

“Follow Me”
A Study in Mark’s Gospel
Session 22 Mark 4:30-34

Introduction:

Truth: It is the God-determined nature of the Kingdom to grow and consume the entirety of our lives.

Review:

Truth: The germinated seed of God’s Kingdom will not remain a seed or a twig, but will grow, expand and consume until it is the dominating feature of one’s life.

Mark 4:30-34 (ESV) *“And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” ³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”*

Verse 30

“And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?”

Jesus is trying to put the truth of the Kingdom of God on the bottom shelf, accessible to everyone.

Verse 31

“It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,”

It takes about 20,000 mustard seeds to make one ounce.

A mustard seed was proverbial in that day for something very small. It was a commonly used word that meant “very small”.

Jesus said, “...*If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*” Luke 17:6 (ESV)

Problem: “...*is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,*” Is it? No. However, it was the smallest seed in that geographic area that was known and sown into their gardens.

Verse 32

“yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

The black mustard seed of Palestine could grow 6 to 20 feet tall with a span of 20 feet. Exceptional plants in exceptional soil could grow 30 feet tall.

The mustard seed would shade the rest of the garden from the searing summer heat and provide food, shelter and a resting place for the birds of the air.

Dual Meaning and Application of the Parable: God’s Kingdom growth in the world and in the individual.

1. The growth of God’s Kingdom in the world at large.

- Jesus was the solitary, microscopic seed (sperma) of God born in obscurity.
- Jesus called out 12 Apostles.
- Later we saw 70 disciples. (Luke 10:27)
- At Pentecost we find 120 disciples in an upper room. (Acts 1:15)
- 3000 came to Christ at Pentecost. (Acts 4:4)
- Throughout the Book of Acts, their numbers continued to increase to an estimated 20,000. (Acts 5:14, 6:1,7)
- In spite of all the church’s failures, weaknesses, satanic infiltrations and persecution, in the end, there is an innumerable number from every nation, tribe and tongue worshiping before the throne of God. (Rev. 5:9;19)

- We are a part of something big and getting bigger. God is gathering and crafting a “people” to populate the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.
- One day everything in creation will become subservient to the Kingdom of God. It, *“becomes larger than all the other garden plants.”*

2. The growth of God’s Kingdom in a person’s life.

- The Kingdom of God often begins in the individual with the simple desire to escape hell and enjoy heaven.
- It then begins to demand the eradication of sin and the establishment of holiness.
- It grows to impact all aspects of life to include our time, finances, conversation, thought life, clothing, entertainment, hobbies.
- It then moves us beyond ourselves to the lives of others as we become a source of protection, nourishment, healing, direction for others.
- In Matthew the parable of the mustard seed stands alongside the parable of the leaven. Matthew 13:33 (ESV) *“He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*
- The *“Kingdom of God”*, when growing as designed, *“becomes larger than all the other garden plants.”*

Verse 32b

“...so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Two Interpretations:

1. Refers to Satanic infiltration of the church and our lives.

- In the parable of the soils, the birds referred to Satan. Thus, some commentators assert that the growth of the Kingdom will give Satan an opportunity to infiltrate and go to work.
 - Jesus warned about tares being sown among the wheat. (Matthew 13:24-27)
 - Judas was a part of the disciple’s band. (Luke 22:3)
 - Ananias and Sapphira were in the Jerusalem fellowship. (Acts 5)
 - Simon Magnus was a part of the church in Samaria. (Acts 8:1-24)

- Satanic-led men boldly infiltrated the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 11:13-15).
- The bigger the net, the greater the chance to catch bad fish. (Matthew 13:47-50)
- Satan is always attempting to thwart the growth of God's Kingdom in the world and in your life, but I doubt seriously this is what Jesus had in mind.

2. Refers to the sheltering, protecting, nourishing nature of the Kingdom.

- Old Testament parallels:
 - Nebuchadnezzar's dream: Daniel 4:10-12, 20-22
 - Assyrian Empire: Ezekiel 31:3-6
 - The imagery was very familiar to the Jewish audience. They would have understood that the Kingdom would become a source of rest, protection, care, security, nourishment and a sanctuary.
- The positive impact of Christianity/Kingdom of God on Earth:
 - Ending of the gladiatorial games, abolition of slavery, women's rights, reversal of poverty, sanctity of marriage (heterosexual, monogamous), health care, education, science, democracy, free enterprise, art, music, literature.
 - No doubt, perversions of Christianity have had their negative effects (Crusades, Inquisition, KKK, White Supremacists), but true Christianity has changed the world in radical ways for good.
- The positive impact of Christianity/Kingdom of God in an individual:
 - As the Kingdom of God grows in us, we become an increasing source of blessing and nourishment to others.
 - As the rule of Christ grows in our church, our church should become a source of rest, protection, care, security, nourishment and sanctuary.

Verse 33

“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.”

Jesus adapted His teaching to the audience's ability and desire to understand. We should do the same.

Verse 34

“He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”

Jesus didn't speak in parables to conceal the message, but to protect people from increased judgment and test the sincerity of their desire to know.

Jesus would explain everything to those who hung around long enough in private for Him to explain everything.

What is Jesus explaining to you in private?

Truth: There will always be a dependency upon Jesus for understanding.

Conclusion:

Questions to ponder:

1. How am I contributing to the growth of God's Kingdom in the world at large in my generation?
2. How am I letting the Kingdom of God grow, consume and use me?
3. What is Jesus explaining to me in private?