

# 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.”

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**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. □

# THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED: THE GROWTH OF GOD'S KINGDOM MARK 04:30–32

## *Introduction: Christianity and the Church*

Jesus is describing the growth and greatness of His kingdom, that is, of Christianity. He shows how Christianity begins as the smallest of seeds and grows into the greatest of movements.

The message of the parable is a powerful message to individual believers and congregations as well as to the worldwide church. The seed of faith begins ever so small, but it grows into the greatest of bushes as it nourishes itself day by day. Mature (grown, v. 32) believers and congregations alike provide shelter for the people of a turbulent world.

- I. The parable describes the kingdom (Christianity) (v. 30).
- II. A seed is sown (v. 31).
- III. The seed does grow (v. 32).
- IV. The birds do nest under its shade (v. 32).

### MARK 04:30–32 CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH

There are two interpretations of this parable.

1. Some say the birds are those in the world who find their shelter in the kingdom (the church, Christianity). The kingdom had a small beginning, but it is now growing into a stately movement. Many in the world, believers and non-believers alike, have found help and safety under its branches. Laws and institutions of mercy, justice, and honour have to a large extent evolved from this magnificent movement. This interpretation relies heavily upon the picture painted by the Old Testament. A great empire is said to be like a tree, and conquered nations are said to be like birds who perch under its shade (Eze. 17:22-24; 31:1-6; Dan. 4:14).
2. Others say the birds are the children of the evil one (Satan) who see the protective covering of the kingdom and seek shelter therein.

Neither interpretation need exhaust the meaning. However, two facts should be noted.

1. Jesus was speaking to the crowds in the first four parables. His purpose was to teach what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. It is a mixture of good and evil. He had just been vindicating His Messiahship to the Pharisees, who were set upon destroying Him (Mt. 12:1-50; 12:14). It was the same day that He began to speak in parables. His purpose was to hide the mysteries from unbelievers and to protect Himself from those who would destroy Him (Mt. 12:10-17). They were the evil ones who had penetrated the kingdom. However, this needed to be known only by the true disciple, not necessarily by those who were evil.
2. The birds are used to describe the evil one in the Parable of the Seed. □

## I. *Mark 04:30 Kingdom of Heaven*

Jesus described the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the kingdom's present state on earth. He revealed how the kingdom, Christianity, was to begin as the smallest movement and grow into the greatest movement.

## II. *Mark 04:31 The Gospel is Sown*

The seed is sown. The words "in the ground" are significant. The ground or the world is where the seed is sown. It is the ground, the world, that needs the seed, that is, the gospel of God. And God has ordained the good news of His love to be sown "in the ground." (See *Good News*, 1 Cor. 15:1-11; See Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:1-2.)

Christianity: a mustard seed was planted. The mustard seed was used in proverbial sayings to describe smallness in the day of Jesus. The mustard seed grew to be a great bush, a bush as large as a tree. Its characteristics were loftiness, expansion and prominence (See *Mustard Seed*, Mk. 4:31).

*The Man* is Jesus Christ. The field is the world. Jesus Christ plants the seed in His field which is the world. Note the world is His (Mt. 13:31).

Took (labon) means to deliberately take; to take with purpose and thought. The planting of the seed was not by chance. It did not just happen. Christ *deliberately* planted the seed and nourished the growth of the bush. The bush existed because of great *purpose and thought*.

The *field* means the world. As said, Christ plants the seed in His field. The world is His.

**Thought 1.** The Man is active, very active, not lazy or lethargic. He plans and He sows. This is a great lesson as we plant the mustard seed of our lives. What an enormous difference there would be in the world if we would plant our lives where many could come and find the care they so desperately need!

**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

**1 John 1:1-2** *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.*

**Rom 10:12** *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.*

**1 Tim 2:4** *Who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

**Thought 2.** The farmer has to have a commitment of heart, mind, and body to sow the seed. All three are essential. Without any one of the commitments, the sowing does not get done or else it is done haphazardly. He must have...

- commitment of heart for motivation
- commitment of mind for planning
- commitment of body for planting

**Mark 12:30** *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*

**John 4:34-35** *“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 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.”*

**John 9:4** *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”*

**Rom 12:1-2** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

**Rom 13:12** *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.*

**2 Tim 4:2** *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

**Thought 3.** The ground is fruitless, sterile, empty, barren without the mustard seed of God. The ground becomes a wasteland; it ends without the mustard seed of God.

**Job 38:25-27** *Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass?*

The fact that the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds is also significant (See *Mustard Seed*, Mk. 4:31). Just because a seed is small does not discourage or keep the farmer from sowing. He knows the enormous potential of the seed for growth and fruitfulness, so he plants. Note that the power for reproduction and bearing fruit is in the seed, not in the farmer. All the farmer has to do is sow the seed. But again, someone has to sow the seed if there is to be fruit.

**Thought 1.** What a lesson for believers and churches! The seed of the gospel, though ever so small, is enormously powerful.

=> No matter how insignificant or small we may feel in reaching others, we need to sow the gospel.

=> No matter how insignificant or small we may feel our church witness is, we need to sow the gospel.

**Psa 126:5-6** *Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.*

**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.

**Gal 6:8** 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.

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

**John 20:21** Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:01–11 GOOD NEWS, GOSPEL

Gospel means "Good News." There is only one gospel, but it is described in different ways. It is called the "Good News of the Kingdom and the Good News of God" (Mt. 4:23; Mk. 1:14); the "Gospel of God's Grace" (Acts 20:24); the "Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1); the "Gospel of Christ" (Mk. 1:1; Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 4:4; 10:14); the "glorious Gospel" (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11); and the "Eternal Gospel" (Rev. 14:6). □

### MARK 04:31 MUSTARD SEED

Mustard seed was not actually the smallest seed known in Jesus' day. But the seed was small, and the mustard bush grew as large as some trees. It has been reported that a rider on horseback could find shade under its branches. The fact that such a small seed could produce such a huge bush caused people to use the mustard seed as a proverbial saying to describe smallness. □

### III. *Mark 04:32 Christianity and the Church*

The seed does grow. Note the words "when planted." Again, the critical point is this: the seed has to be sown. Someone has to sow the seed if the church (Christianity) is to continue to grow. *Growth follows sowing. If there is no sowing, there is no growth. This is the law of reproduction, of fruit bearing.* The seed grows "when it is planted."

The result of sowing is growth. In dealing with Christianity and the church, the result of sowing is to see the greatest of movements. The bush (Christianity) grew into the greatest of bushes. Christ said explicitly that when the kingdom or Christianity is fully grown, it is the greatest of movements.

1. Christianity is the greatest movement socially. It has changed the face of the earth. Liberty and freedom, and the laws and institutions of mercy, justice, and honour have for the most part evolved from Christianity. The movement has set free the enslaved and raised enormously the status of women and children (Acts 16:14).

2. Christianity is the greatest movement individually and personally. This is true because Christ did for an individual just what a tree does for a bird.
  - 1) Christ gives *rest* to a person just as a tree provides rest for a bird (Mt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:1-13).
  - 2) Christ gives a *home* to a person just as a tree provides a home for a bird (Mt. 12:48-50).
  - 3) Christ gives *food*, physically and spiritually, to a person just as a tree provides food for a bird (Mt. 6:25-34).

**Thought 1.** This parable is a great encouragement to every believer.

- 1) It is an encouragement to us in our personal lives and in our ministry. No matter how small we may begin, we must continue on. If we continue, our lives and efforts will grow. We may be like Christ and see little growth in numbers while here on earth, but the growth will take place. Success is assured.

**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.”*

**Psa 126:5-6** *Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.*

- 2) It is an encouragement to our hope in eternity. The Kingdom will finally come some day, and we shall be rewarded for our faithful labour.

**Mat 10:42** *“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”*

**Mat 25:23** *His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

**Mat 25:34-36** *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”*

**1 Cor 15:58** *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

**Thought 2.** The growth of a tree from a small seed is nothing compared to the growth of a person who truly comes to know Christ nor to the growth of a church that is truly committed to the mission of Christ (Jn. 12:24).

*Acts 13:48* When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

*Acts 28:28* "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

*Rom 15:9* So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

*Gal 3:14* He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

*Eph 3:6* This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

*Psa 72:16* Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field.

*Isa 9:7* Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

*Isa 54:3* For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.

*Isa 55:5* "Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour."

*Isa 60:5* Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.

*Isa 60:22* The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly.

#### **IV. Mark 04:32 Christianity and the Church**

The birds do nest under its shade. Many commentators make this point: birds feast on the seeds of the mustard bush. The very fact that the bush (the church) is present with *so much good* to be feasted upon means that many will come to its shade. ■

# THE USE OF PARABLES BY JESUS: WHY CHRIST USED ILLUSTRATIONS MARK 04:33–34

## ***Introduction***

The wisest of all teachers used illustrations; more specifically, He used parables. (See *Parable*, Mk. 4:2). This passage gives three very practical reasons why Jesus used illustrations in His teaching (Mt. 13:10-17).

- I. To illustrate the Word (v. 33).
- II. To teach step by step (v. 33).
- III. To enforce the lesson in private (v. 34).

## MARK 04:02 PARABLE (PARABOLE)

Parable literally means placing a thing by the side of something else for the purpose of comparing. The word *comparison* best describes a parable.

1. A parable is a comparison: it is an earthly event pointing out a heavenly truth. It is a comparison between the earth and heaven.
2. A parable is a comparison: the earthly story has to be delved into to discover the heavenly truth. The spiritual point is found only by active thought and effort, by actively *comparing* the physical world with the spiritual world. In fact, the more a man thinks and meditates upon a parable, the more he usually sees of the truth.

Jesus is the *Master User* of the parable. No man ever used the parable so effectively. □

## ***I. Mark 04:33 Parables Used to Illustrate the Word***

First, Jesus used parables to illustrate the Word. Note the clause “Jesus spoke the Word to them.” What *word* was preached? What is meant by *the word*?

⇒ It is “the Word of the kingdom” (Mt. 13:19-20, 22-23; see Mk. 4:16, 18, 20; Lk. 8:15).

⇒ It is “the Word of God” (Mk. 7:13; Lk. 3:2; 4:4; 5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28).

⇒ It is the Word of this “salvation” (Acts 13:26).

⇒ It is simply “the Word” (Gal. 6:6; 2 Tim. 4:2; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:2, 8).

⇒ It is “the message [the Word]” (Acts 17:11).

⇒ It is “pure spiritual milk [the Word]” (1 Pet. 2:2).

⇒ It is “the Word of His grace” (Acts 20:32).

⇒ It is “the Word of faith” (Rom. 10:8).

⇒ It is the Word of “reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

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- => It is “the Word of life” (Phil. 2:16; 1 Jn. 1:1).
- => It is “the Word of truth” (Col. 1:5).
- => It is “the Word of Christ” (Col. 3:16).
- => It is “the trustworthy message [Word]” (Tit. 1:9).
- => It is “the Word of righteousness” or the teaching about righteousness (Heb. 5:13).
- => It is the “Word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22).
- => It is “the word planted in you” (Jas. 1:21).
- => It is “the word of the prophets made more certain” (2 Pet. 1:19).
- => It is “the Word of my patience” or “my command to endure patiently” (Rev. 3:10).
- => It is called “the Word of their [Christian brothers] testimony” (Rev. 12:11).

Jesus used the parable to illustrate the great truths of the Word. What is there about illustrations or parables that caused Jesus to use them so much?

1. Stories and pictures are more interesting and tend to *draw* a person’s attention more readily.
2. Some believe a person thinks only in pictures; others believe abstract thought apart from pictures is possible. No matter, it is certainly easier to see and remember pictures than statements, principles, rules or dogma.
3. Parables usually require more thought to see the comparison between the story and the truth. Parables are not for the lazy and non-thinking person.

## II. ***Mark 04:33 Parables Used to Teach Step by Step***

Second, Jesus used parables to teach step by step. He taught the people “as much as they could understand.” This means at least three things.

1. Jesus drew comparisons from the daily life of the people, from things and events with which they were familiar.
2. Jesus spoke in the language of the people, using simple and plain words. He did not seek to show a superiority over the people: a superior education, vocabulary, speaking ability or anything else. He never acted above the people.
3. Jesus taught the people *progressively*. He moved them along step by step “as much as they could understand.” The point of the spiritual truth was not available to all, but the story itself was understandable to all. It could easily be recalled in the future for spiritual growth if the person were stirred to seek for the truth.

It should always be remembered that the lazy and non-thinking person seldom learns or achieves, and the unbeliever never succeeds spiritually. Mathew discusses this in some detail (Mt. 13:10-11; 13:12; 13:13-15).

### III. *Mark 04:34 Teaching the Secrets of the Kingdom*

Third, Jesus used parables to enforce the lesson in private. It was now time to give some very special lessons to His close associates, the apostles. They needed to know the *secrets of the kingdom*. It was time to teach the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” to true disciples. The secrets would be understood by true disciples, but they would be misunderstood by those who deliberately blinded their eyes and deafened their ears.

“The secrets of the kingdom of heaven” cannot be understood without first recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and as the One who brings the Kingdom of Heaven to men.

**Thought 1.** We should always be concerned over the way the Word is preached and taught and the way people receive the Word. Are they listening and growing, or are they disinterested and stymied?

**Thought 2.** Note: the same preaching turned some off (the unbelieving crowds) and stirred some to seek more (the believing disciples). There is encouragement here for the preacher and teacher and warning to the unbeliever.

1. Jesus made a very general statement (Mt. 13:11). God gives believers the understanding of spiritual things, the secrets of the Kingdom, but the secrets of the kingdom are not given to unbelievers.

Common sense tells us that God will reveal things to a person who really believes in Him and draws near Him — things that He cannot reveal to a person who ignores, neglects, and cares nothing about God. Therefore, Christ puts it very simply: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them [unbelievers].” God does not reward unbelief: He rewards belief and trust (Mt. 13:35).

2. There are “secrets” in the kingdom of heaven:

=> the incarnation and virgin birth of Christ (Mt. 1:16; 1:23)

=> the ideal and perfect righteousness of Christ secured by His living a sinless life while on earth (Mt. 5:17-18)

=> the death of Christ on the cross for man (Mt. 27:26-56)

=> the intercessory work of Christ going on right now (Heb. 3:1)

=> the Holy Spirit and His presence in the believer (Jn. 14:16-21)

=> the material world and the spiritual world, or the physical and spiritual dimension of being (Mt. 6:9)

=> man’s sinfulness and his dead spirit due to sin (Rom. 3:9-19; Eph. 2:13)

=> the church, both local and universal, and the mixture of both good and evil in it (Mt. 13:152)

=> the future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51)

=> the destruction and remaking of the heavens and earth into a perfect universe (2 Pet. 3:10-13)

The secrets of heaven have to be revealed by God. Man cannot know them by human reason; they have to be *given*, that is, revealed.

The secrets of heaven are given, revealed to believers only. This is logical, exactly what would be expected, as is mentioned above. The reasons given by Christ explain even more why believers alone see and understand what God reveals (Mt. 13:12-15).

**John 14:26** *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

3. The third reason Christ spoke in parables is that believers receive and are blessed with more. The blessings of God include the greatest possessions imaginable: love, joy, peace, confidence, assurance and eternal security. The blessings of God come from seeing and hearing, that is, from *conversion and spiritual healing*, not from the things that men desire (Jn. 10:10; 14:27; 15:11; 16:33; Phil. 4:6-7).

**Acts 3:19** *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

New Testament believers are much more privileged than Old Testament believers because of Christ (2 Cor. 3:6-18; Heb. 1:1-3; 1:4-14; 2:5-13; 2:14-18; 3:1-6; 4:14-16; 5:1-10; 7:1-10; 7:1-24, etc. Hebrews is an epistle which shows the New Testament believers' great privilege in Christ.)

**1 Cor 2:9-10** *However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”*

**Col 1:26-27** *The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

**1 John 2:20** *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ■*