

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for October 30, 2016

Kingdom Operations
Mark 4:26-34

I. The parable of the sprouting seed (4:26-29)

A. The scattering

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

- "Kingdom of God" mentioned 15 times in Mark
 - Before this, it was mentioned in 1:15 and 4:11
 - **Mark 1:14-15** "¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
 - **Mark 4:11** "¹¹ And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,"
 - Mentioned twice in Mark 4:26-34
- Picture of man scattering seed is a similar scene to previous parable (4:1-20)

B. The sleeping

²⁷ *He sleeps and rises night and day,*

- One would expect to find more from the farmer at this point (watering, weeding, etc.)
- Farmer's contribution=Scattering and sleeping
- No emphasis is placed on the farmer in this story

C. The sprouting

and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

- Result of farmer's work?
 - Seed sprouts and grows!
- Reality?
 - Farmer does not know how
 - This is just what happens in nature!
- This is the mystery of how God saves people by His Spirit through the Word
 - **John 3:8** "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

D. The steps

²⁸ *The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.*

- “Earth produces by itself” (αὐτομάτη or automatically)
 - Technical growth: blade, ear, full grain in the ear
- God causes growth when His Word goes forth
 - **Isaiah 55:10-11** “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 it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

E. The sickle

²⁹ *But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”*

- Farmer re-engages when it is time for the harvest
- God uses individuals (us) to sow the gospel into people’s lives in order to grow His Kingdom
 - **1 Corinthians 3:5-7** “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”
 - **1 Peter 1:23** “since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;”

II. The parable of the small seed (4:30-32)

A. The small grain

³⁰ *And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?”*

- Again, the focus of this parable is to teach about the “kingdom of God”
- Again, this is a simple parable/story with a point

³¹ *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,*

- Actual smallest seeds on earth are “epiphytic orchids”
 - Those that grow in the tropical rainforests have small seeds

- 1/300th of an inch long, speck of dust, cannot be seen without magnification
- Mustard seed was smallest of seeds known in 1st Century Israel
- Mustard trees/plants benefits:
 - Leaves were vegetables while the seeds were used as a condiment or medicine
- 725-760 mustard seeds weigh one gram (28 grams=1 ounce)
- Mustard seed=small, tiny, insignificant

B. The surprising growth

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.*"

- Larger than all other "garden plants"
- Mustard tree/plant reaches height of 12-15 feet in about a few weeks
- Point of parable lies in the contrast between small seed and large garden plant
- "Puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade"
 - Simple connection to OT concepts; thus, this illustration is stating that God's kingdom will be bigger than Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman kingdoms and their hosting of all the nations in the world
 - **Ezekiel 31:3-6** "Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches and forest shade, and of towering height, its top among the clouds. ⁴ The waters nourished it; the deep made it grow tall, making its rivers flow around the place of its planting, sending forth its streams to all the trees of the field. ⁵ So it towered high above all the trees of the field; its boughs grew large and its branches long from abundant water in its shoots. ⁶ All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young, and under its shadow lived all great nations."
 - **Ezekiel 31:10-12** "Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, ¹¹ I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. ¹² Foreigners, the most ruthless of nations, have cut it down and left it. On the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land, and all the peoples of the earth have gone away from its shadow and left it."

- **Ezekiel 17:22-24** “Thus says the Lord God: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. ²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

III. The strategy summarized (4:33-34)

A. The commitment to parables

³³ *With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.*

- Apparently there were many more parables that Jesus spoke
 - Matthew 13 and several kingdom parables
- He spoke “the word” to them
 - These parables were described as “the word” by Mark
 - These parables, like all of Jesus’ teaching, should be regarded as “the Word”
- “As they were able to hear it”
 - Jesus chose not to overwhelm His audience
 - It is amazing to consider God’s wisdom in giving us all that we can handle on any particular occasion

B. The commentary in private

³⁴ *He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.*

- Jesus’ strategy continued with parables
 - Conceal truth of Kingdom from outsiders
 - Reveal truth of Kingdom to insiders/disciples