**Exegesis Research Paper: Mark 4:26-29**

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Course Number: Course Name

Due Date

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The church has a number of different beliefs with regard to its eschatological and soteriological views, both of which blend together in an effort to focus on the mission of the church. This sole effort is the salvation of the sinner and their conversion to disciples of faith that wait for the return of Christ. In the fourth chapter of the book of Mark, Jesus makes use of parables, as he often did, to teach his disciples the value and the operation of salvation as well as spiritual growth. The parable being discussed in Mark 4:26-29 is often known as the parable of the Seed. Like most parables used by Jesus, the continual references of the seed or the use of seed throughout scripture, the seed form is critical to understand when trying to explain how Jesus uses this parable of the growing seed presented in Mark 4:26-29.

This parable comes at the very end of chapter four and is perfectly placed, considering all the parables that precede this one also focused on the concepts of salvation and growth. While there are many scholars that hold the opinion that this parable is not about the salvation and growth of a single soul alone, but the growth of the Christian church as a whole. However, this paper keenly focuses on the growth of an individual, focusing on how the seed of growth has been deeply rooted in the heart of that soul by God’s Grace. Here, the growth of the church is not being addressed by Jesus, but the salvation, as well as sanctification of the person as a whole, is to be explored in vivid detail.

# Context of the Passage

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth the fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. (Mark 4:26-29)

In this particular parable, the Growing seed is considered similar to the work of God in fostering the Holy Spirit within the heart of a believer, so that this believer can rejoice in the harvest and bear witness to the growing Kingdom of God. Throughout the passage, the focus is maintained on the significance, meaning, understanding, and then the application of the concept of growth in adult life, especially under the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus not only often used parables to explain what he taught to his people. His teachings to the people were limited to parables only. However, when he was teaching his disciples, he would also explain the meaning behind the said parables [[1]](#footnote-1). The parables also deal with a path to perception for which questions, explanations, and insights are necessary. However, much of these questions, as well as explanations and insights do not exist from the very beginning. Mark uses the focus on the parables for the applications of the everyday lives of believers. The application of the seed parable can be found all throughout scripture used by the different writers focusing on the same growth emphasis. Whether it was Paul writing his letters, he would often reference the reader in their growth stages as if they were growing in Christ. For instance, 1 Corinthians 3:1 “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” This reference of growth is further explained in the second verse, where he elaborates “fed with milk, and not with meat….” There most certainly be something wrong if a newborn baby came out of a mother’s womb and started speaking that they wanted some meat and potatoes, it had not yet reached that part of growth yet for that kind of substance. Instead, start off with the essential nutritional substance or basics of the milk in order to grow. Like a newborn, Christians are fed with the essential nutritional substances of sincere milk in order to grow.

Much of Jesus’ teachings in the book of Mark revolve around the concept of the Kingdom of God. However, this concept is explained in a different manner in Matthew, where the concept revolves around the Kingdom of Heaven, especially in Jewish culture. The reason behind this can allude to the fact that the name of God is not often used in the Jewish culture, therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven takes place in the Kingdom of God. Mark’s Gospel, on the other hand, has a Greek and Gentile audience, making it possible and acceptable for him to refer to this phrase as the Kingdom of God. In addition, we see this as Jesus teaches that Mark begins with “The Kingdom of God is like…” Such literary styles show the intended audience and the cultural background in which it was given.

The final focus of this passage is primarily on the theme of Jesus, and how he is a suffering servant of God. This suffering is evident in Isaiah 53 and further elaborated in Mark. Mark places Jesus in an immediate setting, one where he is surrounded by crowds and overwhelmed by the needy people seeking the signs and wonders he had been pleased with. However, Jesus remains in this setting and teaches the crowd. The only point where he does retreat is when the crowds make an effort to crown him king.

# Meaning of the Passage and Bibliography

Mark is indeed a theological book. According to David E. Garland, “The gospel was not intended by its author to be a vessel of theological truths waiting to be quarried but a story in which Jesus is the central figure. Mark’s theology is unfurled through narrative development” [[2]](#footnote-2) Though Mark did not write for the sake of building a theological framework to understand Jesus, he makes his theological claims and evidence by telling the story of the life of Christ. When you compare to Mark to another theological book such as John, you can see the styles comparatively. John’s framework is much more theological in construction rather than through a narrative frame.

Mark’s gospel displays his Christology through stories. Mark reveals the identity of Christ through the stories of the calling of his disciples, his healing, power over demons, and power over death and nature. Through these narratives, the reader discovers who Jesus is and who he claims to be through the signs performed. Mark, then, not only establishes Christ’s identity through his narrative form but also the idea that the kingdom of God is not as fixed and immobile as one usually thinks. According to Garland, “The Kingdom is a metonymical designation of God’s reigning presence in which God intervenes in history and human experience, wielding his sovereignty to accomplish his purpose [[3]](#footnote-3).”

In the parable of the growing seed (vv. 26–29), the Lord emphasizes the mysterious, unseen growth of the kingdom. The growth of faith within an individual is a mysterious process, which produces great fruit. In chapter 4, Mark is building upon the idea of the seed of God’s Word being sown in the hearts of man and the Holy Spirit’s production of fruit. Matthew Henry states, “The work of faith is small in its beginnings but comes to be great and considerable at last. [[4]](#footnote-4)” Henry summarizes Mark’s theme perfectly. The seed sown on good soil produces the fruit of faith, but it is a small and slow growth. Jesus says, “Night and day the sower sleeps, yet the seed sprouts and grows.” Therefore, the Word of God changes the human heart in part overnight and, in part, over time [[5]](#footnote-5).

Firstly, verse 28 tells us that the earth produces by itself. In his book The Work of the Holy Spirit, Abraham Kuyper tells us that the action of faith is produced out of the human heart by the decision of the heart itself, but only because God planted a seed of the fruit in the earth, to begin with [[6]](#footnote-6). That is to say, the soil is only good because God has made the soil fertile for the planting of the seed. As Mark talks about the various soils in the previous parable, we see that one cannot bear fruit if the soil has not been prepared for growth [[7]](#footnote-7). Farmers do not simply find soil that is already fertile but tills the soil that he chooses in order to prepare the ground for growth. Likewise, it is with God, he prepares the soil to receive the seed of His Word and to sprout and grow and prepare for harvest.

Secondly, growth happens in stages and over time. First comes the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear (v. 28). Once the seed has taken root, the work of growth begins. The sower has not seen this growth, nor the rate at which it grows, yet it grows day and night. Mark seems to suggest that the confession of faith has not yet occurred in the believer, yet grace is at work within them. Therefore, it can be assumed that the growth of the gospel in the human heart begins prior to conversion. It is not until it sprouts from the earth that one is able to profess faith in a conscious choice. Matthew Henry states, “When it is sprung up, it will go forward; just as nature will have its course, so will grace” [[8]](#footnote-8).

Lastly, when the fruit has been conceived, it is prepared for harvest. This exemplifies a life lived out for Christ that has seen itself to completion and is prepared to be harvested. Christ is the gatherer that brings the sickle to reap the harvest. For when the harvest is gathered and stored up, it is then put to its use. The Westminster Confession defines what the chief use or end of man is “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Therefore, the Christian is reaped for harvest in two ways. First, in his production of fruit in the work that God has his people doing in earthly ministries, becoming the next sower. Secondly, granting them eternal life to enjoy the presence of God.

It is important to note that the kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed on the ground, representing that the Holy Spirit is being prophesized by Jesus in use of His parables. At this time, the Holy Spirit has not yet been deposited into the hearts of Christians because the prophecy of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection had not yet been fulfilled.

The growth of a Christian is not in the believers timing, but of God’s and what He wants to reveal. This parable of the growing seed is just that, explaining that in order for the harvest to come and the crop bring forth fruit, there must be growth. The seed represents what the beginning stages are and what the power the seed has when it is allowed to bear fruits. Bearing the fruits resembles life and Jesus compares this to the whole kingdom of God in the scattering of the seed. Verse 27 of Mark 4 mentions night and day referencing the everyday ordinary life, getting up and working the seeds during the day and resting at night, as a farmer tends the fields dung the day and rests at night. Whether or not the farmer gets up or sleeps, the seed is going to sprout, though he may not know-how. This verse explains that although the seed is planted, and the farmer is working and tending to the filed that it is not known when the seed will root and spring up and spout to bring forth fruit. It reflects that the seed sprouts and grows mysteriously in a way that cannot be understood by human wisdom. The similar way that the Holy Spirit within believers will grow mysteriously through God’s power to bring forth more life to each believer.

# Significance of the Passage

The significance of the passage must also be understood that in order for the harvest to come, the seed must grow. One must not expect for a harvest to come if the time has not been taken to sow the seed and grow. First, the seed must be received/sown. The earth is equipped to receive the seed to be planted as one is equipped to receive the Holy Spirit. Once received, it must grow to reach the harvest. In order for the seed to grow, it needs nourishment or the nutrients. As Peter 2:2 references newborn babies desiring sincere milk, the newly deposited Holy Spirit deposited within a born-again Christian needs the sincere milk, which is the Word of God, in order to grow within. The focus of verse 29 is the harvest. The harvest can be viewed as like a farmer planting his crops, the desired outcome is to harvest the crop. Like Jesus will come for the “harvest” for believers, He will immediately put in the sickle, a gathering hook, to call those who believe [[9]](#footnote-9).

Knowing, therefore, that Mark points us to the sovereignty of God in salvation, we can be encouraged and have hope that the harvest will come. If God is, like us, the Sower, then he is also the gardener. The gardener not only tills the ground but helps to feed and nurture the plant into maturity. This cannot be destroyed by the actions of the human heart or the sinful nature. It is not the job of the believer to till the soul or prepare the heart for the seed of God’s Word. We are not called to ensure that the plant reaches maturity, this is all the Lord’s work. All we are called to do is scatter the seed, and once the seed takes root, the growth happens on its own. We continue to live in faithful obedience to Christ and watch as the saving of souls is accomplished by the great gardener.

This also provides hope. All the loved ones, both family and friends, that have not yet been reaped for a harvest, or have not seemed to be tilled yet, will be taken care of by the great gardener. The pressure to “get them saved” is not on us, we are simply called to scatter the seeds and allow God to work through His sovereign will. One a family member comes to faith, we know that God is faithful to see that plant to maturity, to completion. We may not see the growth every day, yet as Mark says, the Sower wakes up every morning and the plant has grown. We do not always see the process, but we see the final result. The invisible hand of the Spirit is not seen in the small spurts of growth but in the resulting fruit that is produced. Let us continue to scatter the seed faithfully trusting that God will till the ground of those He has called and sent His Spirit to grow that seed to maturity.

# Conclusion

Jesus way of teaching his people using parables is a commonly known fact. However, many parables, especially with regard to the growing of seeds, are often used to explain how both the heart and the soul of a believer grows in the kingdom of God. One may not be aware of the mechanism of how it works, but he can rest assured in the fact that the Lord works in mysterious ways and he will always find a way to make sure that his believer grows. The word of God holds power and the Holy Spirit, that dwells within a believer, must be nourished and paid its due attention so that it can hold on to the power to transform the heart of the believer, allowing it to grow. The Word of God was seen as a seed so that it can be sown and bear the fruit of faith within every believer.

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3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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