

Sow and Watch It Grow

Mark 4:26-34 (NIV)

²⁶ He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." ³⁰ Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." ³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

What is the kingdom of God? Whenever I come across the term "kingdom of God" in the Bible, I always have to stop and ask myself, "What is the kingdom of God again?" It's a multi-faceted answer. I guess the shortest answer is that the kingdom of God is God's rule. But where and how? The kingdom of God is God's rule over heaven and earth and all things in existence. This earth, this universe, everything we see is God's kingdom.

There is also a more personal aspect of the kingdom of God. When God the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and our hearts through his Word, when we are brought to believe in God as the one who has removed all our sin, then the kingdom of God lives within us. God now rules in our hearts by that faith the Holy Spirit created in us. His will now governs my life as I personally have been made a part of his kingdom.

The kingdom of God is an abstract concept and hard to define. So, Jesus speaks to the people in parables. These parables are not "riddles" or "mysteries." Parables are almost always concrete illustrations of an abstract truth from God taking memorable pictures from everyday life to understand God a little better. This is why Jesus "did not say anything to [the people] without using a parable." (verse 34) If you want to know how God's kingdom, his rule, ends up in people's hearts and grows to include more and more people, then listen to Jesus' parables to illustrate these divine truths.

He says, "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." (verses 26-27) The kingdom of God takes root and grows in someone's life like how a farmer scatters seeds on the ground and those seeds take root and grow. The farmer doesn't make the seed take root or grow; it just does that. The farmer cannot make the seed grow; it either will or won't.

Another truth of the kingdom of God is illustrated with the parable of the mustard seed. It was the smallest seed that a Jewish farmer would use in their garden. Yet, it could grow to be 10 feet tall, so tall that birds could perch in its shade! It's a simple picture to teach the truth that the kingdom of God may start out small, but from those small beginnings, something big will come - just like that little mustard seed.

Okay, but what does this mean for you and me?

I want to see everyone in this community, in this state, in this country, and in this world become a Christian. I want the kingdom of God to dwell in their hearts, that the Holy Spirit would come to each and every single person and bring them to believe that Jesus is God from all eternity and is the one who lived perfectly for them in their place and removed all their sins. I am not content with letting people believe whatever they want to believe. I am not content to coexist religiously because I am not okay with letting anyone go to hell. This means that in my little area of life, with the limited number of people I know and interact with, I want them to know that they have Jesus who saved them from an eternity of suffering in hell. I want to get Jesus to them. I want them to be a part of the kingdom of God. So, how do I do that?

Jesus is telling us through these parables that the kingdom of God grows without us knowing exactly how. When does the Word of God take root in someone's life? When do they come to believe in Jesus as their Savior God? Can I see that happen? Probably not, just like I don't see when a seed starts to take root unless I were to dig it up, which would then be detrimental to the seed trying to grow. Now, I can till the ground, break it up, before I throw seeds on it. I can add fertilizer to where the seeds have been sown. I can pull the weeds around it. I can give the area shade maybe. And I should make sure that the seeds have some source of water. I can do all those things, but I cannot actually make the seeds grow. I cannot actually make someone part of God's kingdom.

Even though I cannot make someone a part of God's kingdom, God tells me to sow the seeds of his Word, to sow the message that Jesus is the one who removes my sins and gives me and covers me with his perfection so that I belong to the kingdom of God. Sow and then watch it grow because it is not up to me to make the seed of his Word grow in someone's heart. It is not up to me to make someone believe that Jesus is their Savior from sin. It's not up to me to knock down every argument a person has against the Bible and against God.

This also means that the kingdom of God will not take root and grow in someone's heart because I run the right programs, make the perfect postcard invitation, write hand-written letters to people, knock on every door in town, teach the right Bible study, order the perfect Sunday School curriculum, or build the most beautiful church. You and I, we do not make the kingdom of God grow. We do not make people believe in God. God does that all on his own. He just wants us scattering that seed of his Word out there and God the Holy Spirit will use it to make it take root and grow in someone's life, to make them a part of the kingdom of God.

What immense relief! I am not a green thumb, and I don't enjoy gardening. God bless if you do, if that's your thing. My kind of garden is the one you can plant and pretty much never do anything else to maintain it. I just want to sit back and watch it grow. These parables that Jesus spoke, that he recorded and preserved for us, give us the comfort that it's not up to us to make people a part of God's kingdom – that's God's work. He just wants us to sow and then watch him make it grow.

Now, though, this means that my job is to sow the seed of God's Word, to put God's Word out there, the message of what he has done for you and me, how he is our perfection right now, that by Jesus' perfect life and his suffering and death on the cross, my sins are paid for and removed from me, that I am perfect right now because God has made me a part of his kingdom through his Word, through the waters of baptism. The Holy Spirit made that seed of his message take root in my life and it is growing and he has done the same for you! God wants us to sow this message to people regardless of whether or not we think it will grow.

It's not our job to judge how receptive people will be to the seed of God's Word, critiquing what kind of soil they are. God says just sow and watch him grow it. Yes, the person you sow God's message on may reject it immediately. They may receive it with wonder and joy for a little while and then fall away from it. It's on God to make it grow. This means I can't hide behind the excuse that this person that I was talking to would not have listened to me had I shared what God has done for them. It's not my job to hang on to the seed of his Word and sow it only on good, fertile soil. And it also means that I shouldn't pelt the ground, the person, with seeds in order to make them take root and grow. Again, God simply calls us to sow them and then watch him grow them.

Watching these seeds take root and grow is not something we can necessarily see. For a while, that seed is just in the dirt. There's not an instant shoot or stem or fruit. It's like this pine tree back at my Mom's house. I planted that thing when I was in third grade, some 25 years ago or so. It was maybe 18 inches tall when I planted it. Now, the pine tree towers over the house. That didn't happen in days. That didn't happen in months. In fact, there was a while there when my Mom and Dad thought it would die. In high school when it wasn't even as tall as me. But now it's huge.

Jesus gave us this parable so that we would know that this is how his kingdom gets bigger, that from something so small something huge comes, like with the mustard seed. God's kingdom has spread to billions of people and it's still spreading today, still growing. God will make sure that it continues to grow and get bigger while we simply sow more seeds.

Where can you sow the seed of God's Word and what he has done for all people? Is it a conversation you can have? Is it a question you can ask? A post on Facebook you can make? A video you can share? A card or a postcard that you can mail? A text you can send? It doesn't have to be big. In fact, it often won't be big. It will be a little seed, like that mustard seed. Sow it, and then step back and watch God grow it and make that person a part of his kingdom, to bring them to believe that Jesus is their perfection, their King, their Savior.

As we sow, we will continue to put our best foot forward in all we do, in all our conversations, in all our worship, in all our Sunday School and Bible studies, in all our outreach to the community, in all the work we do on our building. But when it comes to growing God's kingdom, we sow the seed of his Word and then continue working while watching God make it grow as he gathers more and more people into his kingdom. Amen.