

The Parable of the Growing Seed

Bible reading

Mark 4: 26-29

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.”

Jesus often taught using parables, a bit like stories or riddles, where the true meaning isn't always clear or obvious. Jesus told his disciples a lot of parables about the Kingdom of God. He would say: “The Kingdom of God is like...” He taught so much about the Kingdom of God, it was obviously very important to him. But this parable about the Kingdom of God doesn't initially sound like a particularly exciting story or comparison.

If one were to summarise this parable to be just one sentence long, you could say: The Kingdom of God is like seed that grows.

I like growing plants too. If I told you that one day I planted some seeds and they grew, you wouldn't be particularly surprised at that information, or particularly over-awed by my storytelling ability!

What is so special or noteworthy about seeds that grow?!

Let's take a look at the parable in more detail and see if we can discover some reasons why Jesus used the image of a growing seed to describe God's Kingdom.

The focus of this parable is not the sower (man/farmer), nor the conditions of the soil. The focus is the seed itself and how it grows. So our first thing to notice about the seed is that:

1. The seed is **small and seemingly insignificant**.

I have some seeds here. Can you see them? Who here can see them?

Jesus chooses to compare the Kingdom of God not with something big and impressive, but with something small and seemingly insignificant.

Bigger does not necessary mean better.

If you have ever felt small or insignificant, this parable is for you.

2. The seed and the soil contain all the necessary structures, nutrients and chemicals for growth to happen.

The seed is naturally **full of potential** for life and growth, for fruitfulness and harvest.

3. The man doesn't know (or doesn't need to know) *how* the seed grows. It just does.

To begin with, all the action happens underground. The seed grows **secretly**, and in the dark. We can't see it, we don't know if it is even growing until it breaks through the surface of the soil.

The seed doesn't grow because the man tries to understand it. The seed grows despite his lack of understanding. God alone can see it.

4. The seed seemingly grows **slowly**. But if you were to study just what was happening, it would seem **miraculous**.

A wheat seed takes about a week to germinate and sprout, depending on the temperature of the soil. If you were to try and watch it grow you wouldn't see anything happening. You could only see it if you watched a time-lapse video. And then you could see the miraculous way it sends the roots down to seek out water, then the first shoot up to seek out the light, and how the stem and leaves and flowers and grains develop.

5. The seed grows irrespective of what the man is doing. Whether the farmer is awake or asleep, whether he works or rests, the seed carries on growing.

This can be somewhat discouraging if you're the type of person who is very active trying to help people, or if you're the type of person who feels they need to always be involved for anything to happen. But Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God is not dependent on just us. If we are full of energy and working, then great! But if we need to rest, God won't stop and the Kingdom will keep growing.

6. The seed carries on growing until it is ready to be harvested. It doesn't stop. It doesn't regress. It doesn't decide to go back into the ground.

God is drawing us to himself, like the plant grows towards the sun. The power of God's love is great enough to keep growing the plant.

7. As the seed develops, it looks different and has different forms and features. First a stalk for stability. Then leaves for capturing sunlight. Then a head for flowers to develop. Then a full kernel, full of potential and usefulness.

Growth has many stages. Journeys have many milestones. Change will look different at different points. Let's not get frustrated at the stages of growth that we are seeing, or compare ourselves or our church or our family with other people. What is important is the miracle of growth and the miracle of the Kingdom of God secretly growing amongst us.

8. As soon as the seed has fully grown it is harvested. It is not left to rot, or to wither away, or be wasted. It fulfils its potential.

In God's Kingdom, nothing and no one is ever worthless, useless or wasted.

Conclusion

In Jesus' parable of the growing seed, we are reminded that what is important can often be overlooked. The important things are often the small things, the little people, the seemingly insignificant actions.

Jesus lived this way himself. He loved the poor, the outcast, the lepers. He made friends with those who were not admired or accepted by society. He treasured the small seeds.

This parable teaches us to shift our gaze away from the big and impressive things of this world, to the small and little things.

From the rich and powerful people to the barely noticed people.

Because this is where the Kingdom of heaven takes root and grows.

What is the most unlikely place that you would associate with God's Kingdom? Maybe that is the place where the seed of God's Kingdom is secretly growing.

Let's not give up on someone or something that looks like it's beyond hope.

The seed of God's Kingdom may be the smile you give to a stranger. The 'thank you' you say to the cashier at the supermarket. The help you offer to a neighbour. The piece of litter you pick up from the pavement. The courageous decision you make that few people notice or comment on. The messages of love and peace that you send to your friends.

This is how the kingdom of God grows. This is how the kingdom of God is growing, right now, amongst us. Can you see it? Maybe not so easily. But if you were to look back at a time lapse video in a few years time, you would be able to see how much growth and change has happened.

The Kingdom of God is like a growing seed. Amen