



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N31 August 16, 2020

KING JESUS

“Seeds of the Kingdom ”

Mark 4:26-34

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Hope

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with him.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
1 Peter 1:3



What is the kingdom of God like?

The *hope* of God's people revealed in the New Testament is not heaven but the return of Christ and with it, the redemption of the body and the coming of the kingdom of God. Of course, believers *do* go to heaven when they die—not to spend eternity but to await the resurrection of their physical bodies upon Jesus' return (2Co 5:8; 1Co 15:20-23; 1Th 4:16-18) and afterward to reign with him (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:4-6; cf., 2Ti 2:12). The hope of God's people revealed in the Old Testament is the coming of the kingdom of God, an *earthly* rather than a *heavenly* hope. A covenant between the LORD (i.e., Yahweh) and David, in the words of one author, “guaranteed the eternal, physical manifestation of Yahweh's dominion through David's seed over the land and the people of Israel (2 Sam. 7:7-17) . . . In and around the time of Israel's subjection by foreign powers the messages delivered by Yahweh's prophets called for comfort in the hope of Yahweh's future restoration of his Kingdom in Israel. Israel was to look forward to Yahweh's anointed one, who would again lead them in triumph, restore the fallen booth [i.e., dynasty] of David (Amos 9:11), and ‘set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed’ (Dan. 2:44). Throughout the prophetic literature of the Old Testament the contents of this ‘hope’ remained remarkably consistent” (Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, 312-13).

This *earthly* hope is the subject of the earliest announcements of the kingdom. Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear a son, Jesus, whom “the Lord will give the throne of his father David” and who “will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Lk 1:32-33), making him heir to the covenant made with David. Additionally, “the Old Testament character of the hope is also visible in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:67-79).

Mary expresses the Jewish hope in her recognition of blessings for the humble (vv. 48, 52) and judgment for the enemies of Israel (vv. 51-54). In Zechariah's words the hope is for a spiritual and political deliverance (vv. 71-75)” (Saucy, 318). The “kingdom of heaven” in the Gospels refers not the sovereign rule of the Creator over his creation, but to the sovereign rule of Messiah over Israel and the nations. It is this kingdom that John the Baptist announces with these words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Mt 3:2), and the kingdom that Jesus announces with these: “The time has come . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mk 1:15).

The parables recorded in Mark 4 reveal “the secret” (NIV) or “the mystery” (NKJV) of the kingdom of God (4:11)—where “the term ‘secret/mystery’ . . . refers here as in the rest of the NT, to something that was hidden in the past but has now openly been made known” (Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 208). Triggered by Israel's anticipated rejection of him, Jesus discloses that a previously unrevealed initial manifestation of the kingdom will precede the previously revealed full manifestation of the kingdom. According to the parable of the growing seed (Mk 4:26-29), the kingdom develops “all by itself,” that is, apart from human effort and knowledge, and according to the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 30-32), the kingdom grows from insignificant beginnings into vast proportions. Together the parables teach that the kingdom develops on its own and grows inexorably to its destined greatness. “With that conviction come hope, confidence, and encouragement, but with it as well is implied a challenge to make sure that one is identified with this kingdom rather than seen as in opposition to it” (Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 226).



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

26 He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

30 Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Highlight "kingdom of God" in vv. 26, 30.
- Box "like" indicating *comparison* in vv. 26, 30.
- Underline "all by itself" in v. 28.
- Circle "harvest" in v. 29.
- Circle "mustard seed" in v. 31.
- Circle "smallest" and "largest" in v. 31 and v. 32, respectively.
- Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 32.
- Circle "birds" in v. 32.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 34.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. The wrongheaded, ill-fated *decision* of religious leaders from Jerusalem (Mk 3:22) triggered Jesus' telling of the parables in Mark 4. Describe it.

 2. These parables reveal the "*secret* of the kingdom of God" (4:11). Define "secret" (see note v. 26 *kingdom of God*).

 3. Is the *identity* of "the man" who sows the seed and reaps the harvest key to the meaning of the parable? Explain.

 4. Put what verse 27 reveals about the growing seed in your own words.

 5. Explain the significance of the key word *automatē*, rendered "all by itself," to the meaning of the parable.

 6. The mustard seed isn't actually "the smallest of all seeds on earth," is it? Explain.

 7. Explain the *contrast* indicated by "yet" in verse 32.

 8. What *purpose* does the description of "branches" and "birds" serve?

 9. To whom did Jesus speak in parables and why?

 10. **Discussion:** Talk about the value of knowing what these two parables teach about the kingdom of heaven.
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Commentary On The Text

Although Mark underscores Jesus' authority and effectiveness as a teacher, chapter 4 contains one of only two blocks of Jesus' teaching; the other is contained in chapter 13. One commentator writes: "The first main block of Jesus' teaching consists of three parables and two analogies: the parable of the four soils (4:1-20), the analogy of the lamp (4:21-23), the analogy of the measure (4:24-25), the parable of the growing seed (4:26-29) and the parable of the mustard seed (4:30-34). Jesus' explanation of why he speaks in parables in 4:11-12 focuses on the 'secret of the kingdom of God', the first reference to the kingdom of God since 1:15. This first main block of Jesus' teaching is a discourse about the kingdom of God" (Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, TNTC 98).

This block of parabolic teaching is delivered after the accusation "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" is leveled against him by "the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem" (3:22). It is not by accident that Jesus then begins speaking to them in parables. He uses parables to reveal and to conceal—to reveal truth regarding the kingdom to his disciples, and to conceal it from "those on the outside" (4:11), namely, those who have stubbornly rejected him. The same author correctly observes: "The secret of the kingdom of God is privileged information about the coming of God's kingdom (1:15) that not everyone possesses" (Schnabel, 102).

The parables in Mark 4 reveal previously unrevealed truth about the kingdom of God—more specifically, unrevealed truth regarding the present manifestation of the kingdom, which spans the interadvent age, that is, the time between Jesus' first advent and his second advent. This initial, present manifestation of the kingdom will be followed by an ultimate, future manifestation. One commentator explains: "The Kingdom can be present and active according to the description of the parables, and it can be the glorious promise of the Jewish ancestral hope coming one day as final fulfillment. Thus, the Gospels present one program for the manifestation of Yahweh's reign on the earth, but it is a program expressed in two phases. Rejection of the initial proclamation instituted Jesus' greater emphasis on phase one, the Kingdom as present in the power of the Spirit, while at the same time still retaining the promise of phase two, the Kingdom that will come in the future" (Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, 339).

The "seed" parables in verses 26-34 reveal two related truths about the kingdom of God. The first com-

pares the present kingdom to growing seed (vv. 26-29). A man scatters seed on the ground to open the parable and reaps a harvest of grain to close it, but his identity is not key to the meaning of the parable, just as the identity of the woman who mixed yeast into about sixty pounds of flour is not key to the meaning of the leaven parable. What is key are the words "all by itself." All by itself the seed grows in the ground; night and day it develops, germinating, sprouting, and growing without the man's involvement and without the man's knowledge of how it happens. Among horticulturists today, the germination of a seed and its subsequent growth can elicit awe and wonder. This was even more true in biblical times. Time passes, the seed sprouts, and the grain develops—"first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head" (v. 28). The focus is neither on the man nor the harvest. "The focus in this parable is upon the seed and its inevitable growth" (Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 232)—and that "of itself" (*automatē*).

The second compares the present kingdom to a mustard seed (vv. 30-32). The meaning of the parable revolves around a key contrast introduced by "yet." On the one hand, the mustard seed is the smallest seed, and yet, on the other hand, when planted, it grows into the largest plant in the garden. On the seed's proverbial small size, one writer comments: "Those who measure such things report that the mustard seed is one millimeter in diameter and is so tiny it requires from 725 to 760 seeds to equal one gram (one twenty-eighth of an ounce)" (Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 220). The fact that the plant matures into one with branches so large that "birds can perch in its shade" (v. 32) only heightens the contrast. "This parable emphasizes the difference between insignificant beginnings and the impressively large end result" (Schnabel, 110). Together these two parables teach that regardless of what was visible in the wake of Jesus' ministry, the present manifestation of the kingdom is developing in and of itself, moving inexorably toward its destined outcome, and people should not be put off by the kingdom's insignificant beginnings because it is growing into a kingdom of vast proportions.

In verses 33-34, Mark explains Jesus' use of parables. Jesus spoke to people in parables teaching them as much as they could understand. When he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them. "This dual approach, illustrated here in chapter 4, is assumed throughout the rest of the Gospel" (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 121).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 26 *kingdom of God* "God enabled the disciples to see in Him the 'secret' (*mystērion*) about the kingdom. This refers to the disclosure of God's *present kingdom* plan which is to be an Age of 'seed-sowing' (cf. 4:13-20; 13:10). It was previously hidden to the prophets, but now was revealed to people of His choice (cf. Rom. 16:25-26). The basic 'secret,' common to all the kingdom parables, is that in Jesus, God's rule (kingdom) has come into human experience in a new spiritual form. The disciples had believed in Jesus. God had already given (*dedotai*, perf. pass.) them this 'secret,' though so far they understood little of its full impact" (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 119). One commentator calls the parables in Mark 4, including the two in verses 26-32, "parables of the *present kingdom*." He writes: "Any number of parables could be labeled parables of the *present kingdom*, and to some degree all the parables presuppose that the kingdom of God is present in the activity of Jesus, even where the kingdom is not explicitly in view . . . The phrase 'present kingdom' does not mean that the end of the world was present; it means that the promises of the OT Scriptures, especially the prophets, had begun with Jesus' actions and words" (Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 226).

v. 26 *like* "This is a good example of a similitude. It is an extended simile [a comparison using *like* or *as*] which depicts a recurring event, mostly in the present tense, for the sake of an analogy. There is no developed plot" (Snodgrass, 180) — see also the mustard seed parable. The kingdom's *likeness* to the growing seed is determined by the interpreter's identification of its key element; note the variety of titles given it: "The Growth of the Seed, The Seed Growing Secretly, The Seed Growing by Itself, The Seed Growing Gradually, The Patient Husbandmen, The Confident Sower, The Unbelieving Farmer, The Grain is Ripe, and The Automatic Action of the Soil" (David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, 177). The key element is actually the *whole process*. "The analogy is not with one feature (such as the man) but with the *entire process*. The images may set off resonances, as the harvest does with final judgment, but the individual features do not 'stand for something.' We cannot legitimately argue that the salient point is the seed or the harvest, for the entire process is required to make the point" (Snodgrass, 188, italics added). "The comparison is directed not to the man who scatters seed, but to the *whole story* that is being told," (Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, TNTC, 108, italics added).

v. 28 *all by itself* "The seed holds within itself the secret of its growth, and the earth is said to produce 'all by itself' (*automate*, 4:28a). This word would

This word would be better rendered 'without visible cause,' 'incomprehensibly,' or even 'effected by God,' because pious Jews considered the growth of plants to be the wondrous work of God, not simply the result of a law of nature" (Garland, 176). "The parable emphasizes the way the seed grows — not only during the day when the farmer is active but also by night when he sleeps; not as the result of the farmer's intervention but 'automatically'" (Schnabel, 109) — i.e., "of itself."

v. 29 *harvest* On the one hand, "the harvest image is virtually required by the detailed stages of growth. It would be strange to list the stages and stop short of the harvest" (Snodgrass, 186), but on the other, the phrase "puts the sickle to it" likely alludes to Joel 3:13 and points to future judgment (Snodgrass, 186; Grassmick, 121; Schnabel, 109; R. Alan Cole, *Mark*, TNTC, 151-52).

v. 30 *mustard seed* "Most identify the seed in question as the black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), although other varieties like white mustard are possible. This seed germinates within five days and grows quickly to a height of about ten feet and has large leaves, especially at its base . . . Pliny viewed mustard as extremely beneficial to health, able to cure a long list of ailments. Such facts are interesting, but for the meaning of the parable all characteristics of the mustard seed are irrelevant except that it grows so high from such a small seed. Birds would have been attracted to the mustard plant because of both its shade and its seeds" (Snodgrass, 220).

v. 31 *smallest* "In both the Jewish and Greco-Roman world mustard seeds were proverbially known for their small size, even though other seeds, such as the orchid or cypress, were known to be smaller . . . Since we are dealing with a proverbial use, anxiety about issues of accuracy are out of bounds" (Snodgrass, 220). "While not technically the smallest of all seeds known today, it was the smallest of all those that Jews regularly planted in their gardens, which is all that the proverbial language is claiming" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 2nd ed., 392).

v. 32 *birds* "Some see in 'the birds of heaven' (*ta peteina tou ouranou*) an allegorical reference to the inclusion of the gentiles in the kingdom of God (cf. Ezek. 17:23; 31:6; Dan. 4:12, 21; Jeremias 1972: 147; Hooker 1991: 136). No clear allusion to these OT texts is made in the parable, however, and the reference to the birds, like the reference to the large branches, makes perfectly good sense as an example of the greatness of the final product without allegorizing it" (Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 236).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Take heart, for the present manifestation of the kingdom will continue to grow and expand, outward appearances aside, until its future manifestation, which will be vast and glorious.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I remember bringing our first child home. I was absolutely, completely in love with this tiny human dependent on me for every little thing. I also remember being completely overwhelmed with the responsibility of it all. My husband and I (and probably every parent alive) used to joke about needing a manual to get through the day, hour, and sometimes minute. The enormity of parenting is still evident to me today with three teenagers and a tween. The push-pull tension (pushing them to be their own person, encouraging them to tackle hard things and take responsibility for their action while at the same time wanting to kiss boo-boos, rescue them from every trial, and cuddle them when they are taller than you), plays a game with my heart as I try to quietly fade into the background while simultaneously answering all the cries for help. My greatest desire is for them to be what God created them to be! Here's the thing: no matter how much you love your child (and I know it's on a Grand Canyon scale), God, our Creator, the One who picked you to be that child's parent, loves him/her astronomically more than you do. We can "parent" all day long, but that means nothing if we aren't giving our kids over to God. I have a feeling if I did have that parenting manual from God it wouldn't read like an Ikea instruction book. Maybe it would be simple: "pray for your child, release them to Me, repeat." Our tiny baby is now an adult, and parenting can still be overwhelming. Pray, release, repeat

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Mark 4:6-34.

1. To what does Jesus compare the Kingdom of God?
2. What happens when the grain is ripe? Why?
3. How big does the mustard seed grow?

What Do You Think?

Why is it important that the grain is cut when it's ripe?

What Do You Do?

Plant a seed this week. Watch and record the growth over the next few weeks.

CORE COMPETENCY: Worship

I celebrate God for who He is and what He has done for me.

MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 55:11

So is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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