

The Growth Of The Kingdom.

Text: Mark 4:26-29

Suggested Hymns:

159, 109, 136, 304, 175

- 1) A Brief Overview
- 2) Its Internal Energy
- 3) Its Growth According To Laws
- 4) Its Gradualness
- 5) Its Progressive Stages
- 6) Its Certain Development

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 4:26-29, ²⁶ *And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ "and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know. ²⁸ "For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. ²⁹ "But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We have now begun the Trinity season. The colour is green and the subject is growth, spiritual growth. We read in Romans 10:17, ¹⁷ *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Today's Gospel lesson stresses the importance of the word of God when it says, *'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'*¹

Jesus is the best and greatest Teacher. His method always adapted to the understanding of His hearers. He often chose to teach by means of parables. What is a parable? It is a story of every-day life which teaches a lesson in another department of life.

This form of religious teaching is found especially in the gospels, which give us the direct teachings of Jesus. There are very few parables in the Old Testament, only seven,² while Jesus used no fewer than 28, and some of them given by as many as three evangelists.

Very few were given by the apostles. And what was the effect of this kind of teaching upon the people? We read in Matthew 7:28-29, ²⁸ *And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹ for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

Our text today is taken from a chapter containing three parables. All three are closely related, both in the truths that they teach and in the subject-matter they present.

First comes the well-known parable of the Sower going to sow his seed and the four kinds of ground on which the seed fell. This parable tells us of the foundation and beginning of the kingdom of God.

The third parable, immediately following the one in our text, is the parable of the Mustard-seed which grew into a great tree. This parable tells us of the completion of the kingdom of God.

The second parable, which is given in our text tells us also of a sower, but its lesson is the growth and development of that same kingdom of God. Let us closely follow the Saviour's unfolding of this subject. We may take as our theme: *Spiritual Life under the Figure of a Grain of Wheat*. There are five separate thoughts in the Saviour's progressive unfolding of this theme. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A Brief Overview Of The Text.

This parable is found only in Mark.

Whenever Christ speaks about the kingdom of God, His ruling activity, His words always have something to do with the seed, the Gospel that brings people to faith in Christ Jesus.

Here Jesus speaks of the power and reliability of the Gospel message. All that need be done, in fact, all that can be done, is to sow the seed, to proclaim the Word. A farmer who plants the seed does not understand how it grows. The power is in the seed.

So it is with the Gospel. It is sown; it sprouts; it matures; it is harvested. Christ's words echo Isaiah 55:11, ¹¹ *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

The harvest includes the final harvest at the end of the world, when all mankind will see the marvellous fruit the Lord produced through His Word in this world of sin. But the harvest is also reaped here and now in the life of every child of God in whose heart the Word has taken root and grown and whose faith God uses time and time again to bring that same Word to others.

The harvest is not the believer's doing, but God's. Thus this parable was of special comfort to the apostles as they carried out Jesus' assignment. Paul later put it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, ***‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ’ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.*** Even though at times we may not see the results, there will be a harvest because the seed has God's power within it.

One thing must still be noted. The phrase,²⁸ ***“For the earth yields crops by itself”*** might seem as though the earth (the human heart) receives some credit. Not at all, for the Greek really means “spontaneously,” “automatically,” or “as a matter of course.”

The person's heart is only the location of where it takes place. God's power inherent in the Word is the cause. If it were not so, you and I would be without hope; for by nature we are corrupt and sinful, and we reject the grace of God.

It is God alone who overcomes this opposition on our part and brings us to faith. We preach and teach the Word. God's Word does the rest.

2. The Growth Of The Kingdom Its Internal Energy

All life is indeed a mystery. We cannot comprehend even its simplest forms. And here we are dealing with spiritual life, life's highest form. Life is all about us. We see its manifestations on every hand, and yet we know and understand nothing whatever of its real essence.

There must be — there is, a wonderful power in life of any form. How much more so in spiritual life, its highest form! The sower, according to our text, places the seed in the ground and then apparently leaves it to its own devices.

If he had buried a pebble in the ground, that would have been the beginning and end of the whole matter. Nothing whatever would have come of it.

But he has placed a grain of wheat in the ground. And under the influence of moisture and warmth the grain of wheat begins to swell and burst open, and a small, though seemingly frail and feeble, blade of living grass pushes forth.

Some substance without life, for instance, a grain of starch, might have swelled and expanded under the same conditions. But no blade would have pushed forth. Plainly there must have been some powerful force other than mere chemical or physical force to produce this result.

This is the thought which we are to take over into the spiritual world. When the Word of God is preached to the souls of men, it is as if a grain of wheat were placed in the ground under the right conditions for germination.

That power which God has placed in His Word regenerates the cold, dead heart of man, and behold there is a springing forth of new life. The power is really the same in each instance, although applied to different ends — in the case of the seed, for this earthly life; in the other case, for eternal, heavenly life.

In His conversation with Nicodemus Christ points out in plain words what this power is as we read in John 3:5, ⁵ *Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

And shortly after this Jesus likens this power to the wind, ⁷ *“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”* ⁸ *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.* The internal energy is of God.

3. The Growth Of The Kingdom Its Growth Is According To Laws

The entire process of germination and growth is an orderly process, according to laws which are as old and as well established as creation itself. In each case all the right conditions must first be fulfilled.

In the first parable of our chapter this is more plainly indicated under the figure of the seed falling upon stony or thorny ground. It is not every person who hears the Word of the Gospel that is converted. Why this is true is harder for us to understand than in the case of seed falling on stony or thorny ground.

Our text today is not, however, so much concerned with cases of failure as rather with cases of success, where all laws of life are correctly followed. Where such is the case, growth follows seemingly of itself. The sower does not worry over the growth. He does not, like some foolish gardeners, from time to time, dig up the seed to see how things are progressing. That will defeat the purpose.

No, he sleeps and rises night and day, he goes about his other business and has perfect confidence that this life which he has put into the ground, will according to laws which he has repeatedly observed, come forth and show itself in its own good time.

Thus it is also in the spiritual life. The preaching of the Word, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who operates through it, has touched the heart of the sinner. Thereby a certain process of spiritual life has been started, and growth according to the laws of this life will follow.

4. The Growth Of The Kingdom Its Gradualness

And our text teaches us still another fact concerning spiritual life — its growth is gradual. Much disappointment is caused to many people by this fact. They want to have spiritual growth by jerks, and in sudden stages. But God has once for all arranged the matter thus.

Spiritual growth is a slow, gradual process, much like that of a great and mighty oak. It takes a century to produce such a product, while you can grow a pumpkin in a few months. But surely a Christian character is worth it. What a noble thing is a mature, developed Christian character!

It is worth all it costs. The indwelling Spirit of God does His work slowly. He has plenty of time. Impatience in this matter merely defeats its own purpose. Nothing — no human effort or worry — can hurry spiritual growth. After the seed is sown, you must inevitably wait the appointed time for the harvest.

Sometimes the Christian feels disappointed at the gradualness of his spiritual growth. That is but another opportunity for developing patience and trust in the divine Spirit, who controls this matter. He does all things well.

5. The Growth Of The Kingdom Its Progressive Stages

Our text teaches us the next fact concerning the spiritual life when we read, *first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.* Thus it is with the spiritual life. Progressive stages make up its growth.

In the beginning it is but small and weak, corresponding to the thin, small blade of grass. But after a period of time there is the promise of fruit. As with wheat one can see the immature ear which will in time develop into “*the full grain in the head,*” so in the spiritual life.

As Solomon truly tells us, as we read in Ecclesiastes 3:1-3, *¹ To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: ² A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; ³ A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up.*

Much trouble and heartache have those who do things out of their appointed time. For example: Moses’ first attempt to be the leader of the children of Israel.

God has once for all arranged all things according to an ordered course. Would He make an exception with spiritual growth? Would you expect the full head first and after that the immature grain and perhaps last of all the tiny growing blade? Certainly not! God is a God of order, and everything in His kingdom works in an orderly manner. It is well for us that we understand and accept this fact.

6. The Growth Of The Kingdom Its Certain Development

Finally, we learn of the spiritual life that its development and growth are certain. This fact follows from the facts which we have already noticed. As we watch the germination and development of a grain of wheat, we become more and more confident that the harvest will soon appear. It does not depend on us and on our efforts.

The sower in our text slept and rose, not concerning himself with the seed which he had sown. We have no power to make the plant bring forth its fruit. There is a higher power in which we trust.

And even so it is in the spiritual life. That infinite power of God which first made us Christians is also engaged in keeping us Christians and in bringing us to our full development in eternal life. As St. Peter says, in 1 Pet. 1:5, We are *kept*

by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

That same omnipotent power of God which is active in the smallest plant, making it bring forth fruit after its kind, is also active in a different manner and with different means in calling and enlightening us through the Gospel, awakening faith in our hearts, and keeping us all the days of our earthly pilgrimage with Christ in the one true faith.

This means that by the same power of God, God will in His own good time *“raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.”*³ All glory be to God on high! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 16:29

² The Poor Man's Lamb - 2 Samuel 12:1-4

The 2 Fighting Brothers and the Avengers of Blood - 2 Samuel 14:1-11

The Escaped Prisoner - 1 Kings 20:35-40

The Fruitless Vineyard - Isaiah 5:1-7

The 2 Eagles and the Vine - Ezekiel 17:3-10

The Lioness and her Cubs - Ezekiel 19:2-9

The Boiling Cauldron - Ezekiel 24:3-5

³ Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles Creed. *Luther's Small Catechism*