

# Let It Grow

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'll give you the text after she reads it. But just listen to these two very short parables and see what you hear.

! Thank you. What did you hear?

Josie. Small things have great power. Yep. Small things turn into great things. What else? I don't fully understand it. Yeah. The sower does not understand how that growth happens.

One more. Who did the talking? How many characters did you hear today? Just Jesus, right?

No characters in the two stories that we heard today. Okay. Very good. Why don't you open your Bible to Mark chapter 4. Mark chapter 4 and verse 26 is where we'll start.

[ 1 : 45 ] Mark chapter 4 and verse 26. And let's pray together. Father, we are grateful to have your word.

We are grateful to have a space to gather in. We're grateful for the freedoms that we enjoy in this country at this time in world history to gather in this way without fear of persecution.

We're grateful to have your word. We're grateful to have your word for us preserved for us. And we're grateful for these dear brothers and sisters to gather with.

Thank you for giving us songs to sing and voices to sing them to you. Would you please help us now as we continue in this time of worship?

Help us to hear those things that you want us to hear. Holy Spirit, would you please help me to speak those things most clearly that would be helpful for your people to understand these two particular parables and to understand our relationship to them.

[ 2 : 53 ] Please keep me from saying anything foolish or anything that would be in error, anything unhelpful or distracting. We so want to hear what you have to say to us.

And Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we so want you to be glorified, not only in our time of singing, but also here in this time as we willingly, humbly put ourselves under the preaching of your word and ask that you would speak to us even as we sang together this morning.

Help us right now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Early in our marriage, Lois and I served our church's youth group.

And I will admit to you, and I don't think this will be a surprise, the activity time during youth group is not the time that I put the most effort towards.

But one week, I came up with what I thought was a really wonderful activity. It was simple. It was inexpensive. It wasn't messy.

[ 4 : 08 ] It wasn't gross. It was all of the things that I am looking for in an activity for young people. And so I was pretty excited. Here's what we did. Lois and I bought three identical 10 by 10 puzzles.

We took the puzzles home. We opened them. We dumped all the pieces into one giant pile, mixed them all up, and then counted off the pieces back into each individual box.

Now, the plan was to split the kids into three groups. And the idea was that they would need to trade pieces between their groups in order to complete their puzzles.

I thought that it would be like that very loud trading game called Pit, you know? And I thought there would be laughter and shouting and teamwork and all of those fun things.

Instead, it was pure chaos. It turns out that even though the puzzles had the same picture on the box, they were each cut differently.

[ 5 : 21 ] The pieces didn't match. So the kids had nothing to start with because the pieces were just a jumbled mess.

And when they thought they were looking for one piece, they didn't really need that piece. It was something else that they were looking for because the pieces didn't match. Now, doing a puzzle without the box cover, that is hard enough.

But in this case, we did have the box. The problem was that we didn't have the right pieces. The pieces didn't all fit.

We knew what the completed puzzle was supposed to look like. But our pieces didn't match up. I wonder if this could be a metaphor for the Jewish people in the first century at the time of the Lord Jesus.

They were not guessing about the Messiah. They believed they knew exactly what he was supposed to look like.

[ 6 : 29 ] And their picture of him was drawn straight from the scripture. Their puzzle box cover, if you will, was of a mighty warrior. Someone who would crush their enemies.

Someone who would rule the nations. And the outline of this picture began to be drawn in their minds right after God delivered them from Egypt and drowned their enemies in the Red Sea. Miriam led the people in singing these lyrics from Exodus chapter 15. The Lord is a man of war. The Lord is his name.

Now, the later prophets filled in more of this picture. Micah promised a ruler from Bethlehem whose greatness would reach all the way to the ends of the earth.

And Daniel saw the God of heaven rolling down the mountain like a stone and crushing all of the other kingdoms, pulverizing them into powder before establishing his own kingdom that would last forever.

[ 7 : 44 ] Zechariah described the Lord bending his bow, except for in his metaphor, the bow was his people.

They were going to be what God would use to conquer. They were going to be his weapon. Their worship songs from the book of Psalms anchored these ideas into their hearts.

Here's Psalm chapter 2. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Or from Psalm 110.

Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Or from Psalm 72. I love this one. May he have dominion from sea to sea and may his enemies lick the dust.

May he have dominion from sea and may his enemies your footstool. These were not just distant promises. They were part of daily worship. Part of the collective hope.

[ 8 : 55 ] These words from their scripture shaped the people's vision of a deliverer. I love the way Mark describes the beginning of Jesus's ministry.

In fact, these are the very first words that Mark records from Jesus. Mark chapter 1 in verse 14.

Now, after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled.

And the kingdom of God is at hand. I imagine the people looking around at one another and saying, Where? Where is this kingdom?

How can you say the kingdom of God is at hand? Where is it? Jesus is not done. Repent and believe the gospel.

And I imagine those people saying, The what? The gospel. I don't know what you're talking about.

[ 10 : 11 ] They expected a different kind of kingdom. And a different kind of king. The Lord Jesus did not brandish a sword or rally armies.

Instead, he told stories. Not stories about great military conquests. Stories about farmers.

Throwing seeds on the ground. What Jesus did. And the stories that he told. They were like pieces of a puzzle.

That didn't fit. The picture that they thought that they were looking for. Their expectations did not align with God's reality.

And so to make them and us think. Jesus tells this parable. Verse 26 of Mark chapter 4.

[ 11 : 15 ] And he 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. The earth produces by itself.

First the blade. Then the ear. Then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe. At once he puts in the sickle.

Because the harvest. Has come. Let's make four observations. About this parable. First.

Notice that the kingdom of God. Is assumed. Jesus says. The kingdom of God. Is as if a man should scatter seed.

[12:16] Other than chapter 1. Which we looked at a few moments ago. Only one other time. Mark uses this phrase. Kingdom of God. Up to this point. It's when he's.

Jesus explains the parable. Of the sower. To the disciples. In chapter 4. In verse 11. And so. We should observe. That the kingdom of God. Is assumed. Jesus states it.

As though they ought to know. As though they ought to be aware. Second observation. Notice the passing of time. After sowing.

The sower sleeps. And rises. Night and day. In other words. Life just goes on. Ordinary faithfulness. Time passes. How much time? Well we don't know. That's not the point. Of the parable. Some interpret this parable.

[13:19] By making. The sleeping. And the rising. Represent some kind of. Passivity. Passivity. On the part of the sower. But I want you to notice. What Jesus emphasizes. And it's in verse.

28. The earth. Produces. By. Itself. Now.

That phrase. By itself. I think it sounds. A little strange. Doesn't it? It still sounds. Kind of strange. To me. Reading it. But we are helped.

By the only other time. In scripture. When this. Word. Is used. Remember when Peter. Was in prison. In Acts. Chapter 12. The church is praying.

Peter. Is sleeping. An angel. Shows up. Smacks him. Wakes him up. And then. Peter. Begins. Following.

[14:15] This angel. Right. Out of the prison. Passed the guards. Out of the prison. This is Acts. Chapter 12. And verse 10. When they had passed. The first.

And the second. Guard. They came. To the iron gate. Leading. Into the city. It opened. For them. Of its own accord.

This is the same word. That Jesus uses. About the ground. And. Producing. The fruit. Once the seed. Has been. Put into it. The sower sows.

And then he goes about. His normal. Routine. The point is not. That the sower is passive. Or lazy. That's not the interpretation. Of the parable. The interpretation.

That Jesus calls attention to. Is that. The seed grows. Spontaneously. Automatically. Of its own accord.

[15:12] Horde. You might say. The sower. It seems. Is both. Baffled. And blessed. By the bounty. He.

He notices. That the seed sprouts. And that the seed. Is beginning. To produce. Fruit. And he realizes. That he has been blessed. But as Josie pointed out.

He does not know. Where did that growth. Come from. The third observation. The growing.

And the fruitful seed. Is. A mysterious. Divine work. Something that is. Beyond. Human control. And that leads.

Directly to the fourth observation. Since. The earth. Produces. By itself. Spontaneously. And automatically. Then we can also say. That the harvest.

[16:06] Is certain. The harvest. Is certain. It is not dependent. On the man. He is going about. His normal routine.

Ordinary faithfulness. Going to bed. Getting up in the morning. Doing the things. That need to get done. And all the while. The ground. Is producing. The fruit.

That will. Lead. To a certain. Harvest. How do these. Points. How do these. Observations. Come together. To help us. Interpret this parable.

Well. Jesus's hearers. Would have. Assumed. That the kingdom. Was coming. But they were looking. For something. In the future.

But this parable. Reorients. Their thinking. And ours. The kingdom.

[17:03] Is here. Right now. Even if the kingdom. Is hidden. Like Jesus implies.

Back up in verse number 22. Even if the kingdom. Is hidden. Even if some of the pieces. That they're holding. Don't seem. To fit. With the image.

That they have. In their mind. Of what their messiah. Is going to look like. They need to realize. That their understanding. Of the messiah. Is incomplete. The kingdom.

Is present. And it will. Be fully revealed. In God's. Perfect. Time. The kingdom. Is like that. Seed. That has been planted.

And the process. Of kingdom. Growth. Is happening. Spontaneously. Automatically. By God's. Mysterious. Divine work. And all of that.

[ 17 : 58 ] Is represented. By Jesus's. Life. His teaching. His ministry. And because this is God's work. Then Jesus.

Can confidently. Say this parable. And teach. That the harvest. Yet to come. Is certain. miracle. I imagine some watching Jesus from the edges of the crowd, observing him, listening to his preaching, considering their well-known picture of what the Messiah is going to look like, evaluating him against this picture.

Perhaps they're grumbling a little bit. What he is doing seems so small, so insignificant, so different from what I expected.

And so Jesus tells another parable. Verse 30. And he said, I don't know if this is true, but this verse kind of reminds me of Jesus standing there.

He's observing someone on the edges, on the fringes, who's evaluating him, and he knows what they're thinking. He knows that he doesn't match up to their expectations. And Jesus, in his beautiful, wonderful humanity, pausing and saying to himself, what could I compare the kingdom of God to?

[ 19 : 49 ] Notice what he chooses. Verse 31. It's like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.

And 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.

When you think of small things, what comes to mind? The eye of a sewing needle.

The eye, I'm glad you said that. The eye of a sewing needle. That is small. What else comes to mind? What's the smallest? Atoms. Atoms are very small.

What about the smallest insect that kind of pops into your head real quick? Mosquito. A mosquito is very small. An ant is very small. A mite, a gnat. All of these are very small.

[ 21 : 03 ] I learned this week about a family of creatures called fairy flies or fairy wasps.

These creatures are so small, Josie, that it would take four male fairy wasps to be as large as a period in your Bible.

They are so small. I'm fascinated by Jesus's choice of metaphor.

For the Jews at this time, the mustard seed was the smallest thing they could think of. If you were to ask the Jews, what's the smallest? They would say a mustard seed. That's what Jesus chooses to describe the kingdom of God.

I'm fascinated by his choice. What humility. What sweet humility. To acknowledge that his ministry and his miracles and the impact that he was having from their perspective seemed so small.

[ 22 : 17 ] So insignificant. But I want you to also notice this. That by choosing the mustard seed, Jesus asserts something else.

He asserts that his life and his death and his resurrection would bring culture shifting, world turning, life-changing results.

Just like a mustard seed, the tiniest thing, when you throw it under the ground, turns into a massive plant with large branches, big enough for other animals to find their way, to find homes in them.

Jesus invites his listeners, don't be put off by what seems unimpressive. The kingdom is present.

Even if it's hidden, even if it's unnoticed, even if it's unrecognized, even if it's ignored, and in God's perfect time, in God's perfect way, the kingdom will be fully and gloriously revealed.

[ 23 : 40 ] See, the kingdom of God does not begin with a bang and the defeat of Rome. The kingdom of God begins with a baby and the defeat of the devil.

And just like the tiny mustard seed, the cross challenges challenges our perception. The cross compels us to think carefully about what God is doing.

It forces us to reimagine, reexamine the pieces that we're holding, pieces that perhaps we've set aside because it doesn't match what we think a savior ought to look like.

It was not by military victory, but through his death, that Jesus destroys the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. And through his resurrection, Jesus gives eternal life to anyone who believes in him. Jews, whether disciples or not, did not need to be told the kingdom was coming.

[ 24 : 58 ] They expected that. What they needed to hear and to understand and to believe was that the kingdom was already present in Jesus.

God's long, longed for kingdom had come. And Jesus testifies that it will grow and it will flourish and it will be fruitful.

until he returns. Unlike the parable of the unforgiving servant that we looked at last week, these two parables don't teach us primarily how to act.

They are about what the kingdom is like. The kingdom is like a farmer who sows seed and then goes about his life and the earth produces by itself a plant and then fruit and then harvest.

The kingdom is like a mustard seed, so tiny and insignificant you can barely see it and yet when it is planted it becomes the largest of all the garden plants.

[ 26 : 19 ] So what are your expectations concerning the kingdom of God?

What do you expect his kingdom to look like? I wonder if you are frustrated by a lack of growth, by a lack of results.

I wonder if your efforts for God's glory seem so small, so easily overlooked, so insignificant.

I wonder if you are okay with not being in control, with admitting that God is sovereign and you are not and that as you examine life around you you realize things are happening, God is doing all kinds of things around me and I am not in control of them but he is and things are getting done.

I wonder what unexplained spontaneous or automatic work of God you could be thankful for today.

[ 27 : 45 ] What unexpected growth are you experiencing in your life or are you observing in the lives of those you love or in the places that you find yourself interacting with people?

people. These parables do not give us a to-do list but they do have application for us.

Like the sower God invites us to ordinary faithfulness. We are to learn patience as we wait as we work as we watch as we worship.

despite life's uncertainty he invites you to be encouraged by remembering that he is at work even when you can't see it or you can't make sense of it and you don't know what he is doing.

Your life and your relationships and your children and your family and your church and your future all of it all of it is in his hands and those are good hands aren't they?

[ 29 : 04 ] Take comfort in this. Our faith is nourished and our hope is firmly anchored in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ the one who loved us and gave himself for us and will return to receive us to himself and on that day he will visibly and eternally establish his kingdom a kingdom of light and life and love are you looking forward to that day with these parables Jesus invites his hearers and he invites you to think about what the kingdom looks like and to consider how the king achieves victory and to ask what is my relationship to this kingdom and this king are you a citizen of the kingdom what a great question to ask or are you caught up with the kingdom of this world will you come to

Jesus today dear one what are you waiting for what are you waiting for come to Jesus today in Christ God has done everything that is necessary for your salvation the kingdom of God as Jesus says is at hand repent and believe the gospel parables are the stories that Jesus told to make us think they challenge our assumptions they shake up our expectations they press us to consider what we truly believe about God and his kingdom and his call on our lives perhaps it's time to set aside the puzzle box lid of expectation that you have about God and his kingdom and to align your understanding of this wonderfully glorious kingdom with the reality that

God says is true be ordinarily faithful dear friends be patient and be encouraged let anyone who has ears to hear listen let's pray good father we are grateful to receive your word like the sower planting seed we ask that the soil of our hearts is responsive to the preaching of your word holy spirit please do work that only you can do of pulling up rocks and weeds and the things that would choke out the work that needs to be done in our hearts we do desire to find our place in this kingdom kingdom we do desire to be used by you for your glory would you please help us as we consider these two parables to examine what we think is true about the kingdom and to align our understanding with your reality help us to be ordinarily faithful patient and encouraged please keep us faithful by your grace until

Jesus returns we look forward to that day it is in his name that we pray amen