

THE PARABLE OF THE GROWING SEED: THE GROWTH OF BELIEVERS

MARK 04:26–29

Introduction — Growth of Believer

This parable tells what happens to the fruitful seed in the Parable of the Sower or Soils (Mk. 4:1-20). It describes how the seed goes about growing, and the process through which it passes. The seed is the gospel and the ground is the *good soil*, either the believer individually or the church collectively. There are four things said about the fruitful seed once it has taken root, but the major point is that growth is sure; it is inevitable. Once the gospel has taken root in the heart of a believer, growth will take place. The believer will grow spiritually. This is the great promise of God, the great assurance and confidence, the great hope and encouragement to every believer.

- I. The parable describes the kingdom (v. 26).
- II. The seed is sown by a man (v. 26).
- III. The growth is not of man (v. 27).
- IV. The growth is sure and constant, but gradual (v. 28).
- V. The growth is consummated and harvested (v. 29).

I. *Mark 04:26 Kingdom of God*

Jesus is describing one aspect of the Kingdom of God in this parable. The kingdom (church) and its citizens will and do grow. The kingdom is looked at in its *present state* here on earth. The Kingdom of God is growing: more and more people are being reached for God, and as they are reached, they are growing just as God wills them to grow (See *Kingdom of God*, Mt 19:23-24).

II. *Mark 04:26 The Seed of the Gospel*

The seed is sown by a man. Note several things.

1. It is man who sows the seed. The seed has to be sown by a man; there simply is no other way it can be sown. Man is the person, the being, the means, the instrument God has chosen to share the gospel with the world.
2. It is the ground, the earth, where the seed is sown. It is the earth that God wants to reach; the earth that God wants to hear His good news. God has sent His followers out into the earth to scatter the seed of the gospel.

Mat 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Mat 10:7, 27 “As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.”

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 5:20 “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

2 Tim 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

III. **Mark 04:27** *Spiritual Growth of Believers*

The growth is not of man. The sower or farmer plants his seed, then he goes about his regular affairs. He sleeps and rises day by day. And while he carries on the routine of his life, the seed germinates, springs up and grows. The point is this: the seed grows by its own virtue. The seed uses the sun, water, air and earth to grow; but the power to germinate, to break forth and grow is of the seed itself, by its own virtue. It is not man who makes the seed grow. Man does not even know how the mysterious growth takes place. The secret of life and of growth is beyond him. He discovers, he rearranges, he develops; but he does not create, not in the real sense of *creation* (*ex nihilo*, out of nothing).

It is the same with the Kingdom of God, with the growth of believers both individually and collectively. Growth is not of man; growth is of God. It is the Spirit of God that takes the gospel and changes a man’s heart and causes him to grow. It is the Spirit of God that recreates a man spiritually, that causes a man to be *born again* and to grow in grace (Jn. 3:3-8; Eph. 2:8-9).

1 Tim 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

John 3:5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

Titus 3:5 *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

1 Pet 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

Thought 1. The ground or seed can hinder and slow the process of growth. Some ground or seed bears only 30 percent fruit, some only 60 percent fruit. Very few seed bear 100 percent fruit (Mt. 13:8, 23;). Only a small number allowed the Word to take permanent root. A person who allows the Word to take permanent root represents the honest and good heart (Lk. 8:15). Christ says two things about him.

- 1) He hears the Word of God and understands it. His heart is soft and tender toward God, so he listens, meditates, concentrates, and thinks. He is not hypocritical, wasting his time and being present physically but absent mentally. He does not allow his thoughts to wander off when the Word of God is being preached. He is responsible and behaves intelligently. He listens to God's Word, studies and receives it.
- 2) He is fruitful. He bears the fruit of God's Word and Spirit in his own life (Gal. 5:22-23). And he reproduces himself by reaching out to lead others to a saving knowledge of the Lord.

Note that John 15 classifies fruit-bearing as "no fruit" (Jn. 15:2), "fruit" (Jn. 15:2), "more fruitful" (Jn. 15:2), and "much fruit" (Jn. 15:5, 8).

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

John 12:24 *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

IV. Mark 04:28 Features of Spiritual Growth

The growth is sure and constant, but gradual. The words about the soil's producing grain "all by itself (automate) mean automatically, spontaneously, of necessity, self-moving. The idea is that the soil produces grain, brings forth fruit automatically, by its very nature. Note two facts.

1. Growth is sure, inevitable. But two conditions are essential. The soil must be "good soil," (Mk. 4:20) and the seed must be sown in the ground. If these two conditions exist, then growth is both *inevitable* and unstoppable. Even a small blade of grass will find a crack in the pavement. Nothing can stop the seed from growing.

Thought 1. The genuine believer (good soil) can rest assured: he is truly God's child, and God will complete the work of grace in his life. The grace of God planted in a

person's heart is unstoppable. The believer's confidence is in God, not in his own flesh and weak efforts. Therefore, there is no reason for being down and discouraged, withdrawn and depressed.

Phil 1:6 *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Phil 2:13 *For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

2 Cor 4:16 *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

Rom 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

2. Growth is constant, but it is gradual, ever so gradual. The seed is sown, and then day after day and night after night passes before the blade ever springs up. Then many more days and nights pass before the ear forms. It takes weeks before the full ear of corn appears. Growth does take place; it is constant — but growth is gradual. It does take time; it does not happen overnight.

Thought 1. Growth is of God, and the believer is to trust and to wait upon God for growth. But the trust and waiting are to be active — a working trust and waiting. There is no such thing as inactive faith and waiting — not to God. Faith and waiting upon God are active; they both serve and work (Jas. 2:14-18).

Thought 2. There is great abuse of this glorious truth, the truth of sure growth, of being secure in God's promises. Man has used the fact...

- to say I am secure, no matter what I do, so I can go ahead and live as I wish (Rom. 6:16, 23).
- to say God assures His kingdom and its growth, so there is no need for me to sacrifice to meet the needs of the world. (Mt. 19:16-22; 19:23-26; 19:27-30.)
- to say believers and the church will grow without me, therefore I do not have to go or serve, not personally.

Thought 3. Growth requires much patience and trust.

2 Cor 9:10 *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.*

Eph 4:15 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

1 Th 3:2 *We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith.*

2 Th 1:3 *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.*

Heb 6:1 *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.*

1 Pet 2:2-3 *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

1 Tim 4:15 *Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.*

2 Pet 3:18 *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

V. **Mark 04:29 Spiritual Growth**

The growth is consummated and harvested. The grain does ripen; the day does come when the corn is *fully grown* and is ready to be harvested. This can mean at least two things.

1. The believer's sowing does produce grain, does bear fruit. Jesus does honour His Word, and it never returns to Him void. The believer can rest assured of reaping some harvest.

Thought 1. What an encouragement to believers! How we should be challenged to work and work for our Lord! We are assured of results before we ever labour. God assures that grain will be produced.

Gal 6:8-9 *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

John 4:35-36 *"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."*

Isa 55:11 *So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Hosea 10:12 *Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.*

2. The believer himself is harvested, taken on to heaven when his growth is completed. When the believer has done all that God wills for him or all that he is going to do, God then escorts the believer home forever. (See *Judgement Seat of Christ*, 2 Cor. 5:10.)

Mat 25:33 *“He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” (see Mt.25:34; Mk. 9:41)*

Rev 14:13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.”*

Prov 11:18 *The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward. ■*

2 CORINTHIANS 05:10 JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 05:10

This is the judgment of believers, not of unbelievers. Note carefully the words, “We must all appear.” By “we...all” Paul means all those who have a nature like him, a new nature in Christ. That is, all those who believe in Christ are the ones who will stand at the judgment seat of Christ. Several important points are stressed.

1. The judgment of believers is a surety: it will happen and nothing can stop it from happening. “We *must* all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Not a single believer will be excused from the judgment.
2. The believer will be judged by Christ Himself. Every believer will face the scrutiny and searching eyes of Christ and be judged.

John 5:22-23 *Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.*

Acts 10:42 *He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.*

Acts 17:31 *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

Rom 2:16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

Rom 14:10 *You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

2 Tim 4:1 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.*

3. The believer will be judged for “the things done while (dia) in the body.” What kinds of things are done in the human body? Acts, behaviour, works. Note three significant points.
 - a. The believer's sins are forgiven once he has confessed and repented of them (Eph. 1:7; 1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1-2). He never has to worry about God charging him with sin, for Christ has already paid the penalty for his sins. His sins are forgiven once-for-all.
 - b. The believer will be conformed perfectly to the image of Christ. In fact, he is even predestined by God to eternal perfection just like God's own dear Son (see notes, Rom. 8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2). He is destined to receive a perfect and an eternal body — a body just like Christ's (1 Cor. 15:50-58).
 - c. However, the believer is called and gifted for a special task and work while on earth (1 Cor. 12:4-14:40; Eph.4:7-13). Just how well the believer accomplishes this task and work will determine his judgment (see 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 6:2-3; 9:24-27, esp. 9:27; Mt. 19:27-30; 25:20-23; Lk. 16:10-12; 19:15-23).
4. The judgment of the believer will determine his reward and the degree of reward, whether good (gain) or bad (loss). Some believers will definitely be ashamed before Christ at His coming (1 Jn. 2:28), and they will suffer loss (1 Cor. 3:11-15). The believer who survives the fire of judgment will be greatly rewarded, so greatly that the rewards explode the human mind. □