

Mark 4:26-41 ~ Scripture Verses

The Parable of the Growing Seed

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.”

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”

³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Jesus Calms the Storm

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

[New International Version, NIV, 1984]

Mark 4:26-41 ~ Discussion Questions

Jesus had recently told the parable of the four types of soil, then the parable of the weeds among the good plants, and now he tells this parable, recorded only by Mark (4:26-29), about a seed growing into grain. This is followed by another well-known seed parable.

1. Who does the man who plants the seed represent? The seed? The plant it grows into? The soil? Think before you answer. (Mark 4:26-29)
2. Have you ever tried to grow a plant from seed? Does every seed sprout? Does every seed grow to maturity? What does it take for a plant to grow, and where do you get the things you need?
3. What was the growth process like for the seed? (4:27-28) Quick or gradual? Well understood or mysterious and unknown? What's the meaning of the parable?
4. Does the seed have anything to do with being "born again?" (1 Peter 1:22-25) How about with saving your soul? (James 1:21)
5. How does this parable help you better understand what the kingdom of God is like? How do you feel knowing that the message of Christ has a mysterious power in itself?
6. Does this parable imply an obligation for believers to sow the seed, water it, and fertilize it in others, i.e., speak of your faith to others? (1 Corinthians 3:6-9)
7. What small or seemingly insignificant possession is worth a great deal to you? Why?
8. Jesus often referred to mustard seeds in what context? (Matt 17:20, Luke 17:6)
9. The parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32) must have been confusing to Jesus' listeners. Everything was wrong. The mustard seed is not all that tiny, while the yellow mustard plant is only 8" tall and the black mustard bush is typically about 5 feet tall, hardly a tree that could shelter birds. Explanation please?
10. The term 'the birds of the air' is sometimes used symbolically to mean the children of the prince of the air. Did Jesus mean by this analogy that the kingdom of God will be in a constant struggle with Satan and his followers?
11. What is the point of this parable? (Remember, this is a "Kingdom of God" parable.)
12. In the story of Jesus quieting the storm (Mark 4:35-41), why were the disciples surprised with Jesus? (4:38) Why did Jesus rebuke his disciples? (4:40)
13. Have you ever felt distressed at events out of control? Has God helped you handle things? How can you trust more completely in him? Do you ever doubt Jesus' deity?

Mark 4:26-41 ~ Leader's Guide

Jesus had recently told the parable of the four types of soil, then the parable of the weeds among the good plants, and now he tells this parable, recorded only by Mark (4:26-29), about a seed growing into grain. This is followed by another well-known seed parable, one of only six repeated in all three synoptic gospels.

1. Who does the man who plants the seed represent? The seed? The plant it grows into? The soil? Think before you answer. (Mark 4:26-29)

The man represents the planter of the seed who might be Jesus or might, in fact, be a believer planting the seed in a non-believer. The seed represents the word of God (it does not represent a person, which may be a bit confusing, because the mature plant does, in fact, represent a believer). In this parable and the previous ones, people also seem to be initially represented by the soil ("All by itself the soil produces grain..." 4:28). A bit confusing. But Jesus said that most people would not understand the parables. Why? Because God's plan involves calling many, but choosing only a few. "(The) *MANY* (meaning – *ALL*) are called, but *FEW* are chosen." – Matthew 22:14

2. Have you ever tried to grow a plant from seed? Does every seed sprout? Does every seed grow to maturity? What does it take for a plant to grow, and where do you get the things you need?

3. What was the growth process like for the seed? (4:27-28) Quick or gradual? Well understood or mysterious and unknown? What's the meaning of the parable?

Whereas the parable of the four types of soil stresses the importance of proper soil for growth of the seed and the success of the harvest, here the mysterious power of the seed itself is expressed ("the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." – 4:27). Once the seed is planted, the farmer perhaps waters and fertilizes it, but verse 28 says, "all by itself the soil produces grain..."

What's the meaning of the parable? It seems to be that "once planted in a fertile mind, the gospel message contains its own power to grow and mature."

4. Does the seed have anything to do with being "born again?" (1 Peter 1:22-25) How about with saving your soul? (James 1:21)

These two verses show how the seed, which is actually the word of God, can work within you.

1 Peter :22-25 - ²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the

heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord stands forever.” [Isaiah 40:6-8]

James 1:21 - Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

5. How does this parable help you better understand what the kingdom of God is like? How do you feel knowing that the message of Christ has a mysterious power in itself?

6. Does this parable imply an obligation for believers to sow the seed, water it, and fertilize it in others, i.e., speak of your faith to others? (1 Corinthians 3:6–9)

Answer: yes to all of the above. All Christians have an obligation to plant seeds, water them, and fertilize them by speaking of our faith or giving our testimony to others.

1 Corinthians 3:6–9 - ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

7. What small or seemingly insignificant possession is worth a great deal to you? Why?

8. Jesus often referred to mustard seeds in what context? (Matt 17:20, Luke 17:6)

He used a mustard seed to illustrate a very small something (usually faith). In Matthew 17:20 Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Again in Luke 17:6 we have: He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

9. The parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32) must have been confusing to Jesus’ listeners. Everything was wrong. The mustard seed is not all that tiny, while the yellow mustard plant is only 8" tall and the black mustard bush is typically about 5 feet tall, hardly a tree that could shelter birds. Explanation please?

First, why a mustard seed? Possibly because it is one of the most tightly packed

seeds. There is no place for air inside it. As a result it can withstand high pressures and high temperatures. Also, of the seeds sown in the East to produce edible products, the mustard seed was probably one of the smallest known by most people. Why refer to the plant as a tree? A mustard seed does not grow into a tree “naturally,” although in isolation a black mustard bush can grow to 10 or 15 feet tall. Even so, the large branches capable of offering nests for the birds of the air does not seem to be possible in a mustard bush however large it grew.

For it to grow into a tree it would have to be an unusual (some say supernatural) occurrence. Perhaps Jesus was painting a picture of a dramatic work of God, so that his listeners would envision a huge mustard tree that was like nothing they had ever seen before.

So as he started telling this parable they might have been thinking, “huh, a mustard tree? Any bird sitting on it’s branches would crush the little bush,” but at the end of the parable those who understood it would be thinking, “Wow, the kingdom of heaven is really going to be beyond anything we have ever seen before.”

10. The term ‘the birds of the air’ is sometimes used symbolically to mean the children of the prince of the air. Did Jesus mean by this analogy that the kingdom of God will be in a constant struggle with Satan and his followers?

Possibly, although it seems unlikely as most modern versions of the Bible (ESV, NLT, 2011 NIV, TNIV, CEV, New Century, CEB, TEV, ASV, Holman, Wycliffe, NAB, etc) simply say birds, wild birds, birds of the sky, or even birds of Heaven. So what did Jesus mean by this? He does not say, but many commentators seem to feel that he was saying that the kingdom of God is certainly a blessing to all who take refuge in its “branches.”

11. What is the point of this parable? (Remember, this is a “Kingdom of God” parable.)

Different commentators seem to come up with somewhat different meanings. The NIV study Bible says, “The main point is that the Kingdom of God seemingly had insignificant beginnings. It was introduced by the despised and rejected Jesus and his 12 unimpressive apostles. But a day will come when its true greatness and power will be seen by the whole world.”

Phil Ware of Heartlight says, “The Kingdom appears small in the face of the world’s political and military powers. However, the Kingdom we see is only a seed, not the fully mature shelter. But the Kingdom is growing and will be large enough to furnish safety and security for those who live in its branches. The God who propels the mustard seed to great growth is at work in his Kingdom to do far greater things than we can ask or imagine. So find your shelter in this Kingdom. All others will pass away, but this one will endure—forever.”

The Roman Catholic view is that, “The kingdom of God initiated by Jesus in proclaiming the word develops quietly yet powerfully until it is fully established by him at the final judgment.”

David B. Curtis of the Berean Bible Church says that “the idea of birds nesting in the branches is the idea of nations finding shelter in the particular kingdom. The benefits of the kingdom of God extend beyond the redeemed. The world benefits by the rule of Christ, for just as the birds found lodging in the mustard tree, even so the people of the world find help, comfort, and better lives through the expansive work of Christ's kingdom.”

Mark Copeland of Executable Outlines says, “Those who will abide in Christ can be used by Him to produce remarkable growth in the kingdom.”

12. In the story of Jesus quieting the storm (Mark 4:35-41), why were the disciples surprised with Jesus? (4:38) Why did Jesus rebuke his disciples? (4:40)

Jesus has power not only over individuals (healing, casting out demons), small events (making wine from water), but over all creation. The sea of Galilee is susceptible to sudden, violent storms as cool air from the Mediterranean is drawn down through narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot, humid air lying over the lake. The disciples were perhaps surprised that Jesus could sleep through such a storm, but it is obvious that Christ, in his humanness, was exhausted. Their question didn't show much faith or even respect when they asked, “don't you care if we drown?”

13. Have you ever felt distressed at events out of control? Has God helped you handle things? How can you trust more completely in him? Do you ever doubt Jesus' deity?

When the disciples ask in vs 4:41, “who is this?” in view of what Jesus had just done, the only answer is that he is the Son of God. By such miracles Jesus sought to establish and increase the disciples' faith in his deity. Why is it taking the disciples so long to “get it?” They still haven't reached any insight as to who Jesus is, despite their privileged position. Would you have understood sooner? How long did it take you to “get it” with respect to faith in Jesus' power and trusting him *completely*?