

Mark 4:21-34

“He spoke the word as they were able to hear”

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I. **Introduction**

Mark records three more parables of Jesus in this section and the context is that they all followed the parable of the sower prior to His conversation with those that came to Him after the teaching and prior to Marks commentary with regards to this time in verses 33-34. Along the way we will see two more seed parables and first the only parable unique to Marks account in verses 26-29. With regards to those three seed parables of Jesus we see:

- 1. **The parable of the sower:** Described the condition of the heart in which the seed is sown
- 2. **The parable of the growing seed:** Tells the story of the natural history of growth and the faithfulness of God to produce the results.
- 3. **The final parable of the mustard seed:** Speaks of the fortunes of seed when it becomes abnormal to God’s plan

These three parables reveal three truths about God’s kingdom:

- 1. **God is at work as He has always been**
- 2. **He hasn’t altered His methods for health and growth**
- 3. **We must not redefine growth or health to suit our agendas**

II. **Vs. 21-25 Hiding truth in plain sight**

Vs. 21 some see verses 21-25 as a further explanation to the parable of the sower while others see it as a complete new parable. I view it as yet another reason Jesus gives for His repeated use of teaching in the parabolic method. In this brief parable *Jesus issues three*

principals about parables as it relates to capturing truth:

1. Vs. 21-23 **Hiding truth makes it more visible**: Jesus asks in verse 21 *“Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?”* The answer Jesus was looking for was, *“No you wouldn’t put a lamp under a basket or a bed! Yes, of course you would put it on a lampstand!”* It would defeat the purpose of lighting up the room. The text in English makes it sound as if Jesus is saying in verse 22 that *“everything hidden will be revealed”* but that is not how the Greek reads. Instead the meaning is that things hidden are done so in order that they may be manifested; **concealment is a means to revelation**. Most of us now have a dimer on the rear view mirror of our cars because the bright lights of the cars behind us not only blind us they make impossible to see how close the car is. Ah, but switch the mirror and dimming the light and things actually become more visible. Salomon in Proverbs chapter 25 verse 2 where he wrote, *“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”* We all like a mystery, we like to investigate and search into a matter, God designed us that way. The greatest truth God hid in plain sight was His Son. ***Jesus’ incarnation was a parable!*** That is how the apostle John describes it in the first five verse of chapter one of his gospel. *“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”* So God took that light and hid it under the basket of human flesh. And in so doing John writes in verse 14 that this light under a basket was, *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* Having said this Jesus again repeats what He said in verse 9 the need to not only hear but truly listen and go further.
2. Vs. 24 **You gain more than what you seek but only if you look**: The 2nd principal follows on the heels of verse 23’s exhortation to truly be listening Jesus said, *“Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear; more will be given.”* The meaning is that the more that a person thinks and searches the more they will understand and the opposite is equally as true. Truth requires investigation and you will be rewarded for your effort above what you initially thought but there is no reward for those who do not put in the effort. The bible is dead and dull to those who won’t take the time to dig into it. Ah but those who take a daily time to read it they are rewarded with truth that has transformed not only their life but those around them as well.
3. Vs. 25 **You lose what you do not use**: Finally Jesus issues the third principal about truth, *“For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”* This doesn’t seem fair there ought to be ***“truth redistribution” “educational equality”*** where everybody ill-regardless of the amount of work put in gets the same grade and the same job promotions. The natural law is called the ***“law of atrophy”***. We see the natural law of atrophy in the physical

realm when we have a prolonged injury and the affected limb is immobilized until it has healed. Once we take off the splint or cast and try to use it we experience firsthand the law's truth, if you can't use it you lose it! It's not just in the area of the body we have all experienced this in the area of our mind and memory as well. Something that we once knew well and memorized because of frequent use is now gone from memory because we no longer used it. Ah but the opposite is also true the more we use something the more functional and powerful what we use becomes. There is no autopilot in our lives, no place where we can stop peddling and start coasting if you want more of the Lord you will need to keep moving forward in your spiritual life!

III. Vs. 26-29 Organic farming

Vs. 26-29 Jesus using simple agrarian observations reveals in this parable **the organic principal growth**. Seed is scattered upon the ground and the sower is not doing any more than preparing the soil and scattering the seed. According to verse 27 he, *“sleeps by night and rises by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.”*

The principal that Jesus is communicating is that the sower doesn't perform a task outside of preparing the soil for the scattering seed and harvesting. There are forces at work which are 100% faithful to do their work whether a sower frets about it or not. **The farmer doesn't get up the next morning a dig up the seed to see if there is any progress. He rests secure in the fact that God is at work even though he cannot see it yet.**

According to this parable **there are 3 observable stages of growth recorded for us in verse 28**, *“first **the blade**, then **the head**, after that **the full grain** in the head.”* It is only as the grain is ripe and time for harvest that the farmer is called back to full time labor.

That is what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:9 when he declared that *“we are laborers together with God...”* There can be in the church today a **destructive spirit of impatience** that demands instant results measureable in numeric growth. This causes an attitude that leads to no patience for allowing God to work in His timing. Instead there is an insistence that the church help Him out as His methods take too much time. Because of this the

church has adopted multiple worldly techniques that have yield numeric success in the corporate world. I personally believe that it is high time that His church starts adopting His methods of “*organic church development*” and become healthy again.

IV. Vs. 30-32 Mysteries of the mustard seed

Vs. 30-32 This is the last in Jesus’ parables and His own words seem to indicate the puzzling nature of the parable as He asks, “*To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it?*” The context of this parable is on the heels of the principal of **natural organic growth**. The problem is that in Jesus parable mustard seeds don’t “*grow up and become greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.*” Furthermore the “*birds of the air*” of verse 32 have already been given in verse three in the parable of the sower and Jesus identified them as satan in verse 15. In Matthew 17:20 Jesus used the mustard seed as a beautiful illustration of faith saying that if you “*have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will be able to say to this mountain, move and it will move..*” Yet in this parable **this mustard seed does not grow true to life**, it becomes abnormally large and doesn’t represent other plants of the same seed. It is a low growing plant with an unimpressive foliage nothing to support a bird’s nest. The mustard plant is by normal nature a great representation of the church as it is unimpressive in stature but pungent and powerful in effect. Jesus is saying that this secret of the kingdom is that this seed that will look like the simple mustard seed of faith that grows up into unimpressive size and foliage but is powerful will instead be a counterfeit that will be seen in false growth that will be characteristic of being impressive and dominate it will have wide influence and attract even satanic forces that will find shelter and a home under its branches. As we look out

after all these centuries of Christian history we see that is exactly what has grown up in the name of Christianity. When we cross reference this parable with Jesus message to the churches in Revelation chapter 2-3 the unhealthy church of Laodicea was the one that said, *“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”* And it was the unimpressive church of Philadelphia that Jesus said, *“I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut; for you have little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”* Paul describes a healthy church In Ephesians chapter 4:1-3 as walking in a worthy of the calling which described as *“lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* That is a far cry from what Jesus reveals here in the abnormal growth and describes what happens when the church gets impatient with how He works and begins to take things into their own hand and genetically alters the seed to produce their own results.

V. Vs. 33-34 As they were able to hear

Vs. 33-34 Mark finishes up this section on Jesus’ parables with his own commentary saying that this was just a sampling of the parables Jesus. He also mentions that the parabolic method of teaching was exclusive when addressing the multitudes but His explanation of these parables were for those who would seek explanation. Mark writes his observation that *“He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.”* Jesus didn’t teach a doctorate course to 2nd graders, instead He tailored His message to His listeners in order to teach them where they were at. ***The amazing observation about the Bible that I’ve noticed is that the truth that it contains expands with time and we see much more depth and complexities the longer we continue to investigate!*** The word of God

continues to reveal the details of my life that the longer I've been in the Word over the years seems to be under an ever increasing magnification. It's for this reason that I believe we can visibly see a person's growth in the Lord as they will become more aware of their faults and not more arrogant of their knowledge! If over time a person who claims they have been in the word has become increasingly more prideful it is a sure indication that they haven't been in God's word.