

Parable of the Seed
Mark 4:26-29
Pastor John E. Dubler
Good Shepherd Bible Chapel



Any introduction to the Parable of the Seed should note the differences between this short parable and the much longer Parable of the Sower, presented in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8. Found only in the Gospel of Mark, this parable differs markedly from the Parable of the Sower. In the Parable of the Sower the stress is found on the four kinds of soils and how seed not properly planted in good soil will meet with disastrous results:

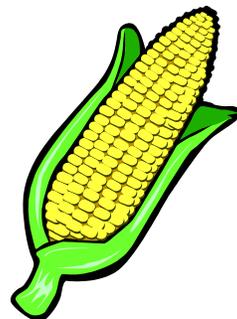
1. Seed sown beside the road: This is the man who does not understand what he hears. Satan comes and snatches away the seed.
2. Seed sown on rocky soil: Presented here is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet because he has no firm root to withstand affliction and persecution.
3. Seed sown among thorns: Here is the man who receives the word but the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.
4. Seed sown on good soil: This is the man who hears the word and understands it. He it is who indeed brings forth fruit, some 100-fold, some 60 and some 30 times what was sown.



Emphasis on the supernatural power of the seed itself. But here, in the Parable of the Seed, the mysterious and supernatural power of the seed itself to produce a crop is emphasized. As in others of Jesus' "Kingdom Parables," such as the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, the Parable of the Seed reveals how the kingdom grows. The farmer plants the seed in suitable ground, but he cannot make it grow. Indeed, he does not even really understand how it grows. But despite our lack of understanding of how spiritual (as well as natural) seeds sprout, grow and bear fruit, the fact remains that the seed of the Gospel message does produce fruit, often without much involvement on our part once the seed is deposited in the soil.

The Parable of the Seed from Mark 4:26-29

And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows — how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."¹



¹ Unless otherwise noted all scripture references are to the New American Standard Updated version published by the Lockman Foundation.

Elements of the Parable:

A. **The man.** In the natural world, the man is a farmer who scatters seed on his field in hope of producing a crop so that he can feed his family. In the spiritual world, the man is anyone who scatters the seed of the Gospel message. He is anyone who shares the hope of salvation in the name of our Lord Jesus. The man is as critical as the seed itself. If nobody sows seed, and it remains stored in the seed bag, there will be no harvest. But it is not just any sort of seed we are talking about. Only the real seed of the Gospel message of our Lord Jesus Christ has this kind of self-reproducing spiritual power. A man without the good seed—the Gospel message—is as hopeless a case as the seed left in the sack with no one to sow it.



B. **The Seed and the Soil.** The seed is the Gospel message while the soil is the hearts of unredeemed people on earth. Several beautiful summaries of this Gospel message of hope, also called “Good News” or “gospel,” are found in scripture.

1. 1 Corinthians 15:1-5.

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . .

2. 2 Timothy 2:11-13

It is a trustworthy statement:

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;
12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him;
If we deny Him, He also will deny us;
13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

3. 1 Timothy 3:16

By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.

The seed has a power within itself to bring forth a crop. Nobody understands quite how it works, just as a farmer really does not understand how seeds produce plants after their own kind. What is obvious is that it in fact works. The Gospel has a mysterious and supernatural power of its own to bring forth faith and belief in a person's heart unto salvation.

The seed grows all by itself. Farmers don't dig up the seed once planted to see how it's doing. If they did, the entire process would be hopelessly interrupted. His mandate is to "Plant it, water it and wait for the power of the seed to work." Our job: sow the Gospel message and then depend on God to do the work of bringing forth a healthy plant.

The Lord gave us some additional insight into this process of the seed bearing fruit when in **John 12:24** He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Neither farmers nor preachers nor evangelists nor any sower of seed can cause the seeds sown to grow. No doubt we should therefore all be less concerned about how it works and more concerned about just sowing the seed of God's Word. To Timothy, Paul says, (**2 Timothy 4:1-5**):

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The Word itself brings about the ministry of growth, produced by its own supernatural capacity. I am reminded of the example of a woman in our church who gave her heart to the Lord while reading the Book of Judges. She was reading the Bible, front to back, in an effort to prove to herself that Christianity was not valid. When she got to the Book of Judges she was appalled at the behavior of the nation of Israel, seeing for herself their continued unfaithfulness, even after God, time after time, delivered them from the hand of their enemies. Their unfaithfulness and ingratitude was the miraculous touch that was needed in her heart to bring her to Christ. What pastor or leader or soul winner could have suspected that she would have come, by the grace of God, to such a conclusion? How many people do we know who have been saved reading Judges?

Therefore we see that the seed needs soil to make the crop come up. Seed stored in bags and not planted in the soil cannot produce a crop. There is plenty of soil in the form of hurting hearts which are longing for answers to life's trouble. There is plenty of seed in the Word of God. What is lacking? Only willing farmers who will just speak the Word of the Lord to hungry hearts. The rest is up to the Lord of Harvests who takes a tiny mention of His Word and causes enormous results from the planting.



A final element of the parable may be seen in the Harvest.

Though the farmer has no understanding of how the seed and the soil interact, the fact is this: the plants sprout and grow up yielding a crop. There is a process to this listed in the parable: “First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.” Probably best not to make too much of this sequence, but it is worth noting that believers sprout and grow like plants: They are born again, they start to produce fruit and hopefully they come to maturity in Christ. But they can only do this by abiding in the vine as we learn from the Lord in **John 15:4-6**:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

The conclusion of the parable notes that “when the crop permits he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.” The “harvest” spoken of here is the end of the age. The sickle is an image of the reaping that takes place at the end of time. In the same way that a farmer can recognize when crops are ready for harvest, the Lord is watching over His planting. There will be a time (only the Lord knows when) of end-time in-gathering. Jesus will return and the final harvest will take place.

The point of the parable. The parable conveys two main ideas, one on a grand scale and one on the more personal and individual:

1. Just as planting precedes harvest, so the present state of the kingdom of God is just a prelude to what is coming before the summation of all things. There will be a really glorious end to the fact that Jesus planted His kingdom some 2,000 years ago.

2. The kingdom starts very small in the individual’s heart. Like a seed which has tremendous power within itself, so the Gospel message has tremendous supernatural power when planted in the ready soil of a receptive heart. Faithful people will continue to sow seeds among the souls of this world. These seeds will sprout and grow, but we won’t understand how.

Finally, in the end, there will be a grand harvest, all supernaturally brought about by tiny seeds planted in ready soil.