

Introduction

Earlier this week Chad was telling me about what he was doing and learning in his various software classes. He mentioned he was learning about encrypting and decrypting messages. He said that he had learned about a man named Alan Turing. He was an English mathematician and cryptanalyst who helped break the Enigma code with what is known as the Ultra code. The Enigma machine was an encrypting machine that Germany had developed and used against the Allied forces in World War II. The machine encrypted the morse code signals so that enemy forces could not understand the secret messages that the Nazis were sending to their commanders in different areas. The Ultra code name was given because the information that the Allied forces obtained from it was considered ultra secret. Alan Turing's part in cracking the coded messages allowed the Allied forces to defeat the Nazis in the Battle of the Atlantic, and in many other crucial engagements. It is estimated that the Ultra intelligence shortened the war in Europe by more than two years and saved over fourteen million lives.

We are in Mark 4 and it begins with Jesus teaching again by the sea. There was a large crowd gathered so Jesus got into a boat while the crowd was on the beach listening to him teach. Jesus was teaching them many things in parables. A parable is a story that incorporates something that is familiar to the listener and conveys a spiritual truth. The English word parable is a transliteration, meaning the word was taken from the Greek language, rather than translating the Greek word into English. The Greek word is parabole (Strong's G3850), and it means to place beside or to compare.

(Mark 4:1-2) "He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. {2} And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching."

In Mark 4:10-12, after Jesus had finished teaching the crowd, He was alone with His followers and they asked Him about the parables. He said, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven." Jesus' parables were like the encrypted messages that the Nazis were sending from their Enigma machine. The Nazis were hearing and could decrypt the messages and understand, but the Allied forces were able to hear, but could not understand the messages. Jesus gave His followers the code to decrypt the parables and understand His teachings about the kingdom of God. This was a quote from Isaiah the prophet (Is 6:9).

(Mark 4:10-12) "As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. {11} And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, {12} so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven."

Much of the passage has to do with hearing and understanding. In verse 3 Jesus said, "Listen to this..." In verse 9 Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear..." In verse 12 He said, "And while hearing, they may hear..." In verse 23 He said, "If anyone has ears to hear..." In verse 24 Jesus said, "Take care what you listen to..." Finally, in verse 33, Mark records, "as they were able to hear it..." The passage clearly implies that we must hear and try to understand.

A couple of weeks ago I was listening to a video that I had taken of my father teaching about Tripping. He began his lecture by telling the class, "If any of you are tired or dozing off, wake up. What I am about to tell you is the most important lecture of the whole two-week school. So, wake up and pay close attention. That was my father's way of saying what Jesus said. "Listen to this...If anyone has ears to hear...take care what you listen to." Jesus wanted people to pay close attention and to listen. God does not desire for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). He wants to give us the Ultra Decoding package so that we can hear the message with understanding.

This morning as I was having breakfast with my wife, I told her that the message today is one of the most important messages that I will give all year. I try to give messages about word, prayer, marriage, communication, relationships, and many areas during the year. I want to give a balanced spiritual diet and to teach the whole counsel of God. The message today is about the word of God, and like my father, I exhort you to listen and pay attention. It is one of the most important messages that I will give all year.

Our passage ends today by saying, "with many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable, but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples." Jesus disciples got the decrypted messages and the crowds got only the parables. They understood the physical illustration, but they did not get the interpretation and the understanding that the disciples got.

(Mark 4:33-34) "With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; {34} and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples."

Two weeks ago we covered the first parable, which was the parable about the four soils. The sower sowed beside the hard ground and the birds came and ate up the seed so that it never grew. Jesus said that when people with hard hearts heard the word, the devil takes away the word that was sown. The second soil where seed was sown was the rocky ground. It sprouted right away but had no depth so it withered. Jesus explained that they people receive the word immediately with joy, but they fall away in affliction or persecution. In these last days there will be more affliction and persecution, so those who are not well grounded will fall away. The third seed was sown into thorny soil. The thorns, or the deceitfulness of riches and the worries of the world choke out the word so that it becomes unfruitful. The fourth soil was good soil and the seed sown into it produced fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. The first parable was about the soils. This was one of many parables that Jesus taught to the crowds that day.

Our passage today begins with verses 21-25. Jesus said that "a lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not to be brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus was wrapping up the parable about the four soils. God wants the word to enter into good soil and to produce lots of fruit. The purpose of sowing the seed is to produce fruit. The purpose of a lamp is to give off light. The word in our lives is to be a light to others. It is to be seen by others. The seed is not sown into our lives to be hidden or kept secret; it is to be revealed through our lives.

(Mark 4:21-22) “And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not *brought* to be put on the lampstand? {22} For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has *anything* been secret, but that it would come to light.”

In the Hebrew culture, listening implied action and obedience. Our lives are to produce fruit. Our lives are to produce good fruit. We need to be careful about how we are living our lives. If we apply ourselves to what we are learning, more will be given to us. If we do not give ourselves to God’s word, gain understanding of what is sown in our hearts, it will be taken away. We need to carefully listen, understand, obey, and bear fruit.

Then, Jesus said that by our standard of measure it will be measured to us, and more will be given to us besides. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. We must be careful to listen with understanding. We must have good soil that bears fruit. When we hear, receive, and understand God’s word, more will be given to us. If we are like the hard ground that does not understand, even what has been sown will be taken away. We must be careful to listen and understand the word of God.

(Mark 4:24-25) “And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. {25} For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”

In our text today, we will cover the parables about the seed of grain, and the mustard seed. Jesus goes from the soil to the seed. The soil was the hearts of the receivers. The parables today are not about the receiver but about the seed, which is the word of God.

19 What Is The Kingdom of God Like? (Mark 4:21-34)

1. The Kingdom Is Like A Grain Seed (Mark 4:26-29)
2. The Kingdom Is Like A Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)

(Mark 4:26-29) “And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; {27} and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. {28} "The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. {29} "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

(Mark 4:30-34) “And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? {31} "*It is* like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, {32} yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." {33} With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; {34} and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.”

1. The Parable Of The Grain Seed (Mark 4:26-29)

This parable of the grain seed is not found in any of the other gospels. The parable of the soils and the parable of the mustard seed are contained in Matthew and Luke, but this parable is not mentioned in either of those two books.

The parable of the grain seed is about the kingdom of God. Jesus was constantly preaching about the kingdom of God. We do not teach nearly enough about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God. When Jesus said to people, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand,” He was offering people the opportunity to repent and come under the rule and reign of Christ in their lives. Jesus wants people to understand that His kingdom is a heavenly kingdom. He wants us to understand what the kingdom of God is about. So, Jesus begins with the kingdom of God is like. He is going to use something in the natural to help us understand a spiritual principle about the kingdom of God.

(Mark 4:26a) “And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like..."”

This parable is about a man who casts seed upon the soil. It is not about the soil; the focus is one what the seed does after it is cast upon the soil. The sower casts the seed upon the soil and then goes to bed at night and gets up by day. After the man has sown the seed on the soil, he is not preoccupied with it. He does not know how it sprouts. He does not know how it grows. There is nothing that the man does, other than sow the seed. There is nothing that the soil does; it just holds the seed. The seed does what it was created to do. It sprouts and grows. After sprouting, it puts out a blade, then the head, and then the mature grain. The plant goes from seed to maturity. There is a growth process to maturity. There are different stages of growth in this process.

(Mark 4:26-28) “And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; {27} and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. {28} The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.”

In this parable, the seed is the Word of God. When it is sown into a person, it performs its work in us. The key is to get the Word of God sown into hearts. We don’t have to help the word; the Word will work on its own. We don’t have to understand how the Word of God works in our hearts. We just need to make sure the word is sown into our hearts.

In Hebrews 4:12, we find that the Word of God is living and active. When the Word of God is sown into our hearts, it is living and active. It will produce growth in our lives.

(Heb 4:12) “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

In 1 Peter 2:2-3, we are exhorted to long for the pure milk of the word like a newborn baby longs for its mother’s milk. Why? We are to long for it because it will cause us to grow in respect to salvation. If we have tasted the kindness of the Lord and been born again, the Word of God will cause us to grow. This seed that is sown in our hearts will sprout. This seed will put out a blade. This seed will grow and put out a head, and then a mature grain will develop. The Word of God in our live does just that; it helps us to grow from a baby to maturity.

(1 Pet 2:2-3) “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, {3} if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

I received Christ into my life at the start of my sophomore year at Texas Christian University. I was a sinner and when I received Christ I went on living a life of sin. I did not read the Bible. I

did not know that I needed to read the Bible. I had nobody disciplining me and telling me to read. My parents were living in Iran and I was only allowed one trip a year to visit them. I went at Christmas so I had nowhere to go in the summer, so I attended summer school. The Lord put a leader of Campus Crusade in the dorm room next to mine. Jim told me that I needed to read my Bible every day, so I started reading the Bible. I started with Proverbs. I couldn't stop reading it. I would read at least eight chapters of Proverbs a day. I would read Proverbs 1-8 one day. Then, I would read Proverbs 2-9 the next day. Jim did not tell me where to read or how to have a quiet time; he just told me to read my Bible. It was amazing what happened. I fell in love with the word and my life began to change. I saw a blade coming up. Then, I saw the stalk growing. My language changed. I stopped getting angry. I stopped being so selfish. God would show me things in the mirror of His word and as I read and meditated on them, my mind got renewed and my life changed. I did not know how the Word was doing it; it just did what it does.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul thanked God that when they received the Word of God from him, they accepted it for what it really is, the word of God, which performs its work in us who believe. The word of God will perform its work in us. We just have to keep sowing the word into our hearts. I have nothing against daily devotions. I have nothing against religious books. They can be helpful to some people. But, if someone only reads a devotional and never reads the Bible, I have a problem with that. We have to encourage people to read their Bibles every day. We have to sow God's word in the soil of our hearts. It will perform its work in us when we plant it in the soil of our heart.

(1 Thess 2:13) "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

In James 1:21-25, we are exhorted to put aside all filthiness and in humility receive the word implanted which is able to save our souls. James encourages us to be doers of the word and not just hearers who delude themselves. Then, he talks about looking intently at the word, as if looking at a mirror. When we look intently at the word and live by it, we will not be a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer. I encourage people to read the word of God and look at it intently. When we look intently, the word is not taken away from us, but it grows in our lives.

(James 1:21-25) "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. {22} But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. {23} For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; {24} for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. {25} But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

In Hebrews 5, God tells us that many ought to be teachers, but instead they are still infants and need milk. He said that solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Many people never look intently at the Word of God. They never get past the devotional reading. We need to encourage people to study the Word of God and learn to eat solid food. This will help people grow and mature.

(Heb 5:12-14) “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. {13} For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. {14} But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

I take my job as a pastor very seriously. I spend a lot of time studying and meditating on the Word of God. I have been called to sow God’s word into the hearts of people. I have been called to feed God’s flock. I can’t make people grow, but I can faithfully sow God’s word in people. I pray for people and pastors out of Jeremiah 15:16. The prophet said, “Thy words were found and I ate them, and they became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.” The word of God was a joy to Jeremiah. The word of God changed Jeremiah and transformed his life. He was called by God’s name because his life reflected the life of God. I pray for people to have the joy in God’s word and for it to perform its work in their lives.

(Jer 15:16) “Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.”

This parable ends with the man immediately putting in the sickle because the harvest has come. This does not mean that when we start maturing in Christ, God is going to harvest us and take us away. We must remember to take away the main point of a parable. The main point of the parable is that the word of God when sown into our hearts will cause us to grow to maturity and bear fruit. I do believe there is a prophetic implication to the parable. Jesus is going to come to reap the harvest. We find that in Revelation 14:14-16. An angel will come out of the temple and will cry out to Jesus who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

(Mark 4:29) “But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

(Rev 14:14-16) “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud *was* one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. {15} And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” {16} Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.”

In this sense, The Father has sown the seed, which is the Living Word. Jesus is the word. In John 1:1 we find that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. The Father sowed the Word, Jesus, into the earth. Jesus was buried and rose from the dead. The church sprouted and began to grow. It continues to grow to maturity. When the harvest is ripe, Jesus will come and reap the harvest on earth. I believe that is the prophetic fulfillment of this parable.

(John 1:1) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

2. The Parable Of The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)

In the parable of the mustard seed, the mustard seed was sown upon the soil in the garden. Though the seed was smaller than all the other seeds, it grew and became larger than all the other garden plants. It grew so large that the birds of the air came and built nests under its shade.

(Mark 4:30-32) “And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? {31} *It is* like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, {32} yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE.”

The kingdom of God is one that grows. The parable is a picture of visible growth. Jesus is considered to be the mustard seed that was sown. The garden is the garden of Israel. Though Jesus came as a little babe, and He had a very small group of disciples, after His death and resurrection, the kingdom of God began to grow rapidly. It spread its branches all over the world. The kingdom of God is one that gives shade, covering, and rest to people all over the earth. The growth of the kingdom of God is very evident.

In Ezekiel 17:22-24, the Lord gave prophet a picture of a cedar tree that He would plant on the high mountain of Israel. The tree would grow large and become a stately cedar, and birds of every kind will nest under it and nest in the shade of its branches. This prophecy was that the nations of the earth would come under the shade of that tree. The parable that Jesus gave lines up with Ezekiel’s vision. The kingdom starts very small in the garden of Israel, but it grows large and all the nations of the earth will seek shelter in God’s kingdom. In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar also had a dream about a tree that grew big and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air found shade under it. That tree was Nebuchadnezzar and the birds are the nations under his rule.

(Ez 17:22-24) “Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take *a sprig* from the lofty top of the cedar and set *it* out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant *it* on a high and lofty mountain. {23} On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. {24} All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform *it*.”

In Isaiah 9:6-7, a passage that is often used at Christmas because it speaks about the Messiah being born, it also says that there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom. The kingdom of God is ever increasing. Remember that the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God and the kingdom of God is ever increasing, just as the mustard seed increased. Though it began with the Father sowing the mustard seed into the earth, a tiny little seed, it grew and continues to grow all the time.

(Is 9:6-7) “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. {7} There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it

with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

There should be growth in our individual lives. We should be growing in our intimacy with the Lord. We should be growing in our knowledge and understanding of the Word of God. We should be growing in our faith. We should be growing in our love. We should be growing corporately. We should be sowing the word of God and the gospel, and we should be seeing the kingdom of God growing. This parable is a picture and promise of kingdom growth.

(Mark 4:33-34) “With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; {34} and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

Conclusion and Applications

Over the past few weeks we have looked at three parables. The first parable was about the soils. God is looking for good soil because He chose us that we might bear fruit. God wants us to bear 30, 60, and 100-fold fruit. A good heart hears with understanding and becomes a doer of the word. A good heart is well rooted and goes through afflictions and persecutions. A good heart seeks first the kingdom of God, not worldly things. The first parable was about the soil.

The second parable was not about soil, but about the seed. The seed will sprout, grow, form a head and produce fruit. The seed will perform its work in us, the soil. We just need to keep sowing the word of God into our hearts so that it can do its work. We may not understand how it works, but it will work. God’s word is living and active and will cause us to grow and mature.

The third parable was not about the soil or the seed; it was about growth. A small seed can become a large tree that the birds can nest under its shade. A mustard seed of faith can move mountains. The kingdom of God is a growing kingdom. God wants you and I to be growing in our faith. He wants us to be growing in our knowledge and understanding. God wants His church to be growing in all respects.

Where are you at this morning? How is your soil? How is your root system? Do you need to get better rooted? God wants you to be well rooted. If that is you this morning, make a commitment to spend time reading God’s word. Make a commitment to study and meditate on God’s word. Make a commitment to become part of a local church who can help you get firmly rooted, and who can feed you with nutrients from God’s word, and can water you with encouragement.

Are you bearing fruit in your life? Are there things that are choking out the fruit in your life? God wants you and I to be fruitful. If there are worries and worldly desires choking out the fruit, repent and put God first in your life.

Are you sowing God’s word in your heart? God’s word will do its work; it will perform its work in your life. If you are not spending time in God’s word, let me encourage you to get on a good Bible-reading program. There are lots of good Bible reading plans. At our church website we have a number of different reading plans. Spend time reading in the Psalms and Proverbs. Spend time in the New Testament. As you read, think and meditate and pray about what you are reading. Try to gain insights and understanding so that the seed is not taken from you. Make a commitment to sow God’s word in your heart.

How is your growth? Are you like the mustard tree? Are you growing in your knowledge of the Lord? Are you maturing in your faith? Are you becoming a place for those around you to seek shade under? God wants us to grow and to increase. He wants His kingdom to grow and increase in your life and in His church. Ask God to grow your faith. Ask God for His kingdom to come and His will to be done in your life. I want to close with a verse that the Lord put on my heart this past year. In Luke 12:32, Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.” These parables are about the kingdom of God and God wants to give us His kingdom. He is glad and happy about giving you and I the kingdom of God. Let’s pray.

(Luke 12:32) “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.”

Introduction (Mark 4:1-2, 10-12, 21-34)

1. The Parable Of The Grain Seed (Mark 4:26-29, Heb 4:12, 1 Pet 2:2-3, 1 Thess 2:13, James 1:21-25, Heb 5:12-14, Rev 14:14-16, John 1:1)

2. The Parable Of The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34, Ez 17:22-24, Dan 4, Is 9:6-7)

Conclusion and Applications