

“Patiently waiting” (10)

We are going to look at a parable today, which is only found in **Mark’s Gospel**. A parable that is closely related to “**The parable of the Sower**” which is found in **Mark 4:1-20**. Jesus often introduces a parable with the phrase, “**The kingdom of heaven is like.**” For example in **Matthew 13:34** Jesus says that, “**The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.**” In **Matthew 13:44** He says that, “**The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.**”

And it is in **Mark 4:26-29**, we find “**The parable of the growing seed,**” which we are going to look at today. Where again Jesus introduces His parable with the phrase, “**This is what the kingdom of God is like.**” Jesus has just finished explaining to His disciples “**The parable of the Sower.**” But the disciples still didn’t understand and so Jesus asks them in **Mark 4:13** “**Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?**”

And so Jesus explains “**The parable of Sower**” to them and we pick the story up from **verse 26. Mark 4:26-29** “**This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.**”

I heard a story about a preacher who went on a mission trip to Russia to preach the Gospel. His usual translator was ill at this time so they got a stand in for him. But the stand in translator got a little mixed up with the words “**heirs**” and “**errors**” in his translation. When the preacher began his sermon, he noticed that his audience wasn’t all that impressed but he kept on going anyway. He was worried that he may offended some people so he asked the stand in translator to tell him what he had said to the people. Here is what the translation sounded like. “**My brothers, you and I here today are the mistakes of God's kingdom. We are the mistakes of God and fellow mistakes with Christ, who is the mistake of all God has made.**”

And the point of the story is that we are not mistakes of God, we’re not fellow mistakes with Christ and we’re certainly not mistakes of God’s kingdom. In fact we’re a part of the kingdom which God spoke about way back in Old Testament times. So before we get into the meaning of the parable I would like to say a few words about this kingdom.

The word “**kingdom**” literally means “**reign or rule**” and the idea of the kingdom has its roots way back in the Old Testament. From the beginning the people of Israel are described as being unique and a chosen people of God. They are the recipients of His special favour and God Himself is their king.

The Bible says in **Judges 8:22+23**, “**The Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule over us--you, your son and your grandson--because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian." But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you."** The people wanted Gideon to rule over them and be their king but he tells them that God Himself will be their leader and He will rule over them. You see if you have a kingdom, you need a king to rule over that kingdom.

And in **1 Samuel 8** we find that God’s people are looking for a physical king and they say to Samuel in **1 Samuel 8:5** “**You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.**” But Samuel wasn’t very impressed with this, so he prayed to God and God said to him in **1 Samuel 8:7** “**Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king**”.

In other words, they already had a king, God was their king, so the Israelites weren’t rejecting Samuel, they were rejecting God Himself. But even though they rejected God, God gave them a king, King Saul, but as time went on, those who were wise, recognised that there was no other authority except God’s authority. **Psalm 103:19** “**The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.**”

And it was during the days of David and Solomon that the Israelite’s kingdom reached its peak, but as we know even this was short lived. And so they lost their kingdom because they rejected their true king and His commands, and they ended up in captivity. And it’s during this time in captivity that the prophet **Jeremiah** gets a word from the Lord and says in **Jeremiah 30:8+9**. “**In that day,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.**”

And again Daniel said in **Daniel 2:44** “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.” In other words God was saying that there was a time coming when He would reaffirm His kingly reign and restore to His honour the people called by His name.

Now after **John the baptiser** was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. And He said in **Mark 1:15** “The time has come; the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Jesus said a little later in **Mark 9:1** “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.”

Now did that time come? I believe it did. In **Acts 2:47** we find people being added into that kingdom. “**And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**” And remember we are dealing with a spiritual kingdom here, not a physical one.

Let’s read the parable again and see if we can understand how this spiritual kingdom grows. **Mark 4:26-29** “**This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.**”

Now the first thing we need to notice is that the kingdom is not something that sprung up in a moment. It was planned, it was prepared for and brought into being in the past and even now awaits its final consummation. In other words, it started its life in the mind of God; it was spoken of by the Old Testament prophets, like we looked at a moment ago.

Jesus said it was near and in **Acts 2** the spiritual kingdom was established. And if you are a Christian today then you can be sure that you are part of that kingdom today. For example in **Colossians 1:13+14** Paul describes the kingdom as “**The kingdom of the Son he loves.**” “**For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**”

In **Hebrews 12:28+29** it says, “**Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."** In other words we are in that kingdom now.

But in **2 Peter 1:10+11**, Peter says, “**Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**”

Now just as a side note whenever the Bible talks about the kingdom in the future tense, it’s talking about heaven itself. And loved ones this is the central truth taught in “**The parable of the growing seed.**” The kingdom spreads all over the world. And that’s what we’re going to look at today, the growth of this spiritual kingdom.

I want to share with you **4 points** today about kingdom growth and the **1st point** is this, “**The kingdom growth is gradual**”. In the production of grain, nature works step by step, in other words there is a step-by-step process by which it grows. And nearly all of its marvels are formed gradually.

I like to watch TV programmes about wild life and wild flowers and sometimes they film a plant growing and what they do is speed the film up so that you can watch it grow, and it’s amazing to see the process of its growth.

And those of you who are gardeners will plant a seed in the ground and after a while you will see the results of that growth. But the actual process of growth is barely visible, and it’s the same with the kingdom of God. Jesus says in the **2nd half** of **Mark 4:28**, “**First the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.**”

And if we were to apply this parable to an individual person, we would get a lesson in patience. You see Christian growth is gradual, when a baby is born, they don’t walk and talk straight away, they have to be encouraged to walk and talk. And the more they try, the more confident they get at it, it’s the same with baby Christians.

We shouldn’t expect them to be able to preach a sermon or teach a lesson in a ladies class straight after their baptism.

They need time to learn the simple things about Christianity. Things like learning how to pray, learning how to read and study God's word by themselves. And when you think about it, if it's possible to expect too little of ourselves, it also must be possible that we expect too much of ourselves. And so in our moral and spiritual development we want to take giant steps, and if we fail we end up being so disappointed in ourselves, we need to learn to walk before we can run.

And church, the mature Christians among us should never forget nature's lesson, and that is the necessity of gradual growth. You know people have come up with hundreds of ways to get people into their church. They have got plans on how to get people to become Christians. Some use musical instruments to attract people into becoming Christians, some say, "Look how spiritual I am, I speak in so called tongues."

But we need to remember that a person doesn't go to bed a sinner and wake up the next morning as a Christian. It doesn't happen like that, we need to be patient and trust God. Acts 5:14 "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number." We need to let young Christians develop gradually and we need to trust God to add people to His kingdom.

2. The kingdom growth is orderly. Mark 4:26+27 "A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."

When the seed is sown and buried in the soil, its very existence seems to be threatened but the seeds growth is marked by an orderly development. In other words just like we go through different stages in our physical growth, it's the same with the kingdom growth.

When kids are born and they go through the teething process, then they grow a little more and go through the terrible two's, three's, four's and five's. And then they start to go through the rebellious stage, which starts at age 6 and goes on until they are 18 years old. And in between all of that they go what we call puberty, which is another fun part of growing up.

But most people grow in the same order, infancy, childhood, youth and manhood. And it's almost impossible to tell when one period ends and another period begins. But at the same time the different stages of development can be clearly recognised. And it the same with the Christian development, Peter says that recent converts to Christianity are like newborn babies.

1 Peter 2:1-3 "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

But sadly you also get Christians who aren't young but haven't grown out of the baby stage yet. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?"

In other words Paul is saying, "You guys are still like little babies, when are you going to grow up and act like the mature Christians you are supposed to be?" And then we get other Christians who are growing up and maturing.

1 Corinthians 14:20 "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults." Jesus says in Matthew 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In other words there are different stages of Christian growth that we all need to be aware of. A young Christian may do and say things that aren't very mature because of a lack of knowledge and understanding. But those who are mature should recognise this and give them a helping hand in their understanding.

Have you ever wondered why some Christians do nothing but complain and grumble all the time? I believe that one of the reasons they complain and grumble all the time is that they haven't grown up in Christ, they are still babies. But every Christian should be growing spiritually.

Ephesians 4:15 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

We've all got a duty to grow up, but we've also got a duty to understand the different development stages of the Christian growth. In other words we need to be patient with those who are slow to develop.

3. The kingdom growth is from God. Can anyone here really explain how things grow? You see a seed can be taken into the laboratory and analysed, but the scientist cannot tell you what makes a seed turn into a flower, the best scientists in the world cannot explain it.

Mark 4:26-28 "A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain." And it's the same with a farmer, a farmer can do many things to the soil, things like ploughing the soil, fertilizing the soil, and weeding the soil, but he cannot make the seed grow.

We sing the song, "There is, beyond the azure blue." And the words from the 3rd stanza say this, "Secure, is life from mortal mind, God holds the germ within His hand, though men may search, they cannot find, For God alone does understand." Now what is A. W. Dicus saying?

He's saying the same thing that Job is saying in Job 36:26-29 "How great is God--beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out. He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion?"

He's saying that the world's leading scientists and all the so called great theologians can try to understand how the universe was formed, how the human body works. He's saying that people can search but they will never understand because it is only God who truly understands these things. In other words the lesson here is that there are some things that God alone can do.

And it's the same in the spiritual kingdom of God, whatever growth takes place in His kingdom is due to the operation of God. In other words we may sow the seed, but we cannot make it germinate in the human heart. We can select the seed and prepare the soil. **And how do we prepare the soil?**

Colossians 4:3+4 "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should." We prepare the soil with prayer but we can't make the seed grow. 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

Now how does God do that? I heard a story about a young sceptic who sat in the church assembly one morning and the preacher was speaking about the wilderness wandering. And he made a statement about how the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and their sandals never wore out. The young sceptic shouted, "Rubbish, how's that possible?" The preacher went up to the young man and said, "God!" The young sceptic said, "Oh, I understand." And the preacher said, "No son, nobody really understands."

And we don't understand how God makes the seed grow, but we know He does or we wouldn't be here as Christians today. But just because we allow God to make the seed grow, that doesn't let us off the hook. Paul says to Philemon in Philemon verse 6 "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

We've still got a responsibility to carry out, because we've still got a vital part in the growing process and our part is an active one. In other words, we accept that we can't make the seed grow, but we still need to make sure that the conditions are right so that the seed will have a chance to grow. And the right condition is this, John 4:24 where Jesus said, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

You see at the end of the day the kingdom belongs to God and the growth of the kingdom will be from God. The Sower must sow God's seed and wait patiently for God to do His part. We must sow the seed, but it is God who causes the growth, it is God who gives fruit.

4. And finally it is God who harvests that fruit. Jesus says in Mark 4:29, "As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." **What's He saying?**

Jesus is saying that it is God who produces growth; hence the fruit, then when this fruit is ripe, again it is God who will bring the matter to a conclusion not man. He's saying that judgement is certain. **James 5:7+8** "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

For the people who have been born again, this is our hope, for those who haven't been born again; this will be the Day when they will wish they had never been born at all. **Revelation 14:14-16** "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Judgement is certain and so when you think about it, this whole parable puts us in our right place. And that is that we are helpless without God and we have to wait patiently for His return. It's not enough just to work, we must work and pray. We can do a lot as Christians but there are some things we can never do.

Lamentations 3:25+26 "The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." And if you're not a Christian today then you can be sure that whenever you hear His word being preached that His seed has been truly planted in your heart.

The question is this, **are you going to humbly accept His word in your life or are you going to stubbornly going to resist His word in your life?** I pray you choose wisely.