



## The Parable of the Growing Seed

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### Mark 4:26-29

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

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Jesus demanded that God have first place, or no place in the lives of His followers. This, over the centuries, has caused a great deal of contemplation in the minds of Christians. *God* must have first place? You mean, I don't I have a right to do what I want to do? How can I climb whatever ladder of success that I'm trying to climb if *my* needs don't come first? Besides, "If Jesus brought the kingdom, why isn't it growing more? Why has it not been more successful?"

The apostles, the early Christians, and we today are often impatient with the way God brings about growth. This brief parable in Mark chapter four addresses these kinds of questions, and Jesus gives us part of the answer, and plenty more to think about... in the Parable of the Growing Seed.

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The Parable of the Growing Seed is found only in Mark's gospel. Mark includes the parable of the Growing Seed along with the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Mustard Seed, which leads us to believe that Jesus, most likely, delivered all these parables on the same occasion, or at least around the same time. Some scholars have suggested that this parable is a sequel to the Parable of the Sower, that it was designed to complete the history of the growth of the good seed which fell on the good ground.

Parables were simple stories from everyday life  
that shed light on profound spiritual truths.

To those who have not grown up on a farm, who have not been exposed to gardening or crop growing, this parable may not have the meaning that it would for those who have watched plants grow. What Jesus is describing here is the natural process of a seed's development into a mature, fruit-producing plant.

Jesus obviously knew how plants grow and understood that it takes time for the plant to be fully useful. In order to conform to nature, a plant has a normal pattern or procedure for its growth process.

Much like the God's kingdom. It will grow. The growth may not conform to the patterns that we have in mind for it. The growth may not come as swiftly as we'd like. The growth may not come in the quantity that we'd like. But growth will come—God willed it.

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One term that needs to be explained before we go much further is found in Mark 4:28, where it says, "*All by itself...* the soil produces." This expression (all by itself, or, of itself) is a translation of the Greek word "automate." It means "self-acting" and is the word from which we get our English word "automatic."

What Jesus is saying here is that the seed did what it was expected to do—it acted on its own. It did what it was made to do—grow! So also in the life of a Christian, we must prepare the soil, fertilize the soul, to make way for growth—it's what God expects of us!

Growth may not follow the pattern that we have in mind, but growth will come. Growth can be silent and unnoticed, but it can also be complex and multifaceted.

To those of us who are impatient - to those of us who have growth goals that always seem to fall short - this parable is saying to us, "Don't give up on God. Growth will happen in God's good time. Besides, God's wants us to grow. In fact, one could go as far to say that it is one of the traits God most wants for us: "To grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord" (2 Peter 3:18)



The sickle has never been used as a Christian symbol, like the dove, the lamb, or the Cross. In reality, we have come to think of the sickle as an anti-Christian symbol. Yet, here in this parable, these words, "when the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it," are elevated by Jesus to a place of honor and appreciation.

Used as a symbol, the sickle here represents the energetic and timely harvesting of the grain from the seed. The sickle, as a symbol, represents the divine command of God to gather the harvest, when, in God's time, the harvest ready. How often in our personal lives has the grain been ripe, and we were presented with an opportunity to serve, or had the chance to help out, but the sickle was not put to use.

Again and again the time for the reaping of good intentions has come, but there was no gathering up of possibilities into decision and action. There was no seizing of the moment... and the harvest was lost.

This image of putting the sickle to use when the time is right, has wide meaning, of course, for the church as well. We can almost see the Lord of the harvest bending over his children and calling to his Church: "Thrust the Sickle!" No need to hold back. Let it go. Swing away. The seed of the kingdom, first the blade, then the ear, is ready. The teachings of Christ have been tugging at hearts and minds - the grain is ripe and ready for harvest.

But all too often church's become more concerned with repairs in the attic, than with the saving of souls. There are way too many church's in America who, in fact, have misplaced its harvesting sickle, or do not know how to use it, or has no motivation to even try to use it.

My guess is... we will never come to church one Sunday and find a sickle placed on the altar as a symbolic reminder of the Lord's desire for Christian's everywhere to work together to gather the harvest. But it might not be a bad idea.