

Title: GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM, MARK 4:26 – 34  
(Chatham, NJ; 06/17/12, AM) [Pc – Narrative Analysis, Inductive]

Theme: In these parables Jesus assures us that the Kingdom will advance by its inherent power to grow and that we can trust it to become the greatest of all kingdoms.

Purpose: To encourage us to continue our respective roles in Kingdom living and be assured that God is still at work in the world.

Introduction:

1. Most likely the first disciples did not comprehend the meaning of these parables, but later and in different periods of history they needed the reassurance implied in each story.
2. Jesus has already told the Parable of the Sower, 4:1-20, and given considerably more detail about what happens in different soil/human hearts.
3. What lessons can we draw from these two parables?

#### I. The Parable of the Growing Seed, Mark 4:26-29

##### A. The farmer's story line

1. He scatters the seed
2. Nothing said about preparing the ground
3. The story dissociates him from the germination of the seed
4. In fact, "the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how" (27)
5. Otherwise he goes about his life
6. His role is only at the beginning and end of the process

##### B. The seed's story

1. It begins with being sown
2. It sprouts and grows of its own accord (by implication, with God's help)
3. Stages of growth are described (28)
4. When mature, it is harvested
5. Not the purpose here to describe the soils (as in Parable of Sower)
6. The story of the seed is the unrelenting process of growth that occurs without human effort

##### C. What this means for us

1. The seed of the Kingdom grows without any visible enhancement from visible, external forces
2. It assures those who find it difficult to comprehend how the Kingdom might be present and at work in a manner contrary to their expectations
3. There is a sense of an appointed time for the seed: harvest
4. Some farmers work well into the night to make sure they don't lose any of the ripened fruit or grain (different apples ripen at different times)
5. The farmer is assured that harvest time comes
6. Likewise the disciples can be certain of the end of time harvest of souls
7. Despite the mystery of the process, God will bring it about

#### II. The Parable of the Mustard Seed, 4:30-32

##### A. Small beginnings

1. A small seed
2. This seems out of place for something as majestic as the Kingdom of God
3. Why not an acorn that will grow into a large tree, like the cedars of Lebanon
4. Perhaps by comparison to worldly kingdoms it starts much smaller

##### B. Big outcome

1. The greatness of the Kingdom lies in its ability to produce something big
2. It becomes a home for birds – the image of preservation and protection, a place to belong
3. The outcome seems contrary to its beginning

C. Meaning for the disciples and us

1. Small beginning defy popular expectations
2. The disciples looked for the grandiose, Mk. 13:1-2
3. Often the Kingdom is reviled and despised by the world
4. Yet God humbles the exalted and exalts the humble
5. The disciples learn to see what is not readily seen
6. God's kingdom will replace all others; remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream

III. Lessons we can learn from these

A. Preach the word, 2 Tim. 2:2

1. Paul urges Timothy to do so "in season and out of season"
2. Even when people don't want the truth, verse 3
3. The seed of the Gospel will grow in ways we cannot see or predict
4. We must broadcast the seed

B. Let God take care of the increase, 1 Corinthians 3:6

1. Like the farmer Paul and Apollos are only servants (farmers)
2. God is the one who makes the seed grow
3. The results are not up to us nor can we take credit for them
4. As his servants we must continue to plant and water
5. We must also be patient through times of unbelief and apostasy

C. Be God's witnesses, Mt. 5:14-16

1. We let our light shine by our good deeds and good behavior
2. Without showing off, good works will be apparent, 1 Tim. 5:25
3. Paul exhorts the church to "not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9)
4. Don't give up; the harvest is coming

D. Only God can change people, 2 Tim. 2:24-26

1. Paul leaves room in Timothy's teaching method for the Holy Spirit to change hearts
2. Like the farmer, we can only sow the seed and patiently await the outcome
3. Cajoling, arguing, and pressuring seem incompatible with the growing seed
4. Watering and feeding the seed look different

Conclusion:

1. Be confident that the seed of the Gospel will grow.
2. Be ready to reap at the right time.
3. Don't fret because it appears small and insignificant.
4. God brings big things out of small beginnings.
5. Believe the Gospel today; reap a harvest of blessings tomorrow.