

The Sower: Kingdom Growth

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[0 : 0 0] I will only be speaking in parables today. Now, she is referring to the new sermon series we are starting,¹ The Parables of Jesus, which we're really excited about.

! And one of the main reasons is, I mean, everything that Jesus said was amazing, but specifically parables, he said that these stories he used to teach things, to make known the mysteries of his kingdom.

In fact, the very first parable that many think that he gave was the parable of the sower. And his disciples come to him afterwards and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables?

And Jesus answered them and said to them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. And that's why parables are so important to us.

They reveal something, and Jesus makes the kingdom of heaven so accessible and known to us through these things. But before we tackle our first parable, it's important for us to understand two things.

[1 : 0 1] What is a parable? What is it? And then also, what exactly are we talking about when we refer to the kingdom of heaven? Because Jesus said these parables are about the kingdom of heaven.

And so, first, let's get to what a parable is. Well, very simply, it's a short fictional narrative. And it's a short fictional narrative that is very relatable to the audience.

So, Jesus is in his day, he uses a lot of agrarian types of things and parables. He uses social interactions and things that people would have absolutely known and understood.

Reveal a deep spiritual study of it. When we come to the word of God, whether it's here on a Sunday or you in your own lives, you have to understand what parables are and what they aren't.

And when we come to a parable, we're not meant to, like, dissect every word in the Greek and the phrase and try to get what the contextual understanding of every possible thing could mean.

[1 : 5 8] Man, what kind of seed was that that was being sown? What kind of plant was being raised up? What was the fruit that it was producing? And what does that tell me about my own self? And, like, you know, the soil, man.

Is it, like, how rocky was the rocky soil? How unrocky was it? What kind of rock was it? Was there nitrogen? Was there phosphorus? What was the soil made of? Like, you know, you can really geek out on these things if you want to.

But that's not what Jesus wants to dive into because we can often lose the forest for the trees when we get into it that way. These parables that Jesus used, again, they are a simple, they are super simple.

They are meant for us to easily grasp something through a narrative. And Jesus is using them to explain a key truth about the kingdom of God. So, what do we mean when we talk about the kingdom of God?

What does that mean? Jesus taught a lot of these parables to teach us about God's kingdom. And so, you can't just get everything you need to know about the kingdom of God from one parable.

[2 : 58] So, over the next 15 weeks, we're going to go through a lot of these parables and unpack them so we can understand the fullness of what Jesus is trying to get across and teach us about the kingdom. But today, if I was to distill it down, what the kingdom is referring to, it means life with God.

That is the essence of the kingdom. You know, there's a guy named Graham Goldsworthy, he wrote a book that's been around for a long time. Seminaries all over the place use it as they teach biblical studies and help pastors preach the gospel well and the truths of the Bible well.

And this book is called The Gospel and Kingdom. And in this book, he shows this main arc of the Bible from beginning to end is really God revealing what his kingdom is. And the Bible, what it's doing, it's revealing life with God.

And what that looks like according to me, his plan and Goldsworthy kind of said, it is God's people in God's place under God's rule. And I would add, in God's presence. And the Bible is the story of life with God slowly being revealed.

And it was revealed to us in creation. And when God created Eden and put man in that garden, and that was life with God revealed at that moment until man sinned.

[4 : 15] And all that was lost, paradise lost. But then again, in God's redemptive plan, as he's unfolding this, it's partially revealed again through the calling of Abraham and the creation of the nation of Israel and them being set apart unto him and him giving them the law to follow in the temple where heaven met earth and they could experience and draw near to the presence of God in that one particular place.

But those things only served as a copy. A copy of the true or heavenly things as the writer of the letter of Hebrews tells us. And we have received something better than what Israel received at Mount Sinai.

We have a better temple than the temple of Solomon because Jesus came and he brought the kingdom when he came to earth. As one pastor said, Jesus put a face on the kingdom.

And he went around preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the good news about the kingdom of God. And he proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand. What does that mean? We often read that and we think, man, the kingdom is at hand.

I mean, it's coming soon. When we think about when Jesus returns one day. But he is saying, what Jesus means is he's saying it's here and it's available to you now. Put it this way. When Jesus preached that the Judea saying those things, Dallas Willard put it this way.

[5 : 32] When Jesus preached that the kingdom was at hand, he meant it the same way someone might speak while extending a hand toward the dining room and saying, here's the dining room to a guest who has come to their home for dinner.

To so easily turn and walk into the kingdom as Jesus invites us to do is a seismic shift and a tremendous transition.

And so for you and me, as we listen and we read and we let the word of God wash over us through Jesus' parables, that's what we have to do. He still is extending his hand to us and showing us that the kingdom of heaven is right here.

Not the kingdom way out there, the kingdom right here, right now. So close and available that if we were to turn and to take him up on it, we would be able to walk into life with God right now.

And it sounds so simple, doesn't it? It sounds easy. And it might make us wonder, man, if that's the case, why isn't everybody doing this? But that's the nature of the kingdom.

[6 : 38] The offer is simple and easy and yet so few take it. Why? Well, today's parable actually explains why. And we're kicking off our series with the parable of the sower.

And Jesus himself said that to understand any of his parables, you have to be able to understand this one. And it's one of the few parables Jesus explained. And I believe he did so because it explains the very essence of life in the kingdom, a.k.a.

life with God. So let's read Matthew 13 and verses 1 to 11. I'll give you a moment to turn there. But also, if you don't have a Bible with you as you're turning there, these verses will also be up on the screen.

It says this. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. And other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil.

[7 : 54] But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

He who has ears, let him hear. And the disciples came to him and said, Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, To you it has been given, to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not.

Hear then the parable of the sower. Say what has been sown. Anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. And yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word. But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.

[9 : 06] He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. This is God's word. Amen.

Amen. The question many earnest seekers, skeptics, everyday Christian believers like you and me, and even theologians, the question many have sought to answer is this, how does one come into God's kingdom?

Or to put it another way, how does one walk into life with God? And what this parable answers is not how we come into the kingdom, but actually it says how the kingdom comes into us.

And Jesus said, it's like seed sown on the ground. The kingdom comes into us by the gospel. Now, one might argue that they've heard of people in faraway places.

You think of places where the gospel hasn't yet reached. remote parts of India, parts of the Middle East, the jungles and far-off places where certain tribes have yet to hear anything.

[10 : 13] But we hear stories about them being saved nevertheless through things like visions of Jesus. And I would say no doubt God can do that. God can proclaim the gospel without men's help if he needs to.

But his primary means and his regular means is through the instrument of the gospel being spoken through people like you and me. The apostle Paul says in Romans, how will they believe if they do not know and how?

Dallas Willard says this, the aim of the gospel is to create new persons. The mode is the impartation of life. The instrument is the word of the kingdom that imparts new life.

The word of the kingdom is the instrument Jesus used, and it is the instrument we are to use to impart this new life to others. So Jesus says, a sower went out to sow.

You could say that Jesus exemplified that in his time on earth. He went out and he sowed. He preached. And then his apostles and his church, they have in turn done the same thing throughout the ages.

[11 : 15] But that isn't the main point of the parable here. Nor is the main point to teach us only to sow seed on good soil. We scatter seed just like Jesus did.

Consider his ministry here on earth. Homeboy preached to multitudes upon multitudes of people. And yet, by the end of his life here on earth, even though he had done all that while performing miracles, he had very few disciples.

The point of the parable isn't to figure out who's got the good soil and who doesn't so we know where to sow. It just shows us the different ways people receive the kingdom.

Some will be hardened toward the offer of life with God. And that's the seed that is sown on the path. The gospel comes to them. You can proclaim it to them. But it feels like it's just always just bouncing off.

It's hitting on hard hearts, hard ears, because they seem to not understand it. Or Jesus says it's because they don't understand it.

[12 : 15] And I want to say this. We think that is speaking to mental capacity. It isn't. The Jews' concept of understanding had much more to do with desire than mental faculty.

Proverbs teaches us about seeking understanding. It is something we could seek after. It's something we should go after. At the beginning of his reign, King Solomon, God came to him and said, you can ask of me anything.

And he goes to God and he says, Lord, give me an understanding mind to be able to discern good from evil. And God gave it to him and granted that to him. He said, he was for the man, like, God, will you take revenge on my enemies?

Kind of sort out my personal vendettas. Would you give me honor and wealth above all other people or even a long life? But he asks for understanding. To be able to discern good and evil.

And here's the thing. The beginning of understanding is to know that you don't have it. And to seek it out. And Jesus said this about the seed sown on the path that many will hear the word of the kingdom and not understand it.

[13 : 19] They don't get it. But the reason they don't get it is because they don't want to get it. The idea of life with God sounds terribly uninteresting and restrictive and maybe even oppressive to their sensibilities.

They are interested in being one of God's people in God's place under God's rule. And so their hardened heart hears the gospel as bad news. And some of the podcasters I like to listen to are atheists.

And partly I like to listen to them just because I can understand their worldview and how they process things and process what's going on in life. I want to know their worldview.

And when they're clever people in many, many ways. They can set up very good arguments and reasons for what they believe and why they believe it. But when they come to speaking of religion and especially Christianity, they often do it in a mocking way.

They cannot understand why people would believe in an unseen God who puts prohibitions on how one should live their life. They love the idea of a humanity that directs its own destiny and can move towards a utopian idea if we just put in enough effort through the pursuit of the right kind of knowledge and scientific advancement.

[14 : 38] And these guys, man, they're able to put forward their ideas in a very smart way. Their promiscuity, their indulgence in things like pornography.

They love crude joking. They love lives of pleasure. They love the pursuit of wealth and prominence. They are very confident in their view that the natural world is all that there really is.

But it's also clear that they really don't like the idea of a God that they must obey. And it's not that they can't understand what the gospel means. They could actually tell you exactly what it is.

They just don't want it to be true. So, why should one sow towards that kind of person, towards that kind of hardened heart?

Well, it seems like a waste of time and energy, right? Well, I would answer to that. Well, consider Paul before he was Paul. And let's be humble and say, you and I do not know when God can turn a hardened heart into a believing one.

[15 : 40] Let's just be honest with that. Keep on sowing. If you got atheist friends, you got skeptics in your life, keep on sowing. Even if it looks like nothing is happening, keep on sowing.

Sometimes there's no results. But all's it takes, man, God to do one thing. That's it. And then it all changes. But even for those where the gospel takes, we see that the results are mixed.

Jesus illustrates in the rocky soil and the choking weeds that some who profess faith have yet to really possess it. And we have to realize some will fall away and some will wither away because their heart is divided.

This also is a failure of understanding, but it's different to the hardened heart. In one sense, the divided heart is excited about the kingdom life, life with God.

And it receives the seed of the gospel with joy. And we look and we celebrate and we say, look, this is Lord and Savior and saying all the right things. They begin to do all the right things. And for a time, things look really good.

[16 : 48] Things look really promising. They seem to be growing. And then difficulty arises. Faith is put to the test. Desire and love for God is put to the test.

Will we endure hardship or persecution for Jesus' name and for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the kingdom, for the sake of life with God?

Will we? Do we have to? Well, look to church history. Look around the world right now, beyond our borders.

Read the voice of the martyrs about what is happening across the world right now. Read Fox's book of martyrs about the history of what it cost many, many Christians over time and place to follow Jesus and to stand for him.

Look to the warnings of Jesus himself. He said, in this world, you're going to have troubles. In this world, you're going to be persecuted. They're going to hate you because they hate me. Life with God will be accompanied by persecution.

[17 : 55] And this assault upon our desire for God and our desire for life with God takes on many forms. We will be slandered. We will be mistreated, both verbally and physically. We will suffer the loss of possessions and careers and the chance of upward mobility simply because of who we are and our faith in Jesus.

Certain circles of society will close the years of existence to you because of that. In its first 200 years of existence, the church was frequently persecuted.

They were blamed for the fires of Rome and that brought on some terrible consequences. They were looked at as those who upset the gods of Rome because they didn't participate in the cult practices and festivals that celebrated those gods.

And those around them looked at them with suspicion and they made up some pretty incredible lies that were spread about. We read this actually in Justin of Rome and Tertullian in North Africa.

Promoted this kind of animus towards Christianity. Here's one from Tertullian in his book, Apology Point Number 7. And he says this about what people were saying about them.

[19 : 07] You think you're maligned today.

At least nobody's saying you're sleeping with dogs. Life with God will be accompanied by persecution.

And for that, some will fall away. Again, it comes down to the desire of the heart. Is in our hearts, are they ringing true that life with God is worth it no matter what may come?

And that desire is assaulted by the temptation toward things that seem better than life with God. Even in times of peace, when there is no persecution, there is another temptation here.

As you and I start to walk in this life with God, there seem to be offers of a better life that spring up. That's what Jesus talks about with the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.

[20 : 28] Jesus speaks to this in his sermon on the matters of the cares of this world that can so infect our hearts in a negative way. And he says it in his sermon on the mount. Do not be anxious about your life.

Don't worry about what you're going to eat, what you're going to drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Don't think, don't worry about the future and tomorrow. Don't put all your cares upon that.

That's the cares of this world and what it's talking about. It's about living to make sure that our tomorrow is so secured and that we can count on with absolute confidence our blessing and our comfort and our ease.

And it compels us into this life of always wanting to anticipate and solve and deflect. So we buy insurance and we buy insurance for that insurance.

The cares of this world get us to believe that we, in our own strength, can secure a good and nearly perfect tomorrow for ourselves. And with that comes the deceitfulness of riches.

[21 : 34] Riches promise us a better tomorrow. They promise us that there's going to be enough food on the table. More than enough. There is going to be leisure to enjoy. There is going to be no debts, no worries, no problems.

Riches, we look at and say, man, if I just had this much, if I was just making this much, then my life would just be all good days. Is there anything wrong with being wealthy?

No. Abraham was a godly man and by the standards of his day was very, very wealthy. But his wealth was what God added to him as he followed God in faith.

He was not pursuing wealth. He was pursuing God. And God chose to bring that to him. And it was of God's own sovereign choice. But Abraham, though he was wealthy by the standards, he also lived as a sojourner.

A man of no country and no people and no home. He was a nomad living in a tent all his life. And he never stopped trusting and following God, no matter how many flocks he had, no matter how many servants he accumulated.

[22 : 52] Wealth proves nothing about your faith. You can be poor and faithless just like you can be rich and faithless. The question isn't how much money do you have.

It's where's your life source? Where are you going to find life and security and hope? Is it dependent upon a better tomorrow?

Is it dependent upon riches or is it dependent upon God? And when those desires grow bigger than dependence on God, this idea of like a perfect tomorrow, more riches, when you need that and that dependence becomes greater than dependence on God, what's going to happen and what is happening is it's going to divide your heart.

You're going to start to really love those things. And it's going to pull you away from love with God. It's going to wither. And that is essentially what Jesus is trying to help us see in this parable.

Life with God is marked by steady growth and fruit. It is not marked by perfection. It is not marked by you being perfect all the time.

[24 : 02] It is not marked by, ooh, I had an anxious thought. Oh, shoot. There it goes. Divided soul. I'm in trouble. Jesus uses this parable to show how the kingdom grows.

Slow and steady. Like seed planted in soil. That is how the kingdom grows in us. You can't work extra hard to speed up the process, right?

When the farmer plants corn, he can water it. He can add manure, insect repellent, miracle grow. He can pray to the corn gods.

And for all that, that corn is going to grow just as corn has always grown. Slow and steady. It will bear its fruit in its appropriate time.

Kingdom growth, friends, is not explosive. It isn't immediate. It is slow and steady. But we also see that growth happens in what Jesus calls good soil.

[25 : 08] So what are those characteristics? He says this. It's the one who hears the word and understands it. Now, we've already talked about what that means, that understanding of it.

It doesn't mean that you are really, really smart and that the really, really smart people grow in the gospel, but the not so clever people don't. It is all about your desire for the kingdom.

It is all about your desire to receive that word and to be that gospel. And he wants it to be true. It is good news to him in the face of everything else he has heard in his life.

That person wants desperately life with God on God's terms. That person desires it because they know in the only way, man, I am not as I should be.

And that is the only way for transformation. That is the only way into new life. And I desperately need that. That person doesn't want to go anywhere else for dependence, for a better and secure tomorrow.

[26 : 15] They depend on God first and foremost above all things. The good soil doesn't mean being perfect. It just means that you, for you, the best thing you are convinced of is the kingdom.

The best thing for you is life with God. And that is it, above all things. Good soil isn't like youthful passion that burns hot one day and quickly flames out the next.

It just grows and increases. Not overnight, over your life, until it's harvest time. In God's time, he will bring it into its fullness.

But before that time comes, that person, that plant, it bears fruit. And it bears fruit that goes beyond itself. Kingdom growth multiplies in us, but it also multiplies beyond us.

Jesus said that the seed in the good soil multiplied its yield, some 60, some 100-fold. And the history of the church seems to have this one consistency.

[27 : 25] It keeps increasing. The people of God are steadily growing in numbers. And yes, there has been times in church history, but the arc of history of the church worldwide shows a steady increase in the number of the faithful.

Even today, you can look around America and see the decline of the church in the West, and that is true. But if you look beyond us, the increase is still substantial.

The growth of the gospel seems to be shifting to the southern hemisphere in places like Latin American countries, in Africa. It's multiplying rapidly in Asia and even in parts of the Middle East.

As they're trying to stamp it out, it just keeps growing and it keeps growing. Right now, it can feel like America's ground is a lot more of the hardened path or the rocky path or the one that's full of weeds.

But we have to keep sowing. We have to keep praying. We have to keep hoping. As for ourselves, we, as far as it's concerned for us as disciples of Jesus, must resolve to desire the gospel of the kingdom.

[28 : 36] We must desire that. We must seek it out. We must receive it. It must be beautiful to us, above all things, better than all other things. Life with God on God's terms.

Our cities, our neighbors, our families, they need to see the kingdom's life growing in us. And friends, we can do that.

We can be faithful. You know why? Because he is. He is. As we continue life with God, trust that. Trust that in his time.

Slow and steady. He will bring about growth. And he will bear fruit in you. Amen. As the band comes up and we look to respond. In a moment, we're going to be taking communion.

And I want to say this. If you, whether or not you were a follower of Jesus, I want us all to consider this. And remember this. For there to be life, a seed first must die.

[29 : 40] And Jesus came to die. So that we can live in the kingdom of God. We can live in that abundant life with God.

And so if you are here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, I want to appeal to you, come to him right now. Come to Jesus who came and died for you. Who died in your place to save you from sin.

So you can have those sins washed away. You can be cleansed of those things. And you can come into life with God. He is the way, the truth, and the life. There's going to be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray to Jesus.

And he will answer that prayer that you pray. If you're already a follower of Jesus, we're going to come to the table in a moment. But before you come, just some considerations to prayerfully bring to God.

For yourself, reflect on this. Is my desire for life with God drifting? Is it becoming a little divided?

[30 : 39] Am I being affected by the world's messaging for a better life? Am I being affected by hardship or tribulation on account of the word?

And I'm starting to wonder, man, this is costing me. Is it really worth it? Come to him. Speak to him.

He will speak to you. He will encourage you. He will help you in your time of need, it says. But when you're ready, and remember this as you come to the communion table, that you come to a Savior who loves you, that is full of grace.

He was the seed that died to bring us life in abundance. And he invites us to partake of his death that brought us life. And as you go to the table, celebrate life in him.

And remember that it is slow, steady growth. If you think, man, I am not what I should be, remember, slow, steady growth.

[31 : 43] He is here for you. He loves you. He will nourish you. And he will bring it to pass. Amen? Pray with me. Father in heaven, we come to you right now, and we thank you for your goodness.

Jesus Christ, our Savior, all of us in our own way are coming to you, some for the need of salvation, some for the need of continuing this desire for you to be our one and only hope of salvation.

For all of us in the room, Jesus, be the most beautiful thing right now. Our only hope, here for life in God.

Amen.