

Mysterious growth; massive growth (recording from Moorgate talk 11/02/2025)

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- [0 : 00] Jesus says these words. Because the harvest has come.
- And he said. With what can we compare the kingdom of God? Or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed. Which when sown on the ground.
- Is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. Yet when it is sown. It grows up. And becomes larger than all the garden plants. And puts out large branches.
- So that the birds of the air. Can make nests in its shade. With many such parables. He spoke the word to them. As they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable.
- But privately to his own disciples. He explained everything. Thanks very much Glenn.
- [1 : 21] Can I add my welcome. It is great to see you here. Today at the Moorgate Talks. And some new faces among us. A particular welcome. To you. And can I say. If you're investigating Christianity.
- The Christian faith. We are here. Partly. In order so that. People like you can come here. And open the Bible. And look at. What Jesus actually said.
- So you're really really welcome. Among us. Today. We're going to bring. We're going to begin with. Just a little question. Around tables. Which I've put on your. Outlines there.
- The question is. What seems weak. About Christianity. Today. Okay. We'll just give you a couple of minutes. On that. And then we'll draw back together.
- We're in the middle of. A block of teaching. In Mark's gospel.
- [2 : 16] That's chapters three and four. Of this. I want this account. Of Jesus's life. Which is all about. The advance. Of the kingdom of God. And how it grows.
- And we've been seeing. That. Jesus said. Right from the start. That the kingdom of God. Would grow. In ways that we. Might not expect. It is different.
- From the kingdoms. Of this world. It does not advance. Jesus did not say. That it would advance. With tanks. Or guns.
- Or tariffs. Even. Not through political. Power. Or military power. But as we've been seeing. In the last three weeks.
- A quiet. Revolution. Chapter four. Verse fourteen. Through a message. The word. The gospel message.
- [3 : 13] Like a seed. Sown on different soils. Doesn't look like much. In the present. And we've seen. That it will advance. Through messy responses. Different kinds of soils.
- People will respond. Differently to it. To the message. Of the gospel. We saw last week. That there's going to be. A hiddenness. To the advance. Of the kingdom of God. In the present. As God.

Reveals. The secret. Of the kingdom of God. Chapter four. Verse ten. That is. That the truth. Of the gospel. That Jesus. Is the son of God. His identity.

That Jesus. Has died for sin. That people. Can come and have. Forgiveness. Forever. In him. As God. Reveals. That secret. Quietly. To his people.

And a quiet. Division. As we saw. Last week. Weakness. In the present. Today. We're looking. At these. The remainder. Of these.

[4 : 0 9] Parables. And we're going to see. Mysterious. In the present. Gradual. Small. But in the end. The theme. Of each of these. Parables. Each of these.

Teachings. In the end. There will be. A great harvest. In the end. There will be. A great. Revelation. We come. Today. To the two. Final. Parables. That Jesus.

Teaches. In chapter four. Of Mark's gospel. And. I don't know. If you've ever seen. You've got these. Sort of picture. Frames. At home. Where you can get. Like. The sort of.

The main picture. In the middle. Which is the big one. And then maybe. Sort of satellite. Pictures. Around it. Well that's a bit. Like what we've got. In chapter four.

The main picture. In the middle is. How's the kingdom of God. Going to advance. The parable of the sower. Through the word. The satellite parables. Expand on that picture.

[5 : 0 2] And give us the same thing. The same process. Just from a different angle. And that's where we come to. Today. As Glenn has read. Two of these. Parables. That expand on.

The same. Picture. Of the kingdom of God. Advancing. As a quiet revolution. Through the word of God. Three points today. Number one. Mysterious growth.

Number two. Gradual growth. And number three. Tiny to massive growth. And just to say. We're going to spend. The vast majority of our time. On the first parable. And I'm only going to say. One mustard seed of a word.

On the final parable. Just because of time. And so that's where we're going to be. So firstly. Mysterious growth. Look down again. At verse 26.

Jesus said. The kingdom of God. Is as if a man. Should scatter seed. On the ground. He sleeps and rises. Night and day. And the seed. Sprouts and grows. He knows not how.

[6 : 0 0] The earth produces. By itself. First the blade. Then the ear. Then the full grain. In the air. But when the grain. Is ripe. At once. He puts in the sickle. Because the harvest.

Has come. This is the parable. Of the lazy farmer. As some people. Have described it. This farmer. He goes out. He scatters. Literally. He throws the seed.

On the ground. In the other parables. The word is different. It's. He sows. He sows. This guy. Throws the seeds. On the ground. Without much care. For where it goes. And for him.

That's job done. There endeth. The work. And verse 27. He then sleeps. And rises. He goes to bed. He gets up. He goes out. He watches it grow.

Repeat. In other words. He becomes. Simply. And merely. A spectator. Watching a miraculous process. That he doesn't understand. Do you see the key words.

[6 : 5 7] Of this parable. The key words. Verse 27. He knows. Not. How. He doesn't understand it. He doesn't need to understand it.

The only thing he knows. Is that there'll be a harvest. In the end. And that he will get to share. In the party. At the end. Having done nothing.

But throw the seed. On the ground. Well that is the picture. We're given. Jesus says. The kingdom of God. Will be like this. What does he mean?

Well. He means. I take it. That the church. Is like the man scattering. We've seen. In chapter 3.

That he sends out. His apostles. To preach. The gospel. We've seen. In the parable. The sower. That the seed. Is the message. It's the word. Of the gospel. The sower.

[7 : 53] Sows the word. And so. The work. Of the church. Is to scatter. The gospel message. That Jesus Christ. Is Lord. That Jesus Christ. Is saviour.

That he's died. For our sins. And that anyone. Can come. And find the grace. Of God. And eternal life. In him. And so. That the work. Of the church. Is to scatter.

But you see. That it is God's work. To give the growth. It's God's work. To give the growth. But more than that. God grows. His kingdom.

In a way. That is completely. Mysterious. To us. It grows. We know not how. You see. That's it. So not only. Are we spectators.

He gives the growth. We are spectators. With no clue. About how the growth. Is going to happen. We just know. That it will. Clarification here.

[8 : 48] It is mysterious. Growth. But it is not. Mysterious. In how it begins. And it's not. Mysterious. In how it ends. It's not mysterious. In how it begins. The gospel seed.

The scattering. That's how it begins. That's not mysterious. To the farmer. It's not mysterious. In how it ends. There will be a glorious harvest. He knows that.

But how do you get from A to B? It's mysterious. God's. Mysterious. Growth. Now what does this mean in reality.

In reality it means that it grows according to God's plan and not ours. One of the things that this means is that we do not know who is going to respond to the gospel.

Or when. Or where. And God deliberately keeps it that way. Can I give you an example? That's a fun example. Some of you will know this guy.

[9 : 47] He's actually at St. Botovs. But he tells a story of he goes every year with his family to what's called the beach mission in one of the towns on the south coast of England.

And I can't remember which one. They're all pretty much. No, they're not the same. Anyway, there he is. A few years ago. Trying to tell people the message of Jesus.

Just standing on the side of a road. And it's getting late. And no one's listening. At least that's what he thinks. And all he can see is just people walking past and doing so. There's one lady he can specifically see who's definitely not listening.

She's just not interested at all. Standing there. And he's kind of thinking to himself, what's the point in this? So I might as well go home. Anyway, fast forward three years later. He's doing the same thing again in the same place.

And that lady comes up to him and says, I've become a Christian. And I wanted to come and tell you that it was thanks to you as I was listening three years ago to what you were saying.

[10 : 45] I went to church and I've become a Christian. Well, many of us will know stories like that. It's just normal. And it's normal. It's normal for the Christian life.

And we see these things. Many, many stories like that. There is a beauty to it. Isn't there? Just as a farmer can admire the seed sprouting. He knows not how.

He can watch it. Watching the master at work. And so the Christian and the church can admire the hand of God bringing about this inevitable growth of his kingdom.

But he's doing it in a way that is mysterious to us so that it is self-evidently his hand and not ours. It's his work.

His miraculous work. That's why he does it in a way that we could never predict. Another thing we don't know is when. I think of a guy who prayed, a Christian man who spent his whole life praying for five of his close friends throughout his life.

[11 : 48] That they would come to know Jesus and the grace and forgiveness that we can all have in him. And he prayed for these five friends. Three were wonderfully converted while he was alive.

But he died knowing that the other two still did not know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. And they were converted at his funeral. You sometimes wonder, don't you, whether the Lord, if you can say this reverently, has a twinkle in his eye with some of these stories.

It is mysterious and it is beautiful to watch. Many a mother who has prayed for her child and died with no signs of life. But then after they've come to know Christ.

I love the story of Eric Nash to illustrate that it's God's plan, not ours. Some of you may have heard of Eric Nash. He was he set up these camps, Christian camps in the 1930s for, you know, they were posh camps, you know, for public school boys.

They were called the bash camps and take these kids away and share the gospel with them. And a big part of his vision for doing that, why he was doing that was because he wanted to reach the nation for Christ through teaching the gospel to these kids who are East Eton and Winchester.

[13 : 10] You know, he thought, well, one day these guys will be running the country. They might be prime ministers. So let's try and get Christian leadership in this country in England. That's one of the big reasons he was doing it.

Now, that did not happen. Even slightly. God, of course, had other ideas. But two individuals on those camps were converted by the name of John Stott and Dick Lucas.

They did not become political leaders. But anyone who knows anything about the history of evangelicalism in the last 50 years, both in this country and indeed globally, will know that the impact of those two men is incalculable.

And we are here, humanly speaking, because of them. Now, Eric Nash had no idea what God was going to do through his ministry. He was hoping for something completely different.

God's plan, of course, was far greater and far better than his. We don't know who or where or when. One thing we do know, like the farmer, he will grow it as we scatter the gospel.

[14 : 23] And we know the end of the story. There will be a wonderful harvest. Not God's plan, not ours. Not our plan, but God's, rather. Secondly, gradual growth.

So firstly, mysterious growth. Secondly, gradual growth. That's the second thing I think we see from this parable, is that there will be lots of waiting. The kingdom of God will grow gradually.

Just look down again at verse 27. He sleeps and rises night and day. Lots of waiting. And then verse 28. Notice how the Lord Jesus slows down.

The earth produces by itself first the blade. It's gradual. Then the ear. Then the full grain in the ear. This is a vital lesson that we must hear.

The results of this farmer's scattering are not immediate. But they are all in God's timings. And God's timeline is much longer than ours.

[15 : 26] I take it the Lord Jesus has in mind here, with this parable, the whole span of the history of the church in this age from start to finish. This is the macro picture.

The harvest is the great final day, as prophesied in the Old Testament, as spoken of in Revelation. That's the day of the harvest. And so this is the macro picture.

This is the whole age of the church that Jesus is describing. We're used to wanting everything now. We're in that generation.

In fact, perhaps more than any other generation before us. Someone described us as the microwave generation. But that's a bit outdated. Some of you will have come across Netflix 1.5 speed.

You come across that, where you can watch stuff at 1.5 speed, if you just want to consume the content a little bit quicker. Tesco Woosh, apparently, has come out now. So, you know, you can have your food in 20 minutes.

[16 : 28] Everything is now, now, now. You will know in your workplaces when a result's expected from your projects. Yesterday. Texts. No longer emails. It's WhatsApp.

It's got to be immediate responses. But that is not how the kingdom of God works. It is mysterious growth.

And it takes time. Like a harvest growing. There is waiting and waiting and waiting for this farmer.

Now, I think this means something revolutionary in terms of the expectations of the Christian. Can I ask you a question? When do you want to see the fruit of your labours as you scatter the gospel?

If you're a Christian here today. This year? Next year? Five years' time? We want to see instant results, don't we?

[17 : 28] That is... We do. We just do. That's how we're wired. We want to... We want it to be like... We're like this. Share the gospel with a friend. Preach the word. Immediate conversions.

But that is like the farmer scattering his seed, right? In this parable. Going and having lunch. Coming back and saying, There's nothing here.

And giving up. God's timeline is longer than ours. In fact, it is much longer. God's timeline stretches beyond next year.

Beyond the next 50 years. Beyond our generation into eternity. Now, I think this is a huge encouragement to the Christian.

In workplace scattering, shall we call it. Workplace ministry. I'll take an example. You take this back to the office today, for example. Here we are.

[18 : 29] Invitation to two weeks' time. Come and hear the gospel. You prayerfully and cheerfully give it to a colleague. And say, look, you know I'm a Christian. This is a great opportunity.

Someone's coming in to explain what I believe. In a couple of weeks, do you want to come? They say... Well, who knows what they might say. No. And never offer me a flyer again, please.

Thank you very much. I find that offensive. Let's take one of the worst case scenarios. Even in that case, you don't know how God will use that in that person's life.

His ways are mysterious to you. And his timeline is longer. You live a godly life in your office, if you're a Christian, with your colleagues.

They know you're a Christian. You're kind and generous to them. You try to share your faith, but perhaps most of the time they just don't want to hear anything about it. You don't know how God will use your witness in those people's lives.

[19 : 34] His ways are mysterious. And his timeline is longer than yours. And you will see on the last day how he has used your scattering of the gospel seed.

I think one of the greatest causes of discouragement in Christian ministry, sharing of faith, is that we expect to see results now.

And when we don't, we slowly give up. This parable is so liberating because it lifts our eyes off this year, right?

Off our lifetime and onto eternity. Look down at verse 29. At once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.

Jesus is talking there about the final day. And so don't look for fruit, the fruit of our lives, primarily in this life.

[20 : 31] God is going to do it in his way and on his much longer timeline. But there will be a harvest in the end. In the meantime, get on with scattering.

And can I say this? Forget about the fruit. Forget about the fruit for now. Leave that to God. I think of the Apostle Paul.

Do you know this Apostle Paul dying without that much fruit from his ministry for his 30 years? He wrote 2 Timothy, the letter of 2 Timothy, and said, Look, the whole of Asia has deserted me.

Just think of him in Rome. What did he know? He knew that in the end, God would bring a harvest. He didn't know how.

And to look around, he may well have been perplexed. I think there are two implications from this parable. One for the Christian person, and one if you're not a Christian here today.

[21 : 37] So firstly, for the Christian person. Now, I think this sets us free for bold and enterprising scattering. Right? And a lifetime of it.

And it is scattering without fear of failure. Do you see that in this parable? There's no such thing as failure if you're scattering the gospel. There's only such thing as waiting.

Isn't that wonderful? And we see that, I think, that God blesses bold enterprises of scattering. We've seen that in history. God blesses the bold enterprise of scattering the gospel.

Time and time and time again. Scattering for him. Well, may I challenge you. There is no better way to spend your life in the workplace than as a scatterer of the gospel.

Do you see yourself as that? Do you see that as your priority? And secondly, if you're not yet following the Lord Jesus, you're so welcome among us.

[22 : 44] We put on these talks, as I said, for you as well. Now, can I say this? If it does not appear that God is at work in the world to you. Well, can you see from this parable that it is because he is doing something much, much bigger and much, much greater.

A quiet revolution through his word. Which brings us very briefly to the third point. Tiny to massive growth.

Just look down with me at verse 30. Jesus said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God? Or what parable shall we use for it?

Do you see there, just before we move on, the Lord Jesus himself, the Son of God, is struggling to find a way to describe the glory of the kingdom of God to human beings, finite human beings.

With what shall we compare it? It's so other. It is like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds of the earth.

[23 : 59] Yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

Well, we all want to be part of a great story with a happy ending. That's what all the films are about, isn't it?

Great stories, happy ending. To be a Christian is to be part of the greatest story with the happiest ending.

I think that's the point of this parable. Mustard seed beginnings, one man on a cross in the Roman Empire, dying as a criminal. Tiny mustard seed.

And then a band of scared disciples, 12 disciples, preaching a message about a risen saviour.

[24 : 54] Tiny mustard seed beginnings. Glorious endings, Jesus says here. The great tree that towers, his kingdom will tower above all other kingdoms in the end.

And there will be rest and peace forever. For all who are part of his kingdom. We all want to be part of a great story with a happy ending.

Well, if you're a Christian, you are part of the great story with the happy ending. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for this profound teaching of the Lord Jesus about the realities of heaven, and of the kingdom of God coming to earth.

Father, we thank you that even though your kingdom seems quiet, hidden, small and weak in the present, that there is a glorious future to come.

A harvest. Father, for any among us who are looking into the Christian faith, please would you open their eyes and give them to the secret of the kingdom of heaven, the identity of Christ and his work on the cross.

[26 : 22] Father, we pray that you would send us out for a lifetime of bold, enterprising scattering, not seeking fruit now in this life, but looking to that final day and the joy of the harvest.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.