

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Seed Growing in Secret

II. The Parable of the Seed Growing in Secret - Mark 4:26-29

A. The Central Point of the Parable

This parable portrays the way the Word of God takes root in men's hearts and imperceptibly grows until it brings forth fruit.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

1. The Man

As in the parable of the Sower, the central individual of this parable is a man who plants seed in the ground.

2. The Seed

The seed, being planted in the ground, naturally takes root and grows over a period of time.

3. The Ground

Without the ground, the seed could not take root.

4. The Time

In verse 27 we note that the man does not sit watch over the seed. In fact, he goes about his daily business and pays very little attention to the crop other than noticing it's growth.

5. The Harvest

Finally, after the seed has had time to grow and bring forth fruit, the man harvests his crop.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

1. The Sickle

As a point of interpretation, the sickle merely symbolizes the harvest of the crop. In Revelation 14:14-19 we see the sickle as symbolizing the act of harvest. To attach a mystical meaning to the sickle is to read information into the text.

D. Interpretation of the Parable

Unless this parable is put into the general context of the time of it's giving, the interpretation becomes very difficult. Since this parable only exists in Mark, and then after the Parable of the Sower and before the parable of the Leaven and

Mustard Seed, it is probably best to place it's giving as occurring after the Parable of the Sower.

The next question is "Was this given prior to the Parable of the Tares?" Probably so. The evidence is as follows:

- All of the "Seed" Parables would most likely be given one after another since the themes and symbology are somewhat the same.
- This Parable describes the action of the seed on the "good soil." It must, therefore, have come after the Parable of the Sower.
- If this parable were given after the Parable of the Tares, it would have destroyed the logical context of Jesus' teaching. Since this parable is a logical extension of the Parable of the Sower, it naturally follows that it was given immediately after that.
- The "Seed" Parables can be seen as teaching the following progression of themes:
 - a. The Parable of the Sower teaches the human side of salvation by revealing the different types of hearts and the different results of the seed.
 - b. The Parable of the Seed Growing In Secret focuses in on the "good soil." Even though the seed falls on good ground, it does not immediately bring forth fruit, but must grow over a period of time.
 - c. The Parable of the Tares shows the Divine side of salvation by revealing the fact that God has sown "good seed", i.e. true believers, and Satan has sowed his tares, i.e. false believers.

Because of this, it is best to see the progression of the parables, at least the ones recorded in the New Testament, as being 1) The Parable of the Sower, 2) the Parable of the Seed Growing in Secret, 3) the Parable of the Tares, and 4) the other parables as given in Matthew 13.

1. The Man

There are many Bible interpreters that would make the man be Christ. However, to make that assertion is to generalize the three "seed" parables; The Sower, this one, and the Tares. One of the major errors to avoid in Biblical interpretation is to generalize symbology when other interpretations are more valid and fit the context better. (Prime example, leaven!)

The best identification that can be given to this individual is that he represents anyone who sows the seed of the Word of God. (See the interpretation for seed following). Since we have placed this parable as being given immediately following the Parable of the Sower, this is the most logical interpretation.

One other point, the man is described as "not knowing" how the seed grows. Certainly this cannot be said of Christ who is the omniscient God of the universe! Also, the man is not described as necessarily caring for the seed, but

remaining somewhat aloof until harvest time. This is quite unlike Christ who takes an active role in the salvation and growth of men.

2. The Seed

Again, since we have placed this parable immediately after the Parable of the Sower, it is most obvious that the seed is the Word of God.

The acceptance of the seed as being the word of God is almost universally attested to by Bible scholars.

3. The Ground

From the context of the Parable of the Sower, we have identified the ground as being the hearts of men. Any other meaning for the ground winds up causing confusion.

As was pointed out prior, the focus of this parable is on the “good soil” of the Parable of the Sower. The points in favor of this argument are:

- No mention is made of stones, thorns, or wasted seed.
- This seed produces fruit just as the seed in the good soil produced fruit.
- No mention is made of lack of fruit, as is the case with the other three types of soil.

4. The Time

As any farmer knows, it takes the appropriate amount of time to reap a good harvest.

One of the reasons that the elapse of time is essential to an understanding of this parable is that Christ makes specific mention of it. In fact, he mentions the passing of time as being something that is perfectly normal.

When the seed of the Word falls onto the good soil, it may take a significant amount of time before fruit is born. In fact, one of the interesting things about Christ is that he rarely took anyone who did not count the cost of discipleship and was not willing to forsake all.

When the word is given, and the reaction is an immediately positive response, the chances are that the soil is not the “good soil”, but the “stony soil.”

Paul alludes to this analogy in 1 Corinthians 3:4 where he mentions that he planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase. In other words, Paul did not immediately reap souls as much as he sowed the seed. The reaping may have been done years later.

5. The Harvest

A major difficulty in interpreting this passage is the identification of the “harvest”.

Some teach that the harvest refers to the same thing as taught in the Parable of the Tares, namely, the judgment at the end of the age. Some difficulties with this is as follows:

- It is not reasonable to assume that the only time fruit is seen is right before the harvest. (see the previous lesson's definition of fruit).
- This interpretation does not fit the context of what Christ is teaching about the "good soil."

The other interpretation, and probably the best, is that the appearance of the fruit marks the readiness of that heart for salvation. This has the following points in favor of it:

- It naturally fits the context. Just as seed takes time to germinate and grow, so does the word take time to change men's hearts.
- Christ has already alluded to the fact that the harvest is ready to be reaped. In Matthew 9:37-38 he tells the disciples that "the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers few."
- At the moment of salvation, the seed planted in the heart has been fully formed and has produced the desired result.

E. Application of the Parable

1. We must realize that just as it takes time to grow a good crop, so it often takes time for the planted word to bring salvation. We are not called to produce the fruit, nor are we called to make it grow, we are just called to plant.
2. All of the seed that falls into the good soil will bring forth fruit. Although in the natural world this is not true, in the spiritual world it is.
3. The harvesting of the fruit is only a small part of the whole process. Those that we sometimes lead to Christ have had the word planted in them for a long time. We just happen to be the ones that do the reaping.