

(Mikros in the Greek) can refer to size, quantity, or rank/influence. So don't worry because a mustard seed isn't the littlest seed in size. This is a parable not a botany lesson.

It appears that this parable is drawing our attention to the change this seed undergoes.

On one hand we find that even small seemingly insignificant things may become significant one day. How is this encouraging to us?

But is bigger always better? There are two Old Testament stories with birds nesting in the branches of large trees found in Ezekiel and Daniel.

6 All the birds of the sky nested in its boughs, all the animals of the wild gave birth under its branches; all the great nations lived in its shade. - Ezekiel 31:6 NIV
12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. - Daniel 4:12 NIV

In both cases these towering trees described great, powerful kingdoms as a tree where birds would come and find home and shade and protection. (Assyria and Babylon) and when the kingdoms got too proud, God cut them down. So bigger isn't always better. In light of those Old Testament parables, what kind of warning might we take away?

WRAP-UP

This passage of scripture concludes by saying "Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand." (Mark 4:33) Jesus wants us to learn as much spiritual truth as we have capacity. To do that He gives us examples in parable form. In these verses we found that God is the revealer of hidden things like the light beneath the basket or the seed germinating underground. He is also one who multiplies what we offer into abundance, like a single kernel producing a full head of grain or a tiny seed growing into a tree. Listen closely as you study His Word, and you will find the mysteries of God's Kingdom revealed.

MEMORY VERSE

24 Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given--and you will receive even more. - Mark 4:24 NLT"

Challenge – Read through the account of these parables in Matthew (Ch 13) and Luke (Ch 8). Then see if their accounts reveal similar of different meanings or themes.

Mysterious Kingdom Gospel of Mark ch. 4 - Week 2

INTRODUCTION

Jesus was a masterful teacher and storyteller. He frequently used parables in his teaching. These parables contain spiritual truths wrapped up in stories the hearers could easily relate to. In the passage of scripture we are studying this week, Mark records three of those parables- the Lamp, the Growing Seed, and the Mustard Seed. Unlike the parable of the Sower we studied last week, Jesus doesn't decode the meaning for these parables for us. That means we, like most of His listeners, are left to interpret their meaning as best we can. God's Word has many layers. Sometimes as we study, we will find one meaning immediately apparent, and later find other truths revealed by the Holy Spirit in the same passage. So, there is no single right answer to these parables, but rather we will suggest a few of the spiritual truths that can be found in them.

Ice Breaker

Do you enjoy working on puzzles or word games, and if so, which types?

Key Passages

22 For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. 23 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." - Mark 4:22-23 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Parable of the Lamp

Our first parable follows Jesus' teaching about the Sower (Mark 4:3-8) which was about God's Word being spread. Under the right conditions and with time, that seed would multiply into a great harvest. In this short parable of the lamp, He says there is a light, that is not meant to remain hidden but will be revealed and put on display as it is intended to be. Matthew also recorded this parable.

21 Then Jesus asked them, "Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine. 22 For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. 23 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." - Mark 4:21-23 NLT

14 "You are the light of the world--like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. - Matthew 5:14-16 NLT

What do you think the light (or lamp) in this parable might represent? At the time Jesus was teaching this parable His ministry had just begun. In Mark 4:22 what does Jesus explain will happen in the future. How do you see this happening in our time? How does Matthew's account give us instruction to play our part?

Between the parable of the lamp and the parable of the growing seed, Jesus emphasizes that we must pay attention to His teaching.

23 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." 24 Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given--and you will receive even more. 25 To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them." - Mark 4:23-25 NLT

Jesus doesn't want His audience to miss what He is teaching. This is essential instruction for us as well. We don't want to casually gloss over the parables. They are treasures for us to mine.

Is there a particular area that you have extensive knowledge of? It could be an academic area you studied or a sports team you support, or even a video game you've played for years. Share a little about how you became interested in it. Think about how your knowledge and understanding and excitement of the subject deepened as you gave it close attention. Now imagine how that same excitement and insight can be applied to your understanding of Jesus and His Word. If you heed

Jesus' advice to listen and pay close attention to His teaching, you might just become a Bible Nerd.

2. Parable of the Growing Seed

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."

- Mark 4:26-29 NIV

This parable feels a little like the continuation of the parable of the sower. In both parables the seed gets scattered. It doesn't appear that there is any attention given after the initial action to scatter the seed, no watering, tilling, or weeding. In fact, we see it doesn't matter if the scatterer is awake or asleep, that seed is going to sprout and grow.

Let's approach this parable with what we learned from the parable of the sower. What did the seed represent? What was the soil it was sown into? In this parable we aren't told what kind of soil the seed is in, but we are told what to expect will happen. What role(s) might we play in this parable? What do you think determines the quality of the crop? If you have ever carried the weight of seeing someone come to salvation, this parable may help lift that weight.

We have a part to play in spreading God's Kingdom, but other factors will contribute to the effectiveness of harvest from the seeds we plant. If we are faithful in what God calls us to do, we can trust the power of His Word will take root where the hearer is willing to receive Him.

3. Parable of the Mustard Seed

The last parable in this study involves yet another seed analogy. This time the seed is identified as a mustard seed.

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." - Mark 4:30-32 NIV

What feature of the mustard seed does this parable focus on? How does that characteristic change between verse 31 and 32? The word for smallest