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 Date: June 29, 2008
 Title: "The Harvest has come"
 Text: Mark 4:26-29 (Gospel parallels - There are none)
 Big Idea: In the ebb and flow of our daily existence God's Kingdom is growing and advancing and nothing we do can undo what God is doing.

Introduction:

Of all the parables, this one appears only in Mark. It is not [unlike] what some would mistake for its counterpart in Matthew, that is, the parable of the wheat and the tares. Some would have these two parables be variations of the same parable because in each, the farmer is said to plant the seed and go to sleep. In each, the harvest comes when the seed has become ripe. There are similarities. But there are differences as well.

There is a different message in each of these parables. In the first, the emphasis is placed on the work of the enemy in sowing the tares, or *darnell* (a wheat look-alike), and in the action of the Lord in separating them for reward and judgment in His coming. But in the parable at which we shall look today, the emphasis is placed on the secret growth of the seed because of the life contained therein. These parables are distinct. <http://www.horizonsnet.org/sermons/mark12.html>

"Its design is to teach the Imperceptible Growth of the word sown in the heart, from its earliest stage of development to the ripest fruits of practical righteousness." (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown* on Mark 4:26)

We should seek to see the continuity between the preceding parables (4:1-20; 21-25) and this parable. The soil referred to in our text is the good soil in verses 8 and 20.

THE BIG PICTURE

Second Cycle - Later Galilean Ministry (3:13 – 6:29)

- The challenge to His ministry (3:1-6)
 - The choosing of the 12 apostles (3:13-19)
- Beginning of THE BUSY DAY (3:20-5:20)
- The charge of demonic activity (3:20-30)
- Beginning of THE BUSY DAY (3:20-5:20)
- The characteristics of God's family (3:31-35)
 - The clarifying of His kingdom (4:1-34)
 - The parable of the soils (4:1-20)
 - The parable of the lamp (vv. 21-25)
 - **The parable of the seed (vv. 26-29)**
 - The parable of the mustard seed (vv. 30-34)

Its Eternal Value:

God's kingdom advances at a steady pace and will come to full fruition. The intent of this parable is to remind His disciples that His purpose will not fail, it will prevail. You and I are a part of a process that ends in victory. It is this hope that enables us to quietly and contently rest even though we exist in the midst of a swirling sea of heartache and sorrow. God's victory assures us of victory in the face of a sin infested and fallen world.

The Present Danger:

The kingdom of God is not brought by the will or force of men, but by the will and power of God. We do a disservice to the Word and Work of God when we place our confidence in man and not God. It is always possible for us to grow weary in well doing. It is possible that we lose hope because we do not see the changes spoken of in the Scripture of God. Passages like this seek to assure us to continue in the faith of faith and trust.

As with all parables, there is a real danger to overanalyze and read into the text what is foreign to the text. "Every parable contains circumstances thrown in to fill up the story, which cannot be literally interpreted." (*Albert Barnes' New Testament Commentary on Mark 4:29*) May we be guarded in our handling of God's Word.

The Storyline:

"The Kingdom of God is progressing toward an end. While we may not fully understand all that goes on, we can be sure that it is growing, and when it comes to full maturity, the harvest will come. There is movement and mystery, but ultimately, there is harvest. We also need to understand this about the Kingdom: the power of the Kingdom moves despite our lack of complete understanding about all that is going on in this work of God. One thing is certain, however; when all things are ready, the harvest will come."

"The first parable here, then, is about the fact that, though Jesus' ministry in Galilee doesn't look like the sort of kingdom-of-God-movement people were expecting, it was in fact the seedtime for God's long-promised and long-awaited harvest. People wouldn't be able to see how God's promised plant would grow from this seed; but grow it would, and harvest would come." (Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 49).

God is working through our activity, our non-activity, and despite our activity to bring His kingdom to pass. When Jesus said, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," there was no uncertainty or questionable posturing. His kingdom is coming and His will is being flawlessly executed even as we speak. What many of us fail to see is the truth of it.

"The kingdom of God really means *the reign of God*; it means the day when God's will will be done as perfectly in earth as it is in heaven. That is the goal of God for the whole universe. This parable is short but it is filled with unmistakable truths." (William Barclay, *Mark*, 106).

Question:

1. Will we gladly be a part of this movement and mystery or resist it? The outcome, however, is inevitable.
2. What does it mean to accept this truth by faith? What might this look like in daily living?

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know Jesus will win and His purpose will be fulfilled.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Him above all else and to align ourselves with the great purpose of God in advancing and establishing His kingdom on earth.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of knowing the victory of God.

Remember that a parable is to be heard and not read. We are to feel the immediate impact of the big idea and not overanalyze each of the various details. The details are only means to get us to hear the big idea.

The Outline:

- I. The casting of seed (v. 26)

Although this point is perhaps assumed and blatant, it needs to be stated. There is no harvest without first casting seed. Although I believe God has determined the end, I also equally believe that God has determined the means to the end. The advancement of His Kingdom and the harvesting of souls for citizenship presuppose that the Word of God is being planted in the soil of men's hearts.

Jesus is the primary character in each of the parables. He is the one who sows seed. He has come and consistently casts the Word of the Kingdom of God. By way of application, I believe it is honest and right for us to see His people as also casting seed.

To whom do we cast our seed? I would argue that the good soil is those who were elected from the foundation of the world and for whom Christ died. But before we conclude incorrectly as to what this means in the sowing of the seed, notice how the spreading of the seed, the sowing of it, is broad and inclusive. Our responsibility is not to find the good soil, but to liberally and generously sow the seed. Where is the best soil found? The best soil is seedless soil. The best soil is the soil that needs the seed. The best soil for sowing the gospel seed is not found in the body of Christ but outside the body of Christ. The best soil is found in everyday life.

The best soil, according to Galatians 5:19-21, is marked by:

- sex sins,
- sinful desires,
- wild living,
- worshiping false gods,
- witchcraft, hating,
- fighting,
- being jealous,
- being angry,
- arguing,
- dividing into little groups and
- thinking the other groups are wrong,
- false teaching,
- wanting something someone else has,
- killing other people,
- using strong drink,
- wild parties, and
- all things like these. (New Life Version – Galatians 5:19-21)

What I am finding as a Christ-exalting, Word-centered, Global-impacting, Grace-based fellowship is that the ministry becomes dirtier, more risky, and base, yet at the same time it is more life giving, more kingdom based and more Jesus revealing.

Not all babies are born in sterile hospital rooms; many are born in less than ideal surroundings. The growth and harvesting of the seed takes place in the normal events of life. Often we associate great events as being key elements in the work of salvation. Such ministries as VBS, Awana, Christian camps are used often by God for the harvesting of souls, but the larger harvest takes place in the context of already established relationships. Moms, Dads, Aunts, and Uncles, friends, family members, and individuals within the church see the larger harvest that takes place in the daily activities of life.

II. The mystery of growth (v. 27)

A. The growth of the Kingdom is often imperceptible.

“He sees it has grown, but he cannot tell in what manner it grew, or what was the cause and method of its growth. Thus we know not how the Spirit by the word makes a change in the heart, any more than we can account for the blowing of the wind, which we hear the sound of, but cannot tell whence it comes, or whither it goes. Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; how *God manifested in the flesh* came to be *believed on in the world*, 1 Tim. 3:16.” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Mark 4:27) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Mark.v.html>

Notice how the text puts this in the context of daily life. While life is lived the seed is sown. It is in the surroundings of life that life is brought forth. Even when we do not see anything happening, change is taking place. Often we are surprised when it would appear that nothing is happening, and then growth shoots forth with great expression.

B. The growth of the Kingdom is always constant.

“Night and day, while man sleeps, growth goes on. There is nothing spasmodic about God. The great trouble about human effort and human goodness is that they are spasmodic. One day we take one step forward; the next day we take two steps back. But the work of God goes on quietly; unceasingly God unfolds his plan.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 107).

God is working His purpose out

1894 Arthur C. Ainger (b. Blackheath, England, 1841; d. Eton, England, 1919)

God is working his purpose out
 as year succeeds to year:
 God is working his purpose out,
 and the time is drawing near;
 nearer and nearer draws the time,
 the time that shall surely be,
 when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
 as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
 where'er the church has gone,
 by the mouth of many messengers
 the call of God has come:
 Give ear to me, you continents;
 you isles, give ear to me,
 that the earth may be filled with the glory of God
 as the waters cover the sea.

March we forth in the strength of God,
 with the banner of Christ unfurled,
 that the light of the glorious gospel of truth
 may shine throughout the world:
 fight we the fight with sorrow and sin
 to set their captives free,
 that the earth may be filled with the glory of God
 as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is done in vain
 unless God blesses the deed;
 vainly we hope for the harvest tide
 till God gives life to the seed;
 yet nearer and nearer draws the time,
 the time that shall surely be,
 when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
 as the waters cover the sea.

C. The growth of the Kingdom is unavoidable.

The text tells us that the one who casts seed is limited in so far that only God can cause the increase. Paul brings this point out as well in First Corinthians. One person sows and another waters and weeds, but only God can give the increase.

⁶“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6, 7).

Notice how God chooses to use human instrumentation for the production of a harvest. John Wesley notes how, “The earth brings forth no corn (as the soul no holiness) without both the care and toil of man, and the benign influence of heaven.” (*John Wesley's Notes on the New Testament* on Mark 4:26). God has chosen to use finite man in the working of His infinite purpose. It is with gratitude and humility that we serve our Lord in the advancement of His kingdom.

“This is still true. After all the researches of philosophers, not one has been able to tell the way in which grain grows. They can observe one fact after another; they can see the changes; they can see the necessity of rains and suns, of care and shelter, but beyond this they cannot go. This is equally so in religion. We can mark the change; we can see the need of prayer, and examination, and searching the Scriptures, and the ordinances of religion, but we cannot tell in what way the religious principle is strengthened. As God unseen, yet by the use of proper means, makes the grass to flourish, so God unseen, but by proper means, nourishes the soul, and the plants of piety spring up, and bloom, and bear fruit.” (*Albert Barnes' New Testament Commentary* on Mark 4:27)

I find this idea perplexing. I always marvel at the simplicity of saving faith. When you lead a person to Jesus Christ, the logistics of it are rudimentary. **First**, you see yourself as a sinner. **Second**, you see Jesus as the only Savior from your sin. **Third**, you accept Him as a gift from which comes the gift of eternal life and the forgiveness of sin. **Finally**, you thank Him. I, by faith, believe in the simplicity of saving faith. There is nothing magical about this. It is not magical, but it is miraculous. When anyone, anywhere, at anytime calls upon the name of the Lord, they will be saved. In that moment God's wrath against them is satisfied and all that Jesus is, they receive. Again, I do not know how all this happens, but that it does, by faith I accept.

“There is nothing so powerful as growth. A tree can split a concrete pavement with the power of its growth. A weed can push its green head through an asphalt path. Nothing can stop growth. It is so with the kingdom. In spite of man’s rebellion and disobedience, God’s work goes on; and nothing in the end can stop the purposes of God.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 108).

D. The growth of the Kingdom is complete.

We are not to lose heart when we sow seed and do not see immediate and open change. If the seed is sown and if it lands in good soil, then a harvest is inevitable. “Some growths are quicker than others, but in all there is growth. And we have no right to look for the end at the beginning, the ripened Christian experience in the young convert, the full corn in the first appearance of the blade.” (*People’s New Testament Commentary* on Mark 4:28)

We must patiently await the unavoidable.

III. The progression of growth (v. 28)

Remember the good soil of 4:8 and 20? The seed has power for reproduction when planted in good soil. Some of us are involved in the sowing stage, others when the seed first shows signs of growth, still others when the mature grain comes to a head and is ready for harvest.

“But **nature's secret processes do not fail to operate because we are ignorant.** This secret and mysterious growth of the kingdom in the heart and life is the point of this beautiful parable.” (*A.T. Robertson’s New Testament Word Pictures* on Mark 4:27)

“The secret of growth is in the seed, not in the soil nor in the weather nor in the cultivating. These all help, but the seed spontaneously works according to its own nature.” (*A.T. Robertson’s New Testament Word Pictures* on Mark 4:28)

IV. The inevitable harvest (v. 29)

The Word about the Kingdom of God is proclaimed far and wide. The seed is germinating in the hearts of those whose soil is good. There is harvesting to be done. Be ready for the sowing, the nurturing and the harvesting. The word of God has intrinsic power. There is life in the Word. Listen to this idea in Isaiah 55:10, 11.

¹⁰ “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:10, 11).

Even in the non-response or in open rebellion against the Word it has shown the hardness of men’s hearts.

There is latent in the parable a call to endure and not lose hope. Remember the context is one of hostility and open opposition. Not only are His disciples inconvenienced but also openly resisted. Like verses 8 and 20 and like verse 21 the parable reminds the hearer that God will triumph and His kingdom will be fully established in all of His resplendent glory.

*“This is the law and order of nature and also of grace in the kingdom of God. Hence it is worth while to preach and teach. **This single fact creates the confidence shown by Jesus in the ultimate establishment of his kingdom in spite of the obstacles which obstruct its progress.**” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures* on Mark 4:28)*

Often we hear people bemoaning the state of the church, of how every church is widespread with problems. As long as we live in a fallen world, this is a true statement. However, I must temper such negativity by noting that God wins. The evil of man and the troubles of a church cannot stop God from finishing what He began.

APPLICATION: (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

There are two conclusions one should come to with regard to the kingdom’s inevitable triumph. First, as citizens of this kingdom we are on the winning side. Second, if I am not a citizen of this kingdom, then what must I do to become a citizen of this kingdom?

SHARE THE GOSPEL

1. Let us sow the seed widely, generously, and expectantly.
2. Let us sow with patience knowing that God triumphs.
3. Let us sow with hope knowing that God triumphs.
4. Let us trust God for the harvest.
5. Let us live prepared for the unavoidable harvesting by God.
6. Let us rest in the certain victory of God to save everyone who wills to come and who He chooses to save.

Practical Considerations:

1. What we can do and what we cannot do.
2. What we can know and what we cannot know.