospel – the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Christ, there is nothing else we can do to bring about the sprouting of the Word of Christ in their hearts and minds. It is totally out of our hands. All we can do is pray. The awakening of spiritual life in a human being is totally the work of God.

[Ligonier] John Calvin writes that the Lord opens a man’s ears “and that no man obtains or accomplishes this by his own industry.”

We proclaim the gospel, we share the gospel, and then we have to leave it in God’s hand. Will that person believe the Gospel, will they understand their lost condition, their need of salvation, will they repent of their sins and believe on Christ to save them? That all depends on God’s sovereign grace.

Did he shed his love upon them before the foundation of the world? In other words, did God elect them to be saved? If he did, at the proper time in his sovereign purposes he will enable them to repent and believe the gospel. He will generate saving faith in their hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit will cause that seed of the Gospel to sprout in their minds and hearts. He will awaken them spiritually. He will bring them out of spiritual death to spiritual life. He will cause them to be born again spiritually. The wind of the Spirit will blow across their lives creating saving faith and all things will become new. He will lift them out of the pit and set their feet on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

From that point on they will never be alone in this world. They will always have the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Nothing can separate them from the love of Christ: “... neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8:38-39

God’s Word will accomplish God’s work in God’s time.

How does the Kingdom of God grow?

By the light shining out of its subjects-

Shining Lives

II. By the sovereign work of God within people – Sovereign Grace

Ⓞ“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout,

Ⓟgiving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
 it shall not return to me empty,
 but ^(Q)it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
 and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Isa. 55:10-11

III. The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Interpretation:

Growth of K of G in world is manifested in the growth of local Christian assemblies throughout the earth,

How does the Kingdom of God grow?

By the light shining out of its subjects-

Shining Lives

By the sovereign work of God within people – Sovereign Grace

By growth of the church in the world -

Spreading Assemblies

The establishment of the gospel in the early centuries.

Growth of church in subsequent centuries throughout the earth until Christ's return.

The consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return when he appears and resurrects his people and the brings down of new heaven and new earth
 (Eph. 1:9-10 ⁹ ^(V)making known^[G] to us the mystery of his will, ^(W)according to his purpose, which he ^(X)set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for ^(Y)the fullness of time, ^(Z)to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

AP

1. Let your light shine.
2. Do your part to sow the gospel and leave the results in God's hand. We have to do our part.
3. Be vitally connected to the church and so what you can to support gthe rowth of church in world.

4. **Be not anxious about your own spiritual growth.**

Mr. Elliot said this, "It is not well in spiritual husbandry (gardening)...to be taking up the seeds to see whether they are growing. It is wiser to sow the seed, and to believe that sun and rain will quicken it."

Expose yourself to the Word of God, always have the welcome mat out on the front door of your life to the Word of God.

Be hungry for the things of God. "Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled."

You think you're not advancing very far in the process of sanctification, that is, growing more in the likeness of Christ, with a Christian attitude about what's happening around you? That is probably a healthy concern – it may indicate you're growing more than you think you are.

You can't make yourself grow. Spiritual fruit grows naturally as the Holy Spirit waters the Word of God and nourishes it and makes it grow in your life. But you must have something within to be watered and nurtured. You must have the Word of God in your life. Be hungry, be open, be welcoming, be diligent to bring the knowledge of the Word of God into your life – listen to it, read it, take it in, think about it. As Psalm 1 says, the man of God "meditates day and night" on God's law, his word.

– and God will bring forth spiritual fruit in your life.

How does the Kingdom of God grow?

By the light shining out of its subjects-

Shining Lives

By the sovereign work of God within people – Sovereign Grace

By growth of the church in the world -

Spreading Assemblies

Prayer: Lord, plant your Word in our hearts that they may bear fruit unto your glory. Enable us to scatter the Word of the Gospel to many people. In your good time and sovereign will, bring in a great harvest of souls as beneficiaries of the redemptive work of Christ our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

-by Pastor Jeff Gregory
Good Shepherd Church
Dallas, TX 75228

3-20-22