

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 1: Mustard Seed Growth

The kingdom of God refers to the reign/rule of God. The Scriptures use this language to refer to various aspects of this rule, including the people who have submitted themselves to His rule. As you study about God's kingdom in the Bible, one component you should notice is that God's kingdom would grow (Daniel 2:34-35, 44). This is pictured in two parables Jesus taught in Matthew 13:31-33, using the imagery of a mustard seed and leaven. In both cases, the picture is something small that grows to have a tremendous impact. Therefore, the kingdom of God is expected to grow and never remains dormant. Our task is to learn how God's kingdom grows and what we can do to participate in this growth.

1) The seed contains the potential for tremendous growth. The growth of God's kingdom is not based in any person or human strategy. Instead, like a seed, all the potential ways God's rule can grow and impact people in this world are contained in the message of the gospel. In the first parable Jesus taught in Matthew 13 (also Mark 4 and Luke 8), Jesus taught about a sower who sowed seed in various types of soil (vv. 3-9). Then, He explained the parable (vv. 18-23). In the explanation, we can see the word about the kingdom (the gospel of Jesus Christ) is the seed that contains all the potential for the growth and the harvest that happened in the good soil. In fact, this kind of growth happens every time the seed comes into contact with good soil (though we may not fully understand how, Mark 4:26-29). If this seed, however, comes into contact with other types of soil, the growth is limited by those types of soil.

For example, some will never even begin to experience this growth because they are focused on worldly things and never give God's word the opportunity to penetrate their spiritually hardened hearts. Others will begin to experience this growth but will not experience it to its fullness. Of these, some initially let God's word penetrate their hearts and begin to live in submission to God but will stop

the growth if they experience trials and persecutions because of what the word is trying to do in their lives. Then, others will also begin with this growth by initially obeying the gospel but will never experience the growth God wants them to experience because they allow worldly concerns and desires to choke out the fruit the gospel is intended to produce in them. Yet, those who allow the gospel to work in their lives in an unimpeded way experience tremendous growth and produce the mature fruit the seed is intended to produce! So, while the soil conditions impact the effectiveness of the seed in that particular soil type, the fact is that the potential for great growth is contained in the gospel!

2) The seed reproduces according to its own kind.

God has created each seed with all that it needs to grow – and then to be able to reproduce itself (Genesis 1:11-12). So, God did not just create a single mustard seed plant to produce all He intended it to produce. Rather, He created it to reproduce according to its own kind. This is also what God expects of those who are receptive when the seed of the gospel is planted in their hearts. For example, Jesus expected His early disciples to be instrumental in helping the gospel spread throughout the world so others would submit to Jesus as King and be His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). But, this was *not* just something that was expected of them. Rather, it is simply what the gospel of the kingdom of God does in the lives of those who cultivate it (2 Timothy 2:2, 24-26; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 3:14-16). In fact, not only do we see these instructions about the expectation to share the seed with others but we also see examples of this in the lives of those who were impacted by the gospel of the kingdom (John 1:37-42; 4:25-26, 28-30, 39-42; Mark 5:1-20; Acts 8:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10). Therefore, spreading the gospel is a natural occurrence in those who cultivate it in their own lives – and is not just the fruit that is produced by specific people in the kingdom of God!

3) Two types of kingdom growth. It is important to have the proper expectations of kingdom growth so that you can be working to cultivate it. First, God's kingdom will grow within people. Those who accept the gospel must work throughout their lives to grow in their knowledge and maturity in Christ (1 Peter 2:2-3; 2 Peter 3:18). This will involve diligent study of God's word and then making careful applications of it to their lives (Acts 2:42; 19:8-10; James 1:22-25). Many fruits are then produced in the lives of those who diligently cultivate the gospel's message (i.e. Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:3-11). This results in every Christian doing whatever he/she can in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Second, God's kingdom will grow numerically as it spreads to others. As we have seen, those who cultivate the gospel in their own lives will strive for it to reproduce through them so others will also come to hear, believe, and obey the gospel. This kind of numeric growth happened throughout the book of Acts whenever the gospel was planted by Christians in the hearts of others (Acts 2:47; 8:12-13; 9:31; 11:19-21; 14:21-22; 18:8). Although God never guarantees numeric results, God's word will always do what God intends (Isaiah 55:10-11)!

God intends for His kingdom to grow. The gospel's message that describes God's rule contains all that is needed for this growth to happen in both personal and numeric ways. Now, those who desire to submit themselves to King Jesus must let the gospel work in them so as to experience this growth in the way God desires and become participants in this growth!

Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correction: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?