

“The Parable of the Mustard Seed”  
Mark 4:30-34  
(Preached at Trinity, June 23, 2010)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Mark 4** is a chapter full of parables. Remember, Christ’s parables deal chiefly with the nature of His Kingdom.  
**Verse 26** – “The kingdom of God is like . . .”  
**Verse 30** – “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it.”
2. Jesus first began by describing those entering the Kingdom by giving the Parable of the Sower. He described four types of soil upon which the good seed was sown. Only one of the four proved to be good soil that brought forth fruit.
3. Of course, Jesus explained the parable as referring to the different people who hear the Word of God. The issue is *how* they hear. And the difference in how they hear is dependent upon the work of God in their hearts.
4. As we continue in **Mark 4** Jesus gives us yet another parable about the Kingdom. This one has been titled, “The Parable of the Mustard Seed.”
5. Remember the nature of our Lord’s Kingdom - It is based upon his dominion – His sovereign rule
  - A. It is an independent reign - God's Kingdom is not a democracy
  - B. His reign is absolute - He makes all law, holds all authority
  - C. The Kingdom is a current reality
  - D. Our Lord’s Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom with earthly realities  
Although it is a spiritual kingdom it has visible living subjects.  
Jesus Christ is reigning in the hearts of His people
  - F. It is a progressive kingdom - it will fill the whole earth  
It is a victorious Kingdom - its victory stands apart from the conditions around us.  
Outward conditions are irrelevant to our Lord's Kingdom
6. This last aspect of our Lord’s Kingdom is the subject of the parable before us tonight. In spite of the fact that most people do not hear the Gospel effectually the Kingdom is nonetheless growing exponentially.  
The main scope of this parable is to show the great success the gospel will have and the great growth of the church.
7. Jesus compares it to a mustard seed.
  - A. Matthew and Luke’s Gospels describe the seed as growing into a tree. What we know of the mustard seed is that it doesn’t reach the size of anything remotely comparable to a tree. In fact, the mustard seed we use to make the mustard condiment is simply a plant.

- B. This is probably referring to the Khardah (Arabic for “mustard”)
1. The seed is extremely small  
**Matthew 17:20** – “And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”
  2. It grows quickly since it is an herb (not a tree). In a matter of months it can grow as much as 15 to 20 feet tall with many fan-like branches  
**Mark 4:32** – “yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches”
8. Various opinions have been given regarding the birds.
- A. Some say they represent young converts flocking to the church.
  - B. Others point to the nests of the birds and describe the great comfort of church
  - C. Still others say they represent the evil of Satan like snatching away the Word in the Parable of the Sower.
  - D. Remember, a parable is not the same thing as an allegory. It isn’t necessary to dissect all of the various parts seeking symbolism in each part. There is one chief scope to this parable: *To show the great success the gospel will have and the great growth of the church.*
9. This is given in contrast to the Parable of the Sower where most of the seed that was sown was given to failure. It fell upon the wayside, or stony ground, or among thorns and did not bear fruit.  
 In this parable, however, the seed is characterized as growing to greatness.
- I. The Church had very humble beginnings
- A. In the post resurrection there were only the 11 Apostles and a handful of other disciples.
    1. Pre-resurrection all but a few had fled. They were a small flock of defenseless sheep – it appeared that Christianity had died
    2. After the resurrection this small group still lacked the power for the Kingdom’s work  
 They were commanded to wait for the indwelling, empowering filling of the Holy Spirit  
**Acts 1:4** – “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” *He said,* “you heard of from Me;”  
**Acts 1:8** – “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
  - B. Then Pentecost came and they were filled with the Holy Spirit
    1. The Apostles became powerful preachers of the Gospel  
 Later Paul would say,  
**Romans 1:16** – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

2. At the close of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 God demonstrated the mighty power of the Gospel.

**Acts 2:37-41** – “Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

**Acts 2:47** – “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

- C. There have been times in history when the church seemed small and weak
  1. There have been times of terrible persecution and martyrdom. The Roman Empire during the days of early Christianity sought to destroy the church – but was unable.
  2. Satan has sought to destroy the church through sowing in seeds of false doctrine, but he has been unsuccessful
  3. God's plan for the church, however, is unfailing  
KJV **Matthew 16:18** – “upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
  4. It's growth will continue until the end.
    - a. Jesus foretold its increase  
**Matthew 24:14** - "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”
    - b. The Kingdom of God will surpass the greatest of kingdoms that have ever existed upon the face of the earth.
    - c. And all kings and kingdoms will be made to bow before our great Lord and King  
**Philippians 2:9-11** – “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

## II. The Parable of the Mustard Seed presents the unchanging nature of the Kingdom

- A. Jesus describes the Kingdom as having begun as only the seed of the mustard plant but that it would continue to grow to a great plant.

However it continues to be a mustard plant

1. The church is founded upon the doctrine of the Apostles  
**Acts 2:42** – “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

2. The doctrine of the church is unchanging  
**Matthew 24:35** - "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."
3. The Gospel must never be tampered with  
**Galatians 1:8** – "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"
- B. The ultimate foundation of the church is Christ
  1. He is the bond that holds the church together.
  2. We are united to Him as one - Jesus described Himself as the vine with the saints as the branches  
**John 15:5** - "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

### Conclusion:

1. Mark concludes this section of parables with a summary statement.  
Jesus continued to teach in parables.
    - A. For the hard hearted the parables would serve to further harden - To veil the truth from those not willing to see it.  
**Mark 4:25** - "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."
    - B. Mark states in **Verse 12** it's a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy  
**Isaiah 6:8-10** – "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" <sup>9</sup> He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' <sup>10</sup> "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."
  2. For the disciples, Jesus continued to reveal the nature of the Kingdom.  
**Mark 4:34** – "He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples."  
**Mark 4:11** – "And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,"
  3. These things are still occurring today.  
The Kingdom is continuing to advance. God is still saving His people.  
**Acts 2:47** – "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."
  4. He is still teaching us privately by His Spirit.
  5. We need to always ask ourselves, what part am I playing in our Lord's Kingdom. The means by which He is adding to His Kingdom is through missions and evangelism. May each of us labor diligently as God adds to His church.  
**Mark 16:15** – "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
- Matthew 28:19-20** - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."