

# “Grow With God”

Allan Pole on Sunday morning, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022



Theme: The Lord calls us to be a part of His expanding kingdom.

Text: Mark 4:26-29

Here’s a thought: American writer William A. Ward advised, “Judge each day not by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant.”

Here’s a profound question: Why did the farmer bury his money in a field? He wanted to make his soil rich.

Jesus talked in Mark chapter 4 about the different types of soils and their responses to seeds. He referred to letting our light shine for everyone to see. He even warned His listeners to grow what has been entrusted to them, lest they have it taken away. The Jewish people in those days knew that God would establish His kingdom here on earth, but they did not know when. They watched and listened with anticipation for signs of fulfilled prophecies. The Roman Empire ruled the land of Palestine, but they longed for God to restore the glory days of King David. Many Jews expected the Messiah to arise in great glory and lead them in a mighty military victory over their oppressors. When would this king and His kingdom appear? How would God establish & expand His influence on the earth?

Let’s listen in on what Jesus says in 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.” NIV

Mark is the only Gospel writer to record this parable, but with these thoughts in mind, we can dive into what Jesus says here in Mark 4:26-29.

The kingdom of God expands by:

**Scattering** (Mark 4:26)



While people were expecting a king with fame, fortune and fight, Jesus was born in a humble manger, grew up as a carpenter and laid His life down. Jesus did not come with swords to fight, but with seeds to plant. Swords are sharp and flashy, but seeds are dull and unimpressive. Jesus spread seeds of God's word, then watched and waited for the results. Who would receive, reject or ignore Him? Who would eventually walk away from Him?

Farmers planted their grain crops in Palestine in late October or November. The seed for summer produce, such as beans, cucumbers, and melons, were sown between January and March (from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

The most important grains were barley (John 6:9) and especially wheat. These were the main crops. After the ground was plowed, the farmer was ready to plant the seed. The farmer would carry the seed in a basket or pouch attached to his waist. He would then take a handful of seeds and throw or scatter the seed with a sweeping motion of the hand and arm. The seeds would fall on the prepared soil. The farmer would then plow the field again so the ground would cover the seed (otherwise, the birds would have a feast). Sometimes the farmer would do this by dragging branches or a log behind a team of oxen (from <https://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/biblecus/biblec6.htm>). The farmers divided their plots of land with walking paths and uncultivated patches of soil. Some seeds would land in these unproductive areas.

Seeds are small. They seem so insignificant. They are vulnerable and dependent upon the one who carries them. What would the man that Jesus features in His parable do with these seeds? He could store them in a bin, eat them or even give them away. Jesus explains that he scatters these seeds on the ground. What? Why would he do this? Throwing them around seems like such a waste! The man scattered this seed because he knew from experience what could happen. He did this because he expected a return. He spread the grain because he had a sickle waiting.

Jesus used another illustration leading up to the parable we are discussing today that would parallel this idea of scattering. Look at Mark 4:21-23:

21 He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." NIV

Light is intended not to be concealed but to shine. Similarly, the seed is meant not to be stored but sown. The Lord is this man scattering seed in the world today. He scatters seed in our hearts and minds, looking for a return on His investment. He uses a variety of ways and means to scatter His seed, including the Scriptures and His servants. The Holy Spirit blows these seeds around, so they land on various soils – some rocky, some thorny and some fertile. These seeds are small and subtle but carry incredible potential. They realize their potential only when they are scattered. The more they are scattered, the greater their potential.

American writer William A. Ward (1921-1994) advised, “Judge each day not by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant.”

What seeds is the Lord planting in you? Are you providing the right conditions for them to settle and take root by spending time in His Word and prayer?

How and where are you scattering the seed that the Lord has entrusted you?

The kingdom of God expands by:

Scattering

**Growing** (Mark 4:27-28)



While the man played a role in preparing the soil and scattering the seed, he went about his everyday life knowing it was designed with the inherent potential to grow. He would have to trust the grain to fulfill its destiny, the clouds to provide the moisture and the sun to provide the energy. Ancient farmers relied on God – not their power – to provide what was needed after they did their part by scattering the seed. Pagan farmers would offer sacrifices to their gods to appease them and gain favour over their crops. The Jewish people would pray and trust the Lord to do what He could.

I admired my dad, who, as a farmer, demonstrated faith and patience despite the weather. He worked hard when he seeded in the spring, but he knew that only the Lord could provide for the crops during the summer.

The seed has a beautiful, mysterious ability to sprout and grow. Jesus explains that night and day, whether the farmer sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself, the soil

produces grain - first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. Ultimately it is God's provision, not people's efforts, that brings the growth. So it is with God's word and God's kingdom. We can try to resist or ignore Him, but He is the one who causes the growth. No one can stop the God of heaven and earth. His word and His ways will prevail.

The word of God and the will of God typically take root in our lives in small, quiet, unassuming ways. From the tiny beginning of the seed sprouts the stalk, then the head, then the whole kernel in the head. We change individually gradually yet certainly from the inside out as His seed sprouts and grows in us. On a community level, households change as people love and respect one another. On a national level, leaders make decisions for the country's benefit as citizens trust and submit to the leaders. Such transformation spreads as the seed of God's kingdom scatters and grows across the land.

We want it to come instantly, but growth comes gradually. The farmer does not sow the seed one day and see the fully grown crop the next day. He needs to be purposeful and patient as he goes about his work. There are times when he sweats, and there are times when he rests.

The Chinese philosopher Mencius (372-289 B.C.) reminds us that our attempts to speed things up don't always work (from "The Fiction of a Thinkable World: Body, Meaning, and the Culture of Capitalism" by Michael Steinberg, page 129):

You don't want to be like the man from Sung. There was a man from Sung who was worried about the slow growth of his crops and so he went and yanked on them to accelerate their growth. Empty-headed, he returned home and announced to his people: "I am so tired today. I have been out stretching the crops." His son ran out to look, but the crops had already withered.

While Jesus reminds His listeners earlier in Mark 4 that not all soil is productive and birds want to come and steal the seeds, He assures us that the farmer wants the seed to grow. The Lord calls us to trust Him, but He also trusts us. God invests in our growth and counts on us to scatter His seed. He provides opportunities to grow but holds us accountable for what we do with them. The seed of God's kingdom grows in us as we receive and obey it. It is one thing to *know* God's will and quite another to *do* God's will. If we do not do something with His seed, He will take it away.

Jesus warns in Mark 4:24-25, leading up to today's text:

24 "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." NIV

The Lord wants and plans for us to grow with Him. Are we learning and living God's Word? What signs of growth do *we* see in our lives? What signs of growth do *others* see in our lives?

The kingdom of God expands by:

Scattering

Growing

**Harvesting** (Mark 4:29)



What is it called when a tractor waits for a pedestrian to cross? Crop yield.

As soon as the grain is ripe, the farmer puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come. The oldest known sickles have flint teeth set in wood or bone handles. Farmers later used metal blades. The grain was held in one hand and cut off near the ground by the sickle (from New Unger's Bible Dictionary). The sickle or reaping hook is a symbol of the final judgment. The Lord of the harvest is a master farmer who expects a return on His investment. One day He will gather the crops that grew and ripened from His seed.

Harvest is the most exciting time on a farm! Everyone can see the results and value of the harvest. It is thrilling to see how the crops have grown and matured, but it takes wisdom to know when it's time to "swing the sickle." Planting requires faith, and waiting for the seed to grow calls for patience. If the farmer cuts the grain prematurely, it will not have grown and ripened as much as it could. If he waits too long, the quality of the grain starts to diminish while it is vulnerable to the elements. The time must be right.

The man in Jesus' parable is responsible for scattering the seed, and the Lord is responsible for growing it. The man *and* the Lord work together in the harvest. Without the Lord, there would be no seed to sow. If the man does not scatter the seed, it will be unfruitful. Without the Lord causing the seed to grow, there would be no harvest. Without the man to bring in the harvest, it would remain in the field.

We can be the soil – trampled, rocky, thorny or fertile. We can provide a setting for the seed to flourish or falter in our hearts. We can be a farmer. We can store the seed and keep it to ourselves or plant it in others. The more seed we sow, the greater the harvest. The Lord of the harvest is looking for workers. He calls us to work and grow with Him, and He directs us to pray for more

workers (John 4:38). The question is not *if* the kingdom of God is expanding but *where* it is expanding. Some will sow, and some will reap.

Mark 4 begins by describing the context for Jesus' teaching in verse 1:

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. NIV

Jesus scattered seeds in the crowd, but He knew that only those who had ears to hear (Mark 4:9) would receive and apply these seeds, resulting in a harvest.

You might have noticed that Jesus does not use the word "church" here in Mark 4:26-29. The church is *not* the kingdom. The church is *part* of the kingdom. Churches are Christ-like communities that speak the words and do the works of the King and His kingdom. Churches that focus on churches will become ingrown, while churches that focus on the kingdom of heaven will grow out and grow up.

Are you motivated by the approaching harvest? If you are, how? If you are not inspired, what adjustments do you need to make to grow and work with the Lord of the harvest?

The kingdom of God expands by:

**Scattering**

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The Lord calls us to be a part of His expanding kingdom.

