

# The Growing Seed

## Mark 4:26-29

I did not get to plant a vegetable garden this year. The past three years I did. Dave Bertrand brought bring over his rototiller and helped me prepare the soil for planting. I planted seeds – seeds for cucumbers, for squash, for zucchini, green beans, peas, peppers, corn, tomatoes, cantaloupe, and watermelon.

Gardening, I learned, gives you a different outlook on things. For example, I no longer rabbits and birds as cute little critters, but rather invaders raiding my produce. But more than that, I experienced the awe of watching a garden come into being out of the barren ground.

Gardening truly is mystery. You hide little seeds under the dirt, pour a little water on top, and nothing happens. The ground is as barren as it ever looked. You go out the next day and it looks the same, and again the next day and still the same result, so that your anticipation begins to decline. But then that morning comes when you step outside and the mystery appears – little green sprouts have begun. Your seeds have actually become live plants. And they keep growing day by day until the next wonder takes place. They begin to flower and the first tiny signs of fruit appear.

It is exciting to watch the marvelous fruit develop each day, until the time of harvest comes and you pick your first vegetable...and then another vegetable, and then another, and then another until you wonder how much produce can come from such a small garden. There isn't a one-day harvest in which you take all that a plant produces.

The kingdom of God is like a garden, so Jesus tells us in 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 how.**

**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."**

Some of you gardeners are shaking your heads and thinking, "If it could only be so easy." I didn't mention the weeding and the watering, though I did allude to the battle with cute critters. Some gardeners make sure the soil has the appropriate nutrients and defend their plants from micro-insects and other dastardly perils. But even seasoned farmers must be amazed at the wonder of growth, because they especially know that they do nothing more than help provide a good environment. The growth itself they cannot produce. All they can do is watch.

Let's look at Jesus' garden. A man scatters seed. We saw in the parable of the sower and the soils in verse 14, Jesus said, "**The sower sows the word.**" Just as in that parable, here I believe that the seed is the word of God. It is the message of the Gospel. It is the good news of the Kingdom of God.

In the previous parable of the four soils the emphasis was on the condition of the soil. The parable of the sower featured four types of soil, and only the fourth type, the good soil, produced fruit. The parable of the seed, on the other hand, features only one type of soil: the good soil. Here the emphasis is on the seed itself. The mysterious growth of the seed is the central focus of the story. What this parable teaches is that the secret of the growth of the seed, the secret of its life is in the seed itself.

So the first lesson from this parable is:

## **1. The Unique Power of the Word of God. (4:26-27)**

We learn something of the unique power of the word of God, the seed is the word - and if you look at verse 27: **"and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how."** Literally, the original reads: 'how, he does not know'. The emphasis is on 'how'. The farmer has sown the seed, he sleeps night and day, leaves it, waits, and it miracle! It grows! He is dumbfounded at the process, he doesn't understand how.

So we learn something of the unique power of the word of God: just as the natural seed has life in itself, so the word of God is infused with life and power.

Modern science has made some amazing discoveries in our lifetimes. Scientists can even take a seed apart and analyze its structure and composition. They can even create a seed that has the same chemical composition. It looks just like a natural seed both outside and inside, down to the molecular level. If you placed a seed made in a laboratory beside a seed produced in nature, you might not be able to tell the difference.

But, when those seeds are planted, the difference becomes clear. Both seeds can be planted in good soil and both can receive plenty of sunshine and water, the seed produced in nature will germinate and grow. The seed produced in the laboratory will merely rot away. Why? Science has learned how to make a seed, but they have never learned to produce life! Only God can do that! The process involved in the transformation from seed to fruit is a work of God!

No farmer, no scientist and no philosopher can clearly explain how a dead, dormant seed can produce life when it is buried in the soil. Yet, within hours of being sown, the outer husk of the seed begins to swell because it is drawing moisture from the soil. The chemical makeup of the seed begins to change. And, often, within days that seed sends a tiny root downward and the beginning of a stalk upward! It is a puzzling mystery, yet the seed produces life within a short time.

Sowing the Gospel seed is the same way. When it is sown into a prepared heart, it is a mystery, but that seed begins to germinate. Sometimes it happens in minutes or hours. At other times, it may take months or years, but there is life within that seed and it will begin to germinate within that heart. When it does, life will issue forth.

I read a story about a street preacher who years ago used to take his hat off and throw it on the ground, and he would shout 'It's alive! It's alive! It's alive!'. The crowd would gather around, who he was about to preach at, and then he would

lift the hat and underneath was a Bible. It's alive, this is God's living and abiding word, and there is a strange force in every utterance of God's word.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "**For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**"

Romans 1:16 says, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...**"

You know, this parable that we're looking at today ought to reaffirm our faith in the Bible. Why substitute the Bible for gimmicks, when this is the living and abiding word of God? Jesus said, "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.**" (Mark 13:3). This book lives!

Whatever opposition there is to the word of God, isn't it wonderful to be able to believe today that, as Isaiah said, "**For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 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.**" (Isaiah 55:10-11). Do you believe in the unique power of the word of God? That's what this parable teaches us.

Then secondly it teaches us:

## **2. The Unusual Productivity of the Word of God. (4:28)**

We see the unusual productivity of the Word of God in verse 28: "**For the earth yields crops by itself.**" The Lord is describing the mysterious, imperceptible growth of the seed: 'of itself'. The Greek word is *automatos*. From it we get our English word *automatic*. Automatically, the seed sprouts, because the life is in itself. This is how the seed works: automatically it sprouts and brings forth fruit. The nature of the soil, the weather, and the cultivation of the plant all enter in, but the secret of the growth is in the seed itself. The life is not in the water, the life is not in the sower, the life is not in the soil, the life is in the seed!

We cast the seed into the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, often without any immediate, visible results. But, when the Gospel falls into the soil of the heart, an amazing, secret work begins to take place. When the Word of God is planted in a human heart, the Spirit of God uses that Word to produce conviction in the heart of the hearer.

That should encourage you who sow the seed. Especially you who sow among boys and girls, particularly your own boys and girls. Isn't it wonderful to know that when you sow this seed, you are sowing *life* into young lives - and who knows when the moment will be that the climate is right, and the water comes down from heaven, and they sprout forth to the glory of God? Let that encourage you.

**Now how does it apply?** Well, here are two practical ways. It applies in that it teaches us that there is **a need for perspective in the work of God**. To put it bluntly: this work isn't about you, it's not about me, it's about Him and it's about His word. It's about the seed. Listen to 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."** We need perspective, it's not about us - we have something to do, but it's not about what we do, it's about what God does.

The second practical thing that we can learn about the word of God: there's need not only for perspective, but **patience in the work of God**. Look at verses 27 and 28: the farmer slept, he rose night and day, the seed sprung up. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says: **'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven'**, and verse 2 at the end says, **'a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is plant'**. That's really saying that there are seasons, there are seasons in life, there are seasons in nature, and there are seasons in sowing the seed, and often that season is a season of waiting. Sowing, waiting, reaping - and what goes on during that waiting time, that time that we should be patient, is often imperceptible. The farmer doesn't know what's going on under the ground, you don't know what's going on behind the veil of the spirit, but something is going on because the life is in the seed. The farmer sleeps and rises, sleeps and rises, and then one day the seed grows and he doesn't know how.

A pastor had served a country church for many years. He had faithfully preached the Word of God and had regularly visited and witnessed in the community. His ministry in that church spanned many years, but there was little fruit and very few conversions. Eventually the old preacher died. He went to his death convinced that his ministry in the little country church had been a failure.

A while later the church called a new Pastor. He preached the same Gospel the old preacher had preached, but an amazing thing happened. People began to get saved. In fact, a revival broke out and many of the people in that community came to know the Lord.

As they testified about their experiences, the people share on things in common. One new convert after the other testified and said that it was the faithful ministry of the old preacher that God had used to awaken them to their need of a Savior.

Never think for a minute that your witness for Jesus is in vain. You cannot see what God is doing! He is working behind the scenes and beneath the soil of hearts to bring souls to Himself.

Many godly parents have spent their lives praying for and witnessing to their wayward children. Many of them have gone to Heaven without seeing their prayers answered. God, however, touched the seed that had been sowed in those hearts and He had saved multitudes because a mom or a dad dropped the Gospel seed in the heart of a child.

Never give up! Never stop telling a lost world about a saving Lord! Never allow this world to silence your witness for Jesus! Keep telling them about Him and trust Him to do His secret work in the hearts and lives of men, women, boys and girls.

You never know, that barren life that you have been sowing seed into might just spring to life on day! You might go to school, to work, to church and see that person profess their faith in Jesus. You might just get to watch them push away from the earth, grow tall in Jesus and bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

The unusual productivity of the word of God teaches us that we need perspective in God's work, we need patience and perseverance in God's work, but thirdly and finally - something else we learn along with the unique power of the word of God, and the unusual productivity of the word of God: we are presented with the

### **3. The Ultimate Purpose of the Word of God. (4:29).**

Verse 29, the seed was sown to bring forth harvest, that's the reason why the word of God is sown. This parable presents God's kingdom from the first sowing, hidden in the hearts of men when the Lord Jesus was on the earth, then the patient waiting in this age of grace, until the final reaping for all to see at the end of the age, that great harvest. The ultimate purpose for the word of God is that there should be a harvest to God's glory.

There is a unique power in the word of God, there is an unusual productivity in the word of God, and there is an ultimate purpose in the word of God that will be fulfilled. James 5:7-8, **"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."**

The harvest is the final judgment day when the Lord comes again. Joel 3:13 and Revelation 14:14ff both refer to that day as the time to swing the sickle and reap the harvest. Those texts speak of the harvesting of all mankind for judgment. Jesus, however, is referring to the harvest of the people who belong to God's kingdom. God's kingdom garden will produce a bountiful harvest.

As we close I want you to think about Jesus. As he preaches the word and teaches disciples, Jesus is casting seeds in anticipation of the harvest. Just as the man literally "sends" the sickle, Jesus would "send" his disciples to preach and cast out demons (Mark 3:13-14, 6:7-13). He would also "send" the Holy Spirit to empower them to implement the victory that God would win over evil through His death and resurrection (John 16:7, Acts 1-2). Jesus' Spirit-empowered followers carried forth the good news of the Kingdom to all the world.

This parable speaks of a man who sleeps and rises and of seed that goes into the earth and grows. And that is just what Jesus did. He died. He was buried. He slept in the earth for three days. And He sprang to life.

Paul calls the resurrected Jesus **"the first fruits of those who are asleep"** (1 Corinthians 15:20). When Jesus died, when He went to sleep, no one believed the gospel. But He did not stay dead. He also got up and the world hasn't been the same since. The resurrection of Christ (the first fruits) guarantees the future resurrection of God's people (the final harvest).