

The Mysterious Mustard Seed

Mark 4:26-34

Introduction

How do you explain to someone something that's totally foreign to them? You find a starting point, something they are familiar with and draw parallels to what you're trying to explain. That's why Jesus taught in parables. His message was "*The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel*" (**Mark 1:15**). But what is this "kingdom of God"? To help the people understand, Jesus used everyday things that they were familiar with and drew parallels to them to explain it. He used examples from all areas of life. But most were agricultural. Let's look at today's two parables—the Parable of the Seed Growing and the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

Background—The Parable of the Sower

Jesus had a good reason for telling the Parable of the Seed Growing. He had just told the Parable of the Sower, which taught that the type of soil determines, to a large extent, the kind of crop that can be produced. It was frustrating for His disciples to think that the results of sowing the Gospel relied so heavily on the hearts of the hearers. "No matter how hard I work, it all comes down to them." The Parable of the Seed Growing shows that there are other factors involved in the growth of the kingdom or the growth of faith.

God Gives the Growth

The type of soil isn't the only factor in crop production. There is the x factor. The unknown way of nature. Honest scientists will tell you that while we know what makes up living things, and what can kill them, we don't know what makes them live. In the same way, we don't know what makes crops grow. We sow the seed and like magic, the plant appears. First, the blade, then the ear, then the fruit or grain. We can see what it does, but we don't know what makes it do that. Only God does. He created it. He causes it to grow.

He Causes the Seed to Germinate

Once the seed gets into the soil, it germinates, puts down roots, and grows into a plant. But first, it must get into the soil. The Gospel is the same way. If a person's heart is hardened, they can resist hearing the Word and the seed won't grow. But once the Gospel penetrates the heart, it puts down root. We may not see a crop immediately, but God works on the person through the Gospel they have heard. The Holy Spirit begins to work faith in the life of the hearer.

He Causes the Plant to Grow and Develop

That doesn't mean we don't have a role to play (Read **1 Corinthians 3:6-9**). We can water the plant and help the new Christian grow by praying for them, studying Scripture with them, helping them get involved in church life, and cheering them on by being a friend. This provides a nourishing climate that is conducive to growth. But remember, it is God who gives the increase.

He Causes the Plant to Produce (John 15:1-5)

Through this process called Sanctification, the Holy Spirit grows the faith He has worked and brings the young Christian to maturity. Then, somehow, the plant starts to produce grain or fruit. The Holy Spirit works fruit in the life of the Christian as he or she abides in Jesus (Read **John 15:1-5**).

Mysterious Growth of the Mustard Seed

The Parable of the Mustard Seed turns our focus from individual Christians to the kingdom. The mustard plant starts as a tiny seed, one of the smallest in nature. Yet, when it is done growing, it becomes the largest plant in all the garden.

Starts Small—the 12 Apostles

When Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God, it didn't come in its fullness and glory. He began by calling twelve men. Others began to follow and at one point, He sent out 72 disciples to share the Good News. Some estimates say there were 120 in the upper room on that first Pentecost. Concerning His Ascension, we read, *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep* (**1 Corinthians 15:6**).

Grows Large—Covers the Earth

As the apostles and others went out into the world, the Gospel spread to the Gentiles, throughout the Roman empire and beyond. Today, it has reached 95% of all language groups. The kingdom of God covers a lot of ground.

Mortal to Immortality

It is vast, but it is not yet in its full glory. That will happen at the end of time when God harvests the crop that has grown. If I may mix metaphors, when Jesus returns and separates the sheep from the goats, *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord* (**Philippians 2:10,11**). Then the kingdom will be experienced in its fullness.

Growth by the Means of Grace

Until that time, God continues to grow us, He continues to grow His kingdom. He does this through the Means of Grace—Word and Sacrament. Through the Word, at Baptism, He works faith in us as the seed takes root. At the Table of the Lord, He grows that faith through the Word. That's the **MYSTERIOUS GROWTH OF THE MUSTARD SEED**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
