

## *Valley Bible Church – Parables of Jesus*

### **What is the Kingdom like? It grows.**

#### **Introduction:**

Eleven of Jesus' parables begin with phrases that say something like *"the kingdom of heaven is like."* Since Jesus mentioned this subject so often we can, and in fact must, learn something about it.

The word "kingdom" literally means "reign" or "rule" and in the Old Testament speaks of a literal kingdom on earth such as the Kingdom of David, or the Kingdom of Saul. It culminates, of course, in a promised Kingdom God on earth with Jesus, The Messiah, on the Throne of David in Jerusalem ruling the world forever.

In the New Testament it is used differently. When mentioned in a future sense, it speaks of a kingdom to come, at once both the eternal earthly one that the Jews await and also heaven itself. Peter refers to this as entrance *into "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (II Peter 1:11).

When mentioned in the present it refers to the body of Christ, the church, where God rules and His sovereign will is done. Jesus taught us to pray to God, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10) And Paul talks of being transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13).

Remember that the Jews would not verbalize the name of God and so they often substituted the word "heaven." This is why Matthew, when writing to his Jewish audience, used the "kingdom of heaven" that is obviously, by context, an exact equivalent to the "kingdom of God."

Have you noticed that parables often come in threes? We had three teaching about God's desire to reach the lost, three instructing about prayer, three on stewardship, and three on grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

This week and next week we will look at three very short parables Jesus told early in His ministry that deal with the growth of the Kingdom of God on earth. We begin with a very humbling lesson we all need to learn: Even though we have a part to play in the growth of the kingdom, ultimately the kingdom grows by the work and will of God.

#### **The Seed Grows Spontaneously**

##### **Mark 4:26-29**

#### **Background:**

Jesus had appointed twelve men (Mark 3:2) into whom He would pour His life and to whom He would entrust the spreading of the gospel. The rapid growth of the church would be largely due to the life and work of these men.

He gave them the message to preach and the authority do miraculous things including healing the sick and casting out demons. He called them his "spiritual family" and revealed to them His ministry and mission. He came to seek and to save the lost, to free those who are captive to sin, to move men from the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light.

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And he explained it all so they could understand. *"He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His disciples."* (Mark 4:34)

But what is this kingdom and what is it like? Jesus used stories that the members of a largely agrarian society could understand. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "What is a farm but a mute gospel?" Romans talks about nature revealing God to man. The seed sowing and growing mentioned in this parable is just one example of these truths.

*Read Mark 4:26-29*

No one knows exactly what a seed is or even understands completely why and how it grows. We have scientific observations and ideas but they just tend to add too and acknowledge the mystery. It is a miracle!

*"... the seed sprouts up and grows--how, he [man] himself does not know."*

It just seems to grow by its self, by spontaneous generation. In reality, since Genesis, *"out of the ground the Lord caused to grow [whatever]... "*

The kingdom of God has the spontaneity of a seed, a divine vitality to create new life, but in reality it is God who makes it grow.

This is the central truth taught by this first parable, but we can learn other things as well:

### **The Growth of the Kingdom is Gradual**

#### **A. Seed growth**

Steps of growth:

The ground is prepared, the seed sown, perhaps it is fed, watered, weeded but the growth is still step by step.

First the seed, then the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. (v 28)

Process of growth:

It is not hard to detect the progress of growth since it gets visible larger, but it is impossible to perceive the process. (Kid's garden illustration)

#### **B. Body Growth**

Steps of Growth:

One is "born again" in an instant, but one does not become a mature Christian over night. Christian growth is gradual and comes step by step. It is a lesson in patience.

It is our nature and our culture to want to have instant results. Having a microwave dinner in three minutes is possible, but growing from spiritual infancy to maturity takes years... and rightly so.

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Becoming a great doctor, engineer, writer, musician, plumber, teacher, salesman, parent, anything worth while, takes time and struggle. How much more the road to spiritual maturity.

Process of Growth:

We must feed on the Word, be taught by word and example, learn by experience, be disciplined and corrected, and we grow at an almost imperceptible rate. In fact, isn't it often painful to observe our selves making the same mistakes, doing the same foolish things, growing so slowly?

But, progress is obvious to those around us and close to us and if we look back and examine our lives we can often see how far we've come.

### **Growth of the Kingdom is Orderly**

#### **A. Seed Growth**

When a seed is placed into the ground, its very existence seems threatened. And in fact it is. John 12:24 -- *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

And yet, the ordered progression of growth occurs: first blade, then ear, then full grain; or first bud, then blossom, then fruit; or first infant, then youth, then adult.

#### **B. Body Growth**

When one becomes a believer he dies to the old life in the flesh and comes alive to the life in the spirit. Romans 6:11-- *"Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*

And when that happens an ordered progression of the spiritual life occurs that is observable:

1 John 2:14-- *"I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."*

New believers are newborn babies who must desire the spiritual milk of the Word or they will not grow. (1 Peter 2:1-3) They are just beginning life, 1John 2:12-- *"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

Young believers are strong, in the Word, and in the fight.

1John 2:13-- *" . . . I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father."*

Adult believers should be mature, striving toward Christ-like perfection with a deep and personal relationship to God as described so perfectly in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

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### **Growth of the Kingdom is From God**

#### **A. Seed Growth**

The bottom line of this parable seems to be the seed seems to grow by itself. A man sows some seed and *"goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know."*-- Mark 4:27

What does it look like to that man? Mark 4:28 -- *"The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head."*

No one can really explain how things grow. A seed may be taken into a laboratory and analyzed, but the scientist cannot completely understand how that seed becomes a flower.

I just read of experiments in a prominent agriculture school where they planted produce under ideal conditions: Perfect rich nutritious soil, top quality proven seed, ideal temperature and sunlight, additional care with nutrients added, and a totally controlled individual irrigation.

The results were good, very good. But, much to the chagrin of the scientific farmers, some of the seed just didn't grow. It was, the article said, "like they had a mind of their own."

The farmer can do all the right things, but he might as well "just go to bed" because he can't make the seed grow. Ultimately there are some things that only God alone can do.

Farmers have always tended to be a praying people because they know that regardless of their finest efforts they don't control the elements and they don't make the seed grow.

#### **B. Body Growth**

Mark 4:26 --*"And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil"*

What is true in the natural world is doubly true in the spiritual world. Whatever growth takes place is due to the working of a sovereign God. We can and must sow seed but we cannot make it germinate in the human heart.

In Corinth, Paul planted; Apollos watered; but it was God who gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). No man comes to God unless God, through His Spirit draws Him.

James puts it so well in James 5:7 -- *"Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains."*

James 5:8 -- *"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."*

See, the one who sows is important. He must sow much seed. He must do all within his power to see that conditions within his control are right. He must nourish and tend. And some times he gets in on the best part:

Mark 4:29 -- *"But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."* (Villa Park illustration)

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Ultimately this parable gives us great balance. We are both necessary in the growth of the kingdom and helpless without God.

This means that to work is not enough. We must work and pray.

*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,*

*to the person who seeks Him.*

*{It is} good that he waits silently*

*for the salvation of the LORD.*

Lamentations 3:25-26