

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER

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FOR THE EATER

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE MOST IMPORTANT PARABLE

The Interpretation of Mark 4:26-29

The subject of this study declares a personal opinion which is the result of long and careful consideration of all the parables. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Mark, and its importance can be seen in the fact that it tells us certain vital truths about the kingdom of God, His own government, which may at any moment become a complete reality in and upon the earth. The parable reads as follows:

And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

As a rule it is a simple matter to give a descriptive title to most parables, such as "the parable of the mustard seed," or "the parable of the leaven," but not so this one. Such titles as "the unconscious growth," and "the seed growing secretly" simply indicate that those who use them do not know what this parable is about, and its force and message is misrepresented by them. The difficulty in finding an expressive title arises because there is no central or dominant figure in it - neither the sower, the seed, the ground, the sickle, or the harvest. However, when considered in the light of its declared subject, the kingdom of God, and the fact that it clearly sets forth five stages in the development and consummation of the kingdom, it probably should be called "**the parable of the stages of the kingdom.**" And while it is a parable of superlative importance, it is one of the most neglected, misrepresented, and misinterpreted of all the thirty parables in the New

Testament As an example, Alva McClain in his book on "The Greatness of the Kingdom" makes no reference whatsoever to this passage. Commentaries which I have consulted say that this parable deals with "the progress of the gospel in the world," "the progressive course of the spiritual life," "the course of the grace of God in our salvation," "the growth of the church," and "what happens when we preach the gospel." None seems willing to face the simple fact that it deals with progressive stages of the kingdom of God from seedtime to harvest. We will consider each word of it.

AND HE SAID. These words identify and call attention to the speaker, and they should remind us anew that we are dealing with words spoken by the Lord Christ Jesus. In view of this we need to remember three other declarations made by Him: "Take heed what ye hear" (Mark 4:24); "Let these sayings sink down in your ears" (Luke 9:44); and "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

SO IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The word "so" here could be better translated "thus," meaning "in this manner." It is the Greek word *houtos* which is usually translated "so," but is also translated "thus," "on this wise," or "after this manner" which are different ways of saying the same thing. Both in the Greek and in the KJ.V. this word is placed emphatically forward which would make it to mean, "After this manner is the kingdom of God and not otherwise." Thus, in certain respects, the development of the kingdom of God is like that which is here pictured in five stages: (1) the blade, (2) the ear, (3) the full grain in the ear, (4) the ripened grain, (5) the harvest.

It should be carefully noted that it is "the kingdom of God" that is the subject here. It is not the gospel, the church, the Word, or the believer. This parable has to do with God's government. Ignore the subject here and you may as well throw out the parable.

AS IF A MAN SHOULD CAST SEED INTO THE GROUND. Since this parable has little to do with the sower, we do not need to identify the one who planted the seed. This does not refer to Christ. Of course, the fact that the Lord did plant the seed of divine government in the earth seems to make Him in some respects parallel with the sower; however, because the sleeping during the night is not applicable to Him, and neither is the expression "he knoweth not how," we will simply run into difficulty if we make the sower to be Christ. Thus, it is apparent that these opening words simply set the

stage in order to lead us into the real message of the parable that comes later.

AND SHOULD SLEEP, AND RISE NIGHT AND DAY . This phrase is idiomatic; and it means that this sower went about his ordinary affairs, maintaining his habitual mode of life, doing nothing more about the seed that was sown. These words are not applicable to the Lord Jesus, since, "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psa. 121:4).

AND THE SEED SHOULD SPRING AND GROW UP, HE KNOWETH NOT HOW. As has already been pointed out, we cannot apply these words to the Lord Jesus, since He knows perfectly how seeds grow into plants and produce after their kind, how God gives to each seed a body as it pleases Him, and to every seed his own body (I Cor. 15:38). We now come to the very heart of the parable.

FOR THE EARTH BRINGETH FORTH FRUIT OF HERSELF. In regard to the kingdom of God these words tell us that it is wholly supernatural, the work of God, and not the product of human actions. The kingdom is coming whether men want it or not and whether they receive it or not. The Lord Jesus Christ becomes King by an act of God, and His government becomes a reality by a divine assumption of sovereignty. The seed of divine government was planted when God predicted it in the Old Testament by such declarations as, "Thou shalt judge the peoples righteously, and govern the nations upon earth" (Psa. 67:4). Just as the earth automatically brings forth fruit because of the seed that is placed in it, so will divine government appear and develop because of what God has already done. All this is in harmony with God's great promise in Isaiah 61:11, "**For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are in it to spring forth; so the LORD GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations.**"

FIRST THE BLADE, THEN THE EAR. If words mean anything, then the words we have here tell us something about the **first two stages** of the kingdom of God. The blade stage of the kingdom of God began when God raised Jesus from among the dead. Men had done their worst, but God intervened and reversed what they had done. Divine sovereignty asserted itself in His resurrection. The blade stage of the kingdom of God is seen in the early days of the Acts period when even devout men had to say, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12).

When we consider the character of growing grains, especially the grasses which are certainly in view here, such as wheat, oats, rye, or barley, we see that these appear first as a grass-blade, a time when all grains look alike. The farmer knows what these blades are because he planted the seed; but anyone else would need to ask, "What is it?" However, grains quickly pass from the blade stage to the ear stage. At this point the various grains have certain characteristics and those familiar with these can easily identify them.

Even so it was with the kingdom of God in the Acts period. Very quickly it passed into the ear stage and its prophesied characteristics began to show forth. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16), were the sure words of Peter. From this time forth it was evident that the long promised kingdom of God was a reality upon the earth, even though only in part, as declared later by Paul in I Cor. 13:9-10. The Acts period as a whole made up the blade and ear stage of the kingdom of God. These are now complete, and God's purpose was finished in them. We need not speculate as to just when one stage ended and the other began as there is no event to mark it, no more than when a field of grain advances from one stage to another.

AFTER THAT THE FULL CORN (GRAIN) IN THE EAR. When growing grain reaches this stage, the farmer has every grain of wheat he is going to get. No more grains will come forth, yet each grain must develop. The "full grain in the ear" is the next stage of the kingdom of God, a stage which has long been suspended, and for which a troubled world now waits, and for which godly men now hope and pray. All of God's kingdom purposes were suspended and have been in abeyance since Paul made his momentous declaration in Acts 28:28. They are suspended while God accomplishes a purpose that was not the subject of any prophecy or previous revelation. This purpose was a secret hid in God. For more than 1900 years God has been writing into the history of His long dealings with mankind a perfect and complete record of the grace that is inherent in His character. The "God of every grace" is demonstrating that He is this. He is doing this in a dispensation of grace in which every act of His is one of love and favor to the undeserving. When His present purpose is complete, He will again speak from heaven, assume sovereignty, and the kingdom of God will be a reality that compares to "the full grain in the ear" of growing grain.

This will be the manifest kingdom of God. When it comes, it will be complete and universal. Jesus shall reign where ere the sun, doth his successive journeys run. There will never be any more divine government than there is on the day when God assumes sovereignty. Human governments always grow, reaching out to take in more and more. They must enlarge to survive. This is their greatest fault. As government accomplishes its purpose, it should be ever decreasing. As Jefferson said, "That government is best which governs least."

BUT WHEN THE FRUIT IS BROUGHT FORTH. This is the ripened grain, the desired end of the farmer's labors. It speaks of the results of God's long period of government. These will be the mature sons of God who will be His in the personal presence of Jesus Christ. This is when the righteous shall shine forth in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43).

IMMEDIATELY HE PUTTETH IN THE SICKLE. "Putteth in" is the Greek word *apostello*, which when used of an inanimate thing means to authorize (see Issue No.5). God's harvest from His government of mankind will be mature and ripened subjects for the thousand years of His personal presence.

BECAUSE THE HARVEST IS COME. This is a blessed harvest indeed, one Paul anticipated in I Thess. 2:19 and 3:13, and which our Lord anticipated in Matt. 13:43.

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