

How The Kingdom Grows

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[0 : 00] Well, for the last several weeks, we've worked our way through this chapter, which is Mark's record of Jesus's parabolic teaching. And today we finally come to the conclusion of what Mark is really trying to get across in this particular chapter.

If you'll remember, it all began with a lakeside gathering, thousands of people perhaps gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Finally, Jesus pushed out into the lake in a small fishing vessel probably, and he begins to teach the people from there.

But he did something different this time around, something different than he had been doing before, at least according to the question that his disciples later asked. He started to teach in stories. And he told this story, according to Mark, about four types of soil in which a farmer sows his seed, and each type of soil has a different reaction to that seed.

And he really just leaves it at that. He doesn't explain it. He just tells the story, and he moves on. And then as we get later on into the chapter, verse 10 or so, we find out that the disciples, in a private setting, asked Jesus not only about that particular story and what he meant by it, but they were asking really, in essence, why are you starting to teach this way?

Why are you starting to teach in these parables? And Jesus gives that explanation, and he explains the purpose of the parables, and we've covered that in great detail. These stories brought gospel clarity to some people, but to others, they actually hardened their hearts further.

[1 : 37] So the parables were sort of a testing of the soils, so to speak. It was a testing of man's heart. Only those who were believing Jesus, believing the gospel, following Christ, were able to receive this gospel clarity.

But those who were not willing to follow Christ, those who were not believing him, actually, their hearts through these stories were hardened further against him and against his purpose and, of course, the ministry of the word in their lives.

So this time of private explanation of this really goes from verses 10 all the way to verse 25. In fact, verses 21 to 25, as we mentioned last week, is really not possible to really understand those without verses 10 through 20.

That's where it's all one conversation Jesus is having. Now, beginning in verse 26, Mark transitions again away from Jesus's private teaching.

This is no longer the private setting of just him and a few of his followers. This is now the recounting of Jesus's parables as taught to the crowds as he would go from place to place.

[2 : 51] Now, remember, Mark isn't covering Jesus's life in a strictly chronological way. He's painting this mosaic, so to speak, and he's capturing these different facets of Jesus's ministry and Jesus's purpose and his identity.

And in this particular chapter, he's dealing specifically with the facet of Jesus's teaching ministry that involved parables. And as he's going through it here, he's not just providing a random sampling of stories, but he has specifically chosen these parables of Jesus to gather in his gospel in order that we might understand the ministry of Jesus in a particular way.

So it may seem that they're somewhat random. It may seem that Mark has just kind of grabbed here and there to give us a sampling of Jesus's teaching, but that's not really what he's doing. All of these are here for a purpose.

All of them are there. They're linked together. And we understand that as we go through it. So though these final two stories that we just read were not likely taught on the same day, they do work together thematically with the earlier parable of the soils.

Every parable in every public parable, at least in this passage is agricultural in nature. And they illustrate the nature of the kingdom of God.

[4 : 22] And because they were taught to mixed crowds in a public setting, there's no explanation given. Remember the explanation for the parable of the soils was not given to the crowds. It was given to the followers of Christ.

And so it goes, as we get through some of these parables, very seldom do we actually see an explanation of the stories unless Jesus is giving it in a private setting.

So before we go any further and really jump in, these are simple stories. It won't take us long to get through them. But before we jump into those, let's talk about what this kingdom of God thing is. Because that's essentially the topic of Jesus is preaching, right?

We just read that in chapter one. Jesus is going throughout Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel of the kingdom of God. And now we get here and every one of these parables, he is comparing now to the kingdom.

Well, what's that all about? Well, broadly speaking, the kingdom of God refers to God's sovereign rule over all of creation. So in the broadest possible sense, what we mean by this is that God is sovereign and that he rules all that he has created, which is everything.

[5 : 32] But when we get to the new Testament and we see this discussion of the kingdom of God, there is a much more narrow emphasis throughout the scriptures that we read.

And so the kingdom of God in the kingdom of God in the kingdom of God in the new Testament largely refers to God's spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who are willing to believe and follow Christ as Lord.

So it's in essence, the sphere of salvation. So those who are unwilling to believe and follow Christ are not a part of the kingdom. Those who do follow Christ, who submit to his Lordship, who believe him in faith are a part of the kingdom.

And so this is the theme. This is the overarching theme of what Jesus is preaching. When he's talking about the kingdom of God, he is speaking of this sphere of salvation.

And so this kingdom language is used all throughout the Bible. And we would even be right to say that the overarching theme of all of the scriptures is the gospel of the kingdom, especially as we view it through Christ.

[6 : 43] Now, think about the crowds that we're hearing Jesus teach. A thoughtful Jew in first century Israel would have understood the prophecies of the kingdom from the Old Testament.

But because of that, they would have had some difficulty grasping exactly who Jesus was and exactly what he was doing. Because they expected that the Messiah would establish a physical kingdom.

And that this kingdom would come suddenly and that it would come all at once. In fact, if you read through some of the Old Testament prophecies, especially the ones that kind of focus in on what John the Baptist ended up being, which was the voice in the wilderness, you'll see some of that language about the kingdom coming suddenly, that it's coming in great power.

And so a thoughtful Jew would have processed it that way. They would have thought this kingdom really is a kingdom of deliverance. It's a physical kingdom. And the Messiah is going to come as a triumphant warrior, as a political leader that will once and suddenly finally deliver us from this Roman control.

And he will establish this physical kingdom. And so this is what they expected the Messiah to be. So they were likely confused when they came across Jesus. Because on one hand, here is a man that was clearly sent from God.

[8 : 05] I mean, he's going from town to town and he's performing miracles that the likes of which have never been heard. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we see miracles to the scale and to the extent as the miracles of Jesus.

There is clearly something fascinatingly unique about Jesus of Nazareth. And they know that.

There's no way, even though the Pharisees and the scribes tried to paint a picture as if he was actually sent from Satan and that he had the power of Satan to do these things.

The people knew better than that. There's why crowds were following him. People are being healed all over the place. These amazing miracles are taking place. And then when they would stop long enough to actually listen to him teach, their response to his teaching was, nobody teaches like this.

He teaches us different than the scribes teach us. He teaches with authority, the people said. And we understand the source of that authority. He's the son of God.

Well, they didn't grasp that. And so on one hand, they're thinking, this man is clearly sent from God. There is clearly something unique about him. And he has a unique purpose here.

[9:16] But the kingdom is supposed to come suddenly. It's supposed to come all at once. It's going to be physical. It's going to be triumphant.

It's going to be victorious. So they didn't know what to do with Jesus. They didn't know what to do with him. Even his closest followers didn't get it. They didn't get it. Even leading up all the way to the cross.

What was it that the disciples have it in their mind? The 12 especially. That Jesus, it was time. We're going to Jerusalem. Jesus is about to get this thing going here. He even told them plainly over and over.

I'm going to go to Jerusalem. I'm going to suffer there. I'm going to die there. And three days later, I'm going to raise up from the dead. He plainly told his disciples that. They didn't get it.

They didn't get it. Because that's not what they expected the Messiah to do. They didn't expect him to suffer. They didn't expect a spiritual kingdom. They expected a very physical kingdom.

[10:18] And so when Jesus gives these two parables here in Mark chapter 4, he's addressing these misunderstandings. He's trying to set right.

At least for those with believing hearts. With ears to hear. He's trying to set right the misunderstandings that they had about the nature of the kingdom. And what his purpose was in it. And so those who were believing Christ like the 12. Gained a gospel clarity. And that progressively grew through time. It especially became clear after the resurrection.

But those with unbelieving hearts likely walked away disappointed. Now imagine again. You're in this crowd. You're a first century Jew.

That is excited that there is someone with signs that they could be the Messiah. And you go to listen to him teach. And as he teaches, he tells this story about the kingdom that insinuates that it's not going to come suddenly.

[11:15] That it's not going to come all at once. And that it's not going to be physical. And that it's not going to be this triumphant victory over Rome. And if you are unbelieving, what are you going to do?

You're going to walk away. Why am I going to? Yeah, surely there's something significant about this guy. But I'm not going to waste my time. I'm looking for Messiah. I'm looking for the one. Because I'm ready to be delivered from all of this.

And so those who had ears to hear began to follow Christ. They gained clarity through these stories. But those who didn't have ears to hear, they weren't fruitful hearers.

They walked away. And they walked away in disappointment. And so this passage really covers two simple stories. And then it provides kind of a final summary of the parabolic teaching of Jesus.

Both stories are about how the kingdom grows. But they do each have a unique emphasis. The first focuses primarily on growth itself. The second one, though, contrast for us.

[12:15] Small beginnings with really incredible results. And so let's just look at the two stories. We're going to focus a lot of time on the first one. And just a little bit of time on the second one. And then we're going to bring it to a close.

As we gear up for our Easter service next week. Okay. Number one. Let's look at the first parable. Which is the growing seed. The growing seed. And we find this in verses 26 to 29.

In fact, look with me first at verse 26. And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. Now, if you were wondering why I could be so certain that this parable and the next one is about the kingdom of God.

It's because the text plainly says it. It just tells us. Jesus says right from the beginning. The kingdom of God is as if a man's scattered seed on the ground. Now, I think a few weeks ago when we first started this chapter, we talked about what a parable actually is.

And if you're like me and you grew up in Sunday school, then you would answer that how? A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And that's true. But the word parable we discussed comes from two Greek words that really come together to form this one.

[13:27] One means beside. It's a preposition. And the other one means to lay. To lay down. And so when we're talking about parables, it really literally means to lay something down.

And so Jesus with these parables is making comparisons. He's laying down an earthly story. Something that even the children in the crowd would have been able to understand.

It's a clearly simple, understandable story. And what he means to do is take the kingdom, lay it beside of it, and draw some parallels between the two. They're illustrations, right?

So Jesus tells us right off, he says, the kingdom of God should be compared to a man who casts seed in the field. And so he returns to this agricultural theme, which might have surprised a few folks in the audience.

Their ears might have perked up at first because he says kingdom of God. Now that excited them because in the kingdom of God, they're thinking deliverance. They're thinking revolution. And they think this story is going to be something big.

[14 : 27] It's going to have a triumphant hero. And there's going to be just, and this is going to get us pumped up. And we're all going to go by the thousands to Jerusalem and take control. When they hear the kingdom of God, they're thinking something big.

But it's interesting, Jesus doesn't use stories like that when he's talking about the kingdom. He just gives this very common, simple, really ordinary story about a farmer throwing some seed out in the field.

The seed here represents the gospel at work in growing the kingdom. And of course, the farmer then would represent anyone who is sharing that gospel.

This particular parable is exclusive to Mark's gospel, which is why we're going to spend a little bit more time here. Let me just give you three notes that I think help me understand what's happening here. Maybe it'll help you as well.

The first thing is this. This is an invisible work. The growth of the kingdom is an invisible work. So look with me at verse 27. The farmer has gone and he's cast his seed in the field.

[15 : 31] And then here's what he does. He sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. So he goes to bed.

He gets up. He goes about his life. And then at some point in the midst of all of that, something happens with the seed that he threw on the ground. Now remember, these people expected that the kingdom would come suddenly and visibly.

But Jesus said that the work of the gospel is at first imperceptible. What is it that the farmer thought? He has no idea how this is going to work.

He has no idea how this is actually going to grow. Consider the story. He goes about his life as usual. Eventually, he sees some growth. But he's unaware of how that seed works, at least in the beginning.

He has no idea what kind of work is being done under the surface. He can't see it. Even if he knows what happens in a general sense, he really can't understand exactly why it happens the way that it does.

[16 : 34] He doesn't know. He just casts the seed. Something happens that he can't see. It's an imperceptible work. And then suddenly, there is growth. The farmer understands that there is a more significant, invisible power at work in the ground by which that seed that he cast dies.

And then somehow in that death produces life. We know that's how it works. I don't know that we understand why it works that way.

But you can't have any kind of produce without first the death of the seed. The farmer knows that's what happens. He doesn't know how. He doesn't know when. He just casts the seed and he goes on.

In the same way, there is a greater, invisible work of God being accomplished in the hearts of people that hear the gospel preached.

God is building his kingdom in ways that are often imperceptible to us. And that's the point he's getting across to the people. Yeah, I know that you're expecting this visible, extravagant thing, but you need to know that the kingdom grows in ways that you're not going to understand.

[17 : 47] In fact, it's going to be growing and you're not even going to know that it's growing. God's going to be working and you won't be able to perceive it all the time. But we can't always see or understand it.

We can be assured that it is working, that he is working, that the kingdom is growing, that the fruit is ripening. Sinclair Ferguson wrote this.

I think it's helpful. He said, what Jesus is saying is that from the outside, his preaching and teaching may seem as fruitless, an occupation as that of a man throwing seeds about in a field.

But it is that activity that eventually produces the crop. It may appear to our eyes that nothing is happening, but all the time the seed is at work to produce the harvest.

And Jesus says, this is how the kingdom works. This is what we can compare it to. It's not what you expect. In fact, you may not even know that it's happening, but it is.

[18 : 48] It is. And it's an invisible work of God. Now, it's really great to have Amy's parents with us. They have this awesome shop in Wilkesboro with this greenhouse.

I don't know why they trust Andy to run that, but he does. And every now and then, I will get into a conversation with Andy about how I need to grow stuff at my house. Because I have this unique ability to kill things without growing anything in return.

So, I can throw out seed in my yard, and it will die, but nothing will produce from it. So, I'm not sure exactly how that works, but that's how it works for me. But every year about this time, in fact, I'm going to do it in a couple weeks.

We've already talked about it. I'm going to go out in my yard. I'm going to buy some grass seed from Lowe's, and I'm going to do the thing. I'm going to go out, and I'm going to put it in the spreader, and it's going to spread, and it's going to cast it out. I'm going to do the thing that you're supposed to do, right?

And then as I do the thing, maybe I'll put some fertilizer or whatever. And here's what I'm going to do, because I'm impatient. I'm an impatient person. Every day, I'm going to walk outside, and I'm going to look at these massive bear spots in my yard, and I'm going to see if anything's happening with it.

[19 : 49] And then I'm going to plague Julie with questions for days. Why isn't this working? I put the seed in the ground, and nothing is happening. But then eventually, it will probably be scorched in the sun, but eventually, there's going to be some things begin to shoot out of the ground.

It may take a couple weeks, but it starts to do it. In fact, there's a word that Jesus uses in this verse for sprout, is the English word here. The Greek word is *blasto*, which means to blast, to blast up. And that's what's happening with the farmer. He's going out, and he's casting his seed. It's doing this work that he can't see. He can't perceive it. But all of a sudden, blast, blasting out of the ground are these blades.

And then as he tends to it, and as it continues to grow, it turns into other things, and it eventually produces fruit. And Jesus said, this is how the kingdom works. This is how the kingdom works. We cast the seed of the gospel.

And we don't know what God's doing with it. He's doing something with it. We don't know exactly what. But every now and then, we're going to see blasting out of the surface these little tiny blades. These little tiny blades. And if they're fruitful hearers of the word, and they're not just the soil that is rocky, and they're not just the soil that is shallow.

[21 : 01] It's going to grow, and it's going to produce fruit, and ultimately, it will reap the harvest. So it's an invisible work. Secondly, it's an automatic work.

It's an automatic work. Look with me at verse 28. The earth produces by itself, Jesus says. First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.

Now, what's rendered here as by itself is the same word from which we get automatic or autonomous. And the emphasis here is on the seed's power to germinate and produce apart from human interference.

Now, if you're like me, I ask Mr. Quo all the time about his garden and how things are coming. He's much better at gardening than me. But he's going to till his ground. He's going to put his seed out. There's nothing he can do to make that grow. He just does what he's supposed to do. He casts the seed. It does its thing. The power is in the seed itself to germinate and to produce.

[22 : 04] And that's what Jesus is saying. This is an automatic work. It's apart from any human interference. Now, think about this in terms of the kingdom. Because we get confused with this sometimes.

Sometimes out of zeal for the gospel, but we still get confused. We think, if I can just construct through human ingenuity just a better way to do church. Or a better way to frame the gospel in conversation.

Or if I can just find more creative ways to do this, then I'll be able to produce what God seems to be having a hard time producing. But no, this is, the power's not in me.

The power's not in you. The power's not in our best apologetic argument. The power is not in how creative we can be in our approach to ministry.

No, the power is in the seed. It's in the word. And as the word is sown, it does the work that God intends for it to do. Our job is to be faithful.

[23 : 08] Faithful to spread the seed. And then in turn, we trust God to produce the fruit. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, I planted, Apollos watered, God gave the growth.

And then he goes on to say, So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Look, there's no power in us. We can't produce salvation in people. We can't make the kingdom grow. We can just be faithful to what God told us to do and trust him to do with his kingdom what he intends to do.

And we should trust that he will do that. Because it's the word that has the power to bring life. Isaiah said this. Isaiah 55.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out of my mouth, God says.

[24 : 12] It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Listen, our job, church, is to cast the seed, share the word.

It is the word that gives life. And as we are casting the seed, trust God to do his work. Trust him to do his work. Terry and I were talking about this yesterday as we're walking through the neighborhood here, putting out Bibles, and we were kind of having this prayerful conversation of how we hope that God will use this, that God will use this in our church, that he will use this in our community, that somebody will open up one of those Bibles and be impacted by the message of the gospel, and that the word will do its work.

And we talked about, we don't know how God is, God may be using this already. I have no idea. I can't see it. I can't understand it even. But I trust, because God said it, that it's not me that has the power to give life to someone.

It's his word. And as we give out the word, we're gonna trust that God's gonna do with that word what he intended to be done with it. As he sends out his word, it will not return to him empty. It will accomplish his purpose.

So let's trust the Lord, church. Let's be faithful. Faithful to share the gospel. Faithful to preach the word. So it's an automatic work. It's an invisible work. Thirdly, it's a guaranteed work.

[25 : 38] It's a guaranteed work. Verse 29. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. Now, I think it's significant that a parable focused on the growth of the kingdom would involve a detailed statement of the process of harvesting.

He doesn't just say that a harvest will come. That's a part of the guarantee here. But that's not all that Jesus is saying. He gives just a quick statement that details the process of harvesting.

I think that's important for us to understand here. Why would he add this to the end of the story?

The harvest here that Jesus refers to, I believe, is the second coming of Christ, which initiates the arrival of the kingdom in physical form.

This will be a time for those of us who know Christ of long-awaited blessing as we join with those who were reading Peter's letter in first century Israel and beyond, how they would have great comfort in knowing that one day the trial of this life will be over, the suffering will be done, the sin will be finished, and we will ever be with the Lord.

Those of us who know Christ long for that harvest. We long for that. I hope you long for that. The Bible often uses this illusion of the harvest to illustrate a coming judgment.

[27 : 14] In this parable, Jesus not only guarantees that his kingdom will come, but he actually guarantees that with the kingdom will come a time of judgment.

Now, Jesus told another story about this in Matthew chapter 13. In fact, why don't you just turn there with me real quick? Matthew chapter 13. In Mark 4, Jesus is saying, not only will a harvest come, but the harvester is going to take out his sickle and he's going to harvest it.

There's a process. There is a judgment that will come as a result of the kingdom. Now, look at Matthew chapter 13. Look with me at verse 24. And another parable he put forth unto them saying, the kingdom of heaven, that's the same thing as the kingdom of God, same thing.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares or weeds among the wheat and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared also the weeds. So the servants of the household came to and said unto him, sir, did not thou sow good seed in the field? [28 : 30] From whence then has it weeds? And he said unto them, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, no, lest while you gather up the weeds, you root up also the wheat with them.

Let both grow together. Until the harvest. And in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the weeds, bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. Now Jesus explains this parable. Look down at verse 37. Again, this is a private time of explanation. And he answered and said unto them, he that soweth the good seed is the son of man. Jesus is the son of man. It's a reference to himself, the gospel. The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom. Those who believe the gospel, but the weeds are the children of the wicked one.

Those who reject the gospel. The enemy that sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world. And the reapers are the angels. So again, he's looking ahead to the second coming.

[29 : 36] He's looking ahead to this final judgment. And then he says in verse 40, as therefore the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world.

The son of man shall send forth his angels. They shall gather out of his kingdom, all things that offend and them which do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.

There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. And then he has this statement again. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

What's happening in this story? Jesus said at the same time that the fruitful grain is growing, there's also some weeds that are growing. They're gonna grow together until the time of harvest. They're gonna grow together.

And then the time of harvest is gonna come. And then the seed sower in the beginning, Jesus now becomes the harvester and he gets out the sickle and he sends his angels and they cut down the harvest.

[30 : 36] And all of those fruitful wheat grains are gonna be gathered into heaven, gathered into the barn. But all of the weeds are gonna be gathered, they're gonna be bundled and they're gonna be burned.

When Jesus is talking about this harvest, he's not only referencing the blessing of the kingdom, he's referencing the reality of the judgment. That at the same time that the kingdom is initiated and established, so will a judgment be.

And the question that we must ask is with what group will we be bundled? Will we be bundled with the fruitful hearers and gain entrance into the kingdom of God to be with him for all of eternity? Or will we be bundled with the weeds? Will we be bundled with the weeds and therefore burned? The church is always warned about this coming judgment.

Many have rejected this warning and perhaps you've talked about this in your witness to people. You've talked about Jesus is coming back. There is a warning in this. A harvest is coming.

[31 : 42] And they say, you know, I understand what you mean, but it's been 2,000 years since Jesus said that and he hadn't come back, so I'm not sure that I buy it. Peter addresses this in his second letter.

I'm just going to read it to you. 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 4. They will say, where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning.

And then he says in verse 8, Peter writes, but do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

And he said, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some men count slowness, but is patient towards you, not willing that any should perish, that all should come to repentance.

But he says, the day of the Lord will come. It will come like a thief. That is, we won't know it. And then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

[32 : 50] Listen, this judgment is indeed coming. The harvest is growing. Jesus hasn't awaited or tarried his coming because he's lazy or he was deceitful.

It's just that the harvest is still ripening. And if there's one thing that I've learned is that God doesn't get in a hurry. He has his timetable. That may be today.

It may be another thousand years. I don't know. But he said he's coming and the harvest will come and you need to be ready for that harvest. Let's look at the second parable quickly. The first one is the growing seed.

The second one is the mustard seed. Look with me again at verse 30. And he said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God?

Or what parable shall we use for it? It's 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 nest in its shade.

[33 : 55] And we're going to spend a lot of time on this one because it's very similar to the first. They're both about how God grows his kingdom. But this one does have a unique emphasis. It's a little bit different than the first.

The first story is addressing the mistaken notion that the kingdom will come suddenly and all at once. This parable addresses those who dismiss Jesus's ministry because it seems to them to be insignificant compared to what they thought the Messiah was going to do.

And so while still technically about growth, this story is more of a contrast. It's a contrast of what seems like insignificant beginnings to what will become of it in greater results.

It's really the difference between micro to mega. In fact, those are the exact words that Jesus uses here. When he uses this word small in verse 31, it's literally the word that we get microcosm or microscope.

When he uses the word large and large branches, it's the word mega. That's what it is. And so Jesus here, he's not insinuating that the mustard seed is actually the smallest seed on earth.

[35 : 08] We know that's not true. That's not what he's saying. He's using a proverbial statement. He's making a point of contrast, of growth. And he's saying, if you look at the mustard seed, how tiny it is.

Maybe in their day, it was the tiniest that they would have worked with. And you say how tiny it is and it seems insignificant and it seems like nothing. And you throw it in the ground, but look at what ultimately it produces.

Sometimes in this setting, trees up to 15 feet tall, so big that Jesus says birds of the air nest in its branches or they find a rest in its shade.

He was highlighting the dramatic growth of the seed. And he says, this is what the kingdom is like. He says, it may seem insignificant to you. It may not seem like much.

In fact, in Jesus's day, it seemed like about 13 people. But now think about 2,000 years later, two millennia later, millions and millions and millions of people that have come to know Christ.

[36 : 13] The millions of people that will worship with us in heaven for all of eternity. Why? Because the kingdom produces significant results. It may seem insignificant as you're reading through the gospels.

It may not seem like much. In fact, by the time Jesus goes to the cross, everyone abandons him. He's by himself. It may not seem like much, but it produces significant results.

But there's a second contrast here. Look again at verse 32. But when it is sown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all the garden plants, so that the birds of the air make nest in its shade.

So there's a second contrast in this story. On one end, Jesus is contrasting the growth of the kingdom from the seed to the tree. And now he's giving a contrast between the birds. Now think about this for a second.

He's talked about birds already in this chapter in the course of these parables. And often the Bible will talk about the birds of the air and the nesting in the branches of Israel. It's a way that the scripture talks about people of all nations being a part of the kingdom of God.

[37 : 18] That's important here too. But there's a more narrow focus, I think, that Jesus has in this contrast. Remember in the parable of the soils, it was the soil that's on the path, right?

The seed is cast on the path and the birds are there. And what do the birds do? Devour. They devour the seed. It doesn't even have an opportunity to do anything.

It takes no root. The birds come by and it takes away the seed and they devour it. But now we get to the birds here in this parable and the birds are doing something different. They're not devouring anymore. What are they doing? They're taking rest in the shade of the tree.

The contrast here is not only with the size of the kingdom, but it tells us the way that God grows his kingdom. He does it by converting those who were at one time enemies of the gospel, which is every one of us.

Sinclair Ferguson says this, Saul of Tarsus and many others since were once birds of the air. They tried to swallow it and destroy its influence in the world.

[38 : 27] But one day they too came to find shelter in its branches. Think what hope that must have given to the Christians in Rome who first read Mark's gospel in the face of suffering and persecution.

The kingdom would not be destroyed. Can't be. Can't be destroyed. Jesus said as much. When Peter makes his great confession, Jesus says, on this rock, that is the confession that Peter had made.

On this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The kingdom can't be destroyed. In fact, instead of being destroyed, what happens is the birds that destroy it in seed form, or at least attempt to, end up finding rest in its shade.

Isn't that amazing to think about the apostle Paul? Early on in the book of Acts, he's a persecutor. He's a murderer. He's trying to stamp out Christianity and everything that has to do with Christ. And yet ultimately, he becomes a bird that finds nest in the branches of the kingdom. What a work of God that is. Can't be destroyed.

[39 : 34] And the only way that it grows is when God turns enemies and makes them a part of his family. Paul, writing to another church, said, such were some of you.

You say, I never murdered anybody or persecuted people that were Christians. Maybe not, but you were just as much an enemy until you came to Christ. You were a bird that would have been willing to devour, and yet now you find rest.

And Jesus said, that's what the kingdom is like. That's what the kingdom is like. Well, let's conclude it here in verses 33 and 34. Mark gives us a narrative note. 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. And so Mark concludes where we will. These parables were an essential part of Jesus's teaching ministry.

And as we've seen, they had a very clear purpose. In fact, Mark tells us that Jesus didn't teach in public any longer without utilizing parables in some way.

[40 : 45] I don't think that he means that Jesus only taught in parables now. It's just that he never taught in public without using parables in some way. I think it's really the sense of what Mark is saying. But there is an encouraging note here in verse 33 that I think is good for us to end on.

Mark said that Jesus taught the word as they were able to hear it. And again, the emphasis here is put on how we receive the word, being fruitful hearers.

But Mark didn't mean that Jesus only used parables when people were willing to hear. That's not what he means here. The sense here is not just as they were able to hear, as they were willing to hear.

It is even as. In other words, I think what Jesus or what Mark is saying about Jesus is that he continued to teach in these parables because he knew that there would be people in the crowds that did indeed have ears to hear.

And so long as these people had ears to hear, he would continue to use the parables because what happened? They gained this gospel clarity. It was the parables that brought them to faith. It's like two people can sit in the same church service and hear the same message from the same passage and one person can just be absolutely crushed by the spirit of God and they think this is my God.

[42 : 03] This is who I want to serve. This is who I want to follow. And the person sitting next to them can hear the same thing and think what a bunch of baloney is that? I don't get it.

Why? Why? Jesus knew there would be people in the crowds with ears to hear and he wasn't going to leave them out. So he went from crowd to crowd and he taught in the parables. He had the hardening effect on those in whom he was judging but then he also knew that there would be some people along the path that had ears to hear.

And it's an encouragement to us that the Lord knew if you know Christ that you'd be in a service one day or you'd be in a conversation one day. The Lord knew that you would have ears to hear. And so he sent his word and it produced his fruit. Maybe that's exactly what these parables will do for you. The crowds that day, surely some people believed.

We know some did. Maybe that's what the parables are meant to do for you today. Maybe they'll harden you a little further.

[43 : 12] But I'll conclude in the way that we've concluded every one of these parable messages. Hebrews 4, 7. Here's what we do know. That today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart.

Well, that's what we do know. Well, that's what we do know. Well, that's what we do know. Well, Well, that's what we do know. that's what we do know. Well, that's what we do know. that's what we do know. Well, that's what we do know. that's what we do know.

that's what we do know. that's what we do know. Well, that's what we do know.