

The Kingdom Like The Growth Of Seed.

Text: Mark 4:16-29

1) The Seed is planted

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Seed grows

507, 414, 515, 848, 267

3) The Seed brings forth fruit

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 4:26–29, ²⁶ *And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. ²⁸ For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We just sang that great hymn by William Cowper,¹

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform;

And how true that is. Many of God’s wonders are wrought in a mysterious way, a way that is above our human understanding. We are able to see the results, but we are often unable to explain just how these results come about.

One of the wonders of God is the growth of seed. We hold a seed in our hand. It seems so small, so insignificant. Yet in it is a tremendous, though mysterious, power, for when we plant that seed, put it into the earth, it takes root, springs up and grows and brings forth fruit.

How does all this come about? We do not really know, we cannot fully explain, but we can see the results. Some say it is Nature, but we Christians know that it is God at work.

So also in the spiritual realm God works wonders with things that to man’s way of thinking are often rather insignificant. Yet these things have a tremendous, though mysterious power. The good seed of the Word of God is

planted in the heart of man, where it takes root, springs up, grows, and brings forth fruit, spiritual fruit. We cannot fully explain it, but we can see the results. It is God at work.

It is about these things that our text for today speaks to us. “*The kingdom of God is*” says Jesus, “*as if a man should scatter seed on the ground ... and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.*”

So here we have *The Kingdom Of God Likened To The Growth Of Seed*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Seed Is Planted

It is planted in men’s hearts and propagates spiritual life. “*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.*” In these words Jesus tells us how the Kingdom of God begins, originates, in the heart of man.

It has its beginning in the seed that is planted there. What is that seed? In the Parable of the Sower and the Soils² Jesus tells us quite plainly that the seed which is sown is the Word of God.³

In this Word of God there is life, spiritual life. Life can only come from life. We do not produce life from something that is dead, that has no life principle in it. Men of science have tried it, labouring and studying long and hard, but they have never succeeded. Life begets life.

And so this wonderful seed of the Word has life in it. This is something that is above our human understanding. It is still a mystery to us.

Just look at a little seed. Take it in your hand, examine it under a microscope. It seems to be dead. There is no movement there, no sound of heartbeat, no outward evidence that there is life in it. But now take that seemingly insignificant seed and place it into the earth. Cover it and allow it to remain there. It will not be long before things begin to happen.

The seed germinates, it begins to grow, it pushes up the earth. Life has come forth from that little seed. How did this all come about? We do not really know. All we know is that when that seed was planted, life was produced. It had life in it.

So also in the spiritual domain. We heard that the Word of God is the seed that is planted in the hearts of men. In that wonderful Word of God there is life,

spiritual life. Jesus says in John 6:63, *The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.* In James 1:18 we are told that ¹⁸ *Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth.*

And in 1 Peter 1:23 we read that we are *“born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God.”* So we were begotten, born again, brought into the Kingdom of God, by the Word. It has life in it, and it brings that life to the hearts of men.

By nature man is spiritually dead, he has no spiritual life in him. *“Dead in trespasses and sins.”⁴* In that state of spiritual death he is without God and without hope. None of his works are God pleasing. He has no future but eternal banishment from the presence of God. His earthly life is but a futile living out of a span of years until he steps over into the eternal death that awaits him. He is a lost soul.

But now the seed of the Word falls upon that man’s heart. He hears the stunning truth of the Law that he is a sinner before God, that he is guilty and worthy of God’s wrath and displeasure, temporal death and eternal damnation. Moved by that Word, he asks that all-important question, *“How can I, a sinner, be saved?”*

And then the Gospel seed is sown in the soil of that heart. The precious truth is brought to him: ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*⁵

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”⁶ ¹⁴ *In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*⁷ And through that powerful Word the Holy Spirit creates faith in that heart.⁸ Yes, spiritual life has begun. And that life came when the seed of the Word was planted in the heart, for that powerful Word has life in it, and it begets life, spiritual life.

Nor is there any other word that brings forth spiritual life than the Word of God. You cannot take the words of men, no matter how wise and prudent, and expect them to regenerate the soul. It is the Word of God, the Kingdom seed, that must be planted in the hearts of men to bring forth spiritual life; for this Word alone has life in it, and begets life.

So this is what Jesus tells us when He says in our text, so “*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.*” The Kingdom of God is brought to the heart of man when the seed of the Word is planted there.

How necessary, then, that this seed be sown, that the Word of God be preached and taught. This is the seed that creates spiritual life. This is how souls are saved. This is how the Kingdom of God is brought to the hearts of men.

How simple it all seems, and yet how wonderful it is that this good seed of the Word should produce such spiritual life, that it should bring to man the blessings of salvation.

Are we sowing this seed of God’s Word in our minds and hearts? Are we seeing to it that it is sown in the hearts of people everywhere? This is what Jesus did when He was here on earth. This is what He commanded His Apostles to do. “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*”⁹ This is also our task, for so the Kingdom of God is planted in the heart.

2. The Seed Grows

The seed not only is planted and brings forth spiritual life, it also grows. Just as the seed itself, and the life within it is a mystery, so also is the growth of that seed. Jesus says in the parable before us: “*And (the sower) should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.*”

There is something both mysterious and wonderful about the growth of seed. No doubt many of us here have experienced it. We planted some seed in the earth, and left it there. We then went about our regular daily duties, sleeping and rising night and day. Then one day we looked and saw that the seed we planted had sprouted and grown. How we do not know, nor can we really explain. Yet it did grow. It was God at work.

Thus it is also with the Kingdom seed. The Word of God is put into the hearts of men. Under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit spiritual life is begotten in the soul. And under that same benign influence growth also begins. Just how we do not know, nor can we really explain. All we can say is that this is the way God works, and it is indeed wonderful.

Let us learn here once again that there is much in the spiritual sphere, in the Kingdom of God, that is above and beyond our weak human understanding. How spiritual growth can take place in the heart and life of man is still a mystery. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being born again, He told him: “***8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.***”¹⁰

We must also speak like that about our spiritual growth. It is brought about by the working of God’s Spirit within us, and we cannot fully explain it. But we know that it does take place when the seed of the Kingdom is sown. Let us believe that. Look at the confidence and trust of the farmer after he sows his seed. He goes about his work, leaving the seed to itself, trusting that it will grow. Once he plants it, he can only wait with patience the time of its growth.

And so we should also go on planting the seed of the Kingdom, confident that the Lord will make it spring and grow up. We should not fret or worry about results in God’s Kingdom, for this is in the hands of God. We need only to plant the seed, to trust and believe.

When the Apostles went out into the world, they went out with nothing but the Word of God and faith in that Word and God’s power to make it spring and grow. Faithfully they planted. Into the soil of men’s hearts they brought this wonderful and powerful seed. And, lo and behold, it did spring and grow up. It sprang up and grew because the power of God was in it. After all, it is God’s work, and not ours, that makes it grow.

“The chairman of a missionary meeting claimed that he was the founder of a flourishing Christian community in India, although he had never been out of England. To the amazed listeners he said that when he was five years old, he wanted to give a penny to the missionaries but strongly objected to putting it into a brown box. He had no proof that it ever went abroad! The local minister was a friend of the family and also a friend of an Indian missionary. So the minister, to please the child, sold him a copy of the New Testament for his penny and directed the boy how to post it to the missionary in India, having written on the flyleaf an inscription giving the name of the boy. The missionary gave it to a poor native who had walked miles through the jungle to procure a New Testament, but who couldn’t afford to buy one.

Nothing was heard of the incident for twenty years. Then another missionary, preaching in a jungle village to people who, he thought, had never previously heard the Gospel message, noticed that his words were causing excited delight. Pausing in his preaching to ask questions, the preacher found that the people knew a great deal about Christ and that many were serving Him. No preacher had ever been to the village before.

The little Christian community had been born through the love and life of the native who had been given the New Testament — the New Testament which had been sold to a child of five.” So the seed of the Kingdom is sown, and God blesses it and makes it spring and grow.

Oh, let us have faith in the power of the Word! In our days many people have lost faith in it. They have mixed with it the powerless seed of man’s wisdom and knowledge, feeling that man must aid or do something to make spiritual life grow and develop, that man must contribute to the growing process. But the power lies in the Word. Jesus says in our text; *For the earth yields crops by itself*. That is because the living seed has been planted in it and grows of itself.

But while we cannot make that seed grow, we can hinder its growth. We can harden our hearts against it, refuse to receive it and let it exert its power within us. If we never have any time for God’s Word, if we seldom attend the house of God, where the precious seed is sown, if we neglect the Sacrament, which is the visible Word, given for the strengthening of our faith and the growth of our soul, we cannot expect growth. In fact, we thus hinder and impede that growth, the work of God within us.

So here Jesus is telling us that this wonderful Kingdom seed will do its work in the hearts of men if we but cast it and allow it to do its own work. We cannot make it grow. That is in God’s hands. He will make it grow, for this is His promise, written in Isaiah 55:11, *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.* Yes, it will grow.

3. The Seed Brings Forth Fruit

And in due time it brings forth fruit. Generally speaking, this growing and bringing forth of fruit is a gradual process. ***“First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.”***

We know that when we plant seed, it does not at once spring up into full fruitage or flower. It takes time. Some, it is true, will come up and flower and bear faster than others, but in general it begins with a small sprout, which lengthens into the stalk, and then comes the ripening of the grain.

Likewise also in the spiritual realm, in the Kingdom of God. It takes time for the soul of man to grow and develop.

That does not mean that salvation itself is a long-drawn-out process or that we are saved gradually by degrees. As soon as faith is wrought in man's heart, as soon as he believes that the Lord Jesus is his Saviour and Redeemer, he is saved. All his sins are forgiven, he is justified in the sight of God.

But once saved, this is not all there is to the spiritual life of man. Growth and development must come, there must be the fruit of faith. The Bible everywhere stresses that man is to grow and increase in faith and knowledge, in grace and love and patience and all the Christian virtues.

We look for growth in earthly things. We expect our children to grow in knowledge and character as the years go by. So the Lord looks for growth and development in our spiritual life. Peter writes; ***“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”***¹¹ And in 2 Peter 3:18, ¹⁸ ***but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.***

It should be our earnest desire and goal to grow in the Kingdom of God and to have the Kingdom of God grow in us. The means God uses for this growth are the Word and the Sacrament. The whole life of the Christian is really a planting and growing of the Word in the heart and life.

And where that Word is planted and allowed to grow, there will be fruit. Just as in nature there will be a ripening and a harvest, so also in the Kingdom of God. As according to God's promise ²² ***“While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease,”***¹² so also according to His promise the seed of the Word shall not fail to bring forth in due time its spiritual harvest of souls redeemed and won.

True, as we have noted, the fruitage and harvest will come sooner in some than in others. Nor will all bear the same amount of fruit. Some will bear fruit only after a longer period of growth, while others will be full of good fruit time and time again.

Jesus says, ²⁹ *But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.* Whenever the fruit is ripe (and God alone knows that), He gathers it in for His Kingdom, He lets none of it spoil.

And this is blessed fruit indeed. Paul writes in Galatians 5:22, ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control.* How wonderful are these fruits of the Kingdom, brought forth in man by the good seed of the Word and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit! Just as the earthly harvest feeds, sustains, and enriches the earth and blesses it with life, so this spiritual harvest is a blessing to the world.

And with such a wonderful spiritual harvest the Lord is well pleased. In all lands the time of harvest has been a time of rejoicing, for the labour and the waiting have been rewarded, and the full sheaves have been brought into storage.

If there is joy in the presence of God over one sinner who repents, surely there is joy when such spiritual fruits are gathered in. And one of these days there is going to be a final harvest time, a glorious eternal harvest, when all of these perfected fruits will be manifest in the Kingdom of Glory.

Oh, what a day of rejoicing that will be! Then we, and all the saints of God, shall give glory to God who planted this divine seed of the Word in our hearts, caused it to spring and grow up and bring forth such precious fruit.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,¹³

On what has now been sown
Thy blessing, Lord, bestow;
The power is Thine alone
To make it spring and grow.
Do Thou in grace the harvest raise,
And Thou alone shalt have the praise. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 414

² Luke 8:5-15

³ Luke 8:11

⁴ Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13

⁵ John 3:16

⁶ 1 Timothy 1:15

⁷ Colossians 1:14

⁸ Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 12:3

⁹ Mark 16:15

¹⁰ John 3:8

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:2

¹² Genesis 8:22

¹³ Hymn 515