

The Growth of God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Matthew chapter 13, so the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13, page 818 in the Pew Bible.

We're going to walk through all these parables, but if we read again at verse 1, Matthew 13 at verse 1, that same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake, and great crowds gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow.

He told them many things in parables. He told them many things in parables.

As you know, we're continuing our short series this evening, the series that we've been looking at throughout January, and we're now into February, the series entitled Vision 2024.

Vision 2024, because as we go into 2024, as we said, we need a vision for 2024 and beyond. And we've introduced our development plan.

[1 : 2 6] We did that recently, and we explained the vision for 2024 and also beyond. And we've seen that in our vision, it must begin first and foremost with the glory of God, because our chief end is, as you know, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

But Vision 2024, it must also include the gospel of God, because the gospel is a person. The gospel is Jesus Christ. And as you know, Christ is to be offered to everyone, everywhere, without exception or qualification.

And then as we saw last week, Vision 2024 comes to us with the go of God, because according to the Great Commission, we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

Therefore, as we've said, in order to possess and put into practice Vision 2024, we need to have a passionate pursuit for the glory of God, the gospel of God, the go of God, and fourthly, the growth of God.

The growth of God. And we can learn about the growth of God from these three arable parables. Arable meaning to do with the earth and growing and planting.

[2 : 4 5] These three arable parables that are sitting side by side one another in this passage. Because as we read there, Jesus, he told the crowds many things in parables.

And then if you look down at verse 34, we're told that Jesus never spoke to the crowds without using a parable. But the thing about parables, we all love the parables of Jesus.

But the thing about the parables is that they're not allegories. And they're not messages with a hidden meaning. They're not even earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. No, the parables of Jesus, they were much, much more than that.

Because, boys and girls, the word parable means to cast alongside. The word parable means to cast alongside. For Jesus, he would use a parable to cast alongside an image or an illustration from an incident or instances with which his listeners were all very, very familiar.

And by doing that, Jesus would immediately get the listener not only intrigued to the parable, but also involved in the parable. To the point that the listener, the listener, they are being cast alongside this parable.

[4 : 01] And they're being compelled in the parable to see that they are part of the parable. They are to see themselves in the parable. And that in the parable, they are being commanded to make a personal decision about the kingdom of heaven.

And that's what we see in these three arable parables. There are three arable parables about the kingdom of heaven. Three arable parables about the kingdom of heaven.

Now, when Jesus speaks here about the kingdom of heaven, and he speaks about the kingdom of heaven throughout, especially in Matthew's gospel, you could say that Matthew's gospel is all about the kingdom of heaven.

But when Jesus speaks about the kingdom of heaven, he's referring specifically to the mission, the ministry, and the message of the Messiah. It's the mission, the ministry, and the message of the Messiah.

And of course, the Messiah is Jesus. He's the Christ. He's the anointed one. He's God's king in God's world. He's the king in the kingdom of heaven.

[5 : 06] And the king here, he has come with a mission. He's come also with a ministry. And he's come ultimately with a message. A message to bring lost and hell-deserving sinners into his kingdom, the kingdom of heaven.

And that's why Jesus, that's why Jesus begins his mission and his ministry with the message. Matthew tells us in chapter 4. The message that Jesus has was, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And what Jesus does here, though, with these three arable parables, is that as king in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus shows us how his kingdom is going to grow.

As king in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus shows us how his kingdom is going to grow. And as you'd expect with these three arable parables, these earthly parables, Jesus draws our attention to three specific things, the soil, the sower, and the seed.

And these three specific things, these three elements, they're found in each of these three arable parables. But what's interesting about these three arable parables is that they all have a particular emphasis.

[6 : 23] The first arable parable is about the soil. The second arable parable that we read focuses on the sower. And the third arable parable, as we read it, it centers on the seed.

So the first, the soil, the second, the sower, the third, the seed. And there are three headings this evening. These three arable parables, they present to us the soil, the sower, and the seed.

And they remind us about the growth of God. The growth of God. So first of all, we're looking at the soil. The parable about the soil.

The arable parable about the soil. Look at verse 3 of chapter 13. Jesus said, He told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow.

A sower went out to sow. The first arable parable which Jesus told was the well-known parable, the parable of the sower.

[7 : 26] And we're very familiar with the parable of the sower because, well, as a preacher, I try to follow the advice, the good advice of C.H. Spurgeon, who said that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year.

This is not, by the way, my time to preach on the parable of the sower. It'll come probably later on in the year. But the thing about calling this arable parable the parable of the sower is that the parable, as we said, it's not actually about the sower, nor is it about the seed.

Rather, this arable parable is all about the soil. And it's all about what type of soil the seed lands on. And Jesus depicts and he describes four different types of soil in this parable.

And he explains that there will be four different types of response to the mission, ministry, and message of the kingdom of heaven.

But as we read, when Jesus told this first arable parable, the disciples, they didn't understand it. And they needed Jesus to expand and even to explain what the parable meant in detail.

[8 : 38] And so Jesus explains these four different soils to the disciples. He explains that there are going to be four different responses to the seed of God's word. And these four different responses, they are like four different hearts.

Because the seed which fell by the wayside, we read there, it had no response at all. The seed was just sown, and yet the seed penetrated no deeper than the surface of the soil.

It just lay there, lay there on the surface of the soil. And as Jesus explains, like a bird ready to get its dinner, the devil comes and snatches the seed away. And it snatches the seed away because this heart is a hardened heart.

It's a hardened heart that is hardened over time. It's a hardened heart that is hardened to the hearing of the mission, ministry, and message of the kingdom.

It's a hardened heart. The second seed Jesus speaks about is seed which fell onto rocky ground, where we're told that there wasn't much soil.

[9 : 45] Jesus said that everything, even though everything looked so pleasing and so promising about this little seed, because there were signs of life, there were signs of the little seedling growing and breaking through the surface of the soil.

But Jesus tells us that underneath, underneath it all, there was no depth. There was no root. And there was no earth. And that's because it was a hollow heart.

It was a hollow heart. And even though there was an initial response to the mission, ministry, and message of Jesus, even though they wanted to follow in the kingdom of heaven, where they believed for a while, like many crowds in the time of Jesus, they believed for a while, and yet in time of testing, they immediately, says Jesus, they immediately fell away.

It was a hollow heart. Then there was the seed that fell among the thorns. But the thorns grew up, we're told, they choked the seed. And Jesus says they are the type of person who responds to the seed of God's word, but they're not satisfied.

They're not satisfied because they still have a hungry heart, where they're hungry for possessions and pleasure. They're hungry for the possessions and pleasure of this world.

[11 : 01] They're hungry for the acceptance and the approval of other people. In fact, Jesus says they're so hungry that they crowd all these things into their life.

But in doing so, they crowd out the mission, the ministry, and the message of the kingdom. That becomes secondary. It's a hungry heart.

But as Jesus explains, the fourth and final soil is the response, boys and girls, the response of a heart we all need to have, because it's the response of a healthy heart.

A healthy heart. Because as Jesus says there, a healthy heart hears the word of God, understands it, and bears fruit. A healthy heart, as you know, it responds in faith and obedience to the mission, ministry, and message of the kingdom.

A healthy heart is a heart we all need to have. And that's what the parable is all about. That's what the purpose of this arable parable is. Because with these four different types of soil, we are being reminded that there will be four different types of response to the mission, ministry, and message of the kingdom of heaven.

[12 : 16] And some will have a hardened heart. Some will have a hollow heart. Some will have a hungry heart. And some will have a healthy heart. And by using this arable parable, Jesus ultimately is asking, well, it's my favorite question.

The question that is so personal and so probing. How's your heart? How's your heart? Jesus is asking us.

Because these are the types of people who sit in church. These are the types of people in our community. These are the different soils that are surrounding us day by day. And Jesus is asking us, how's your heart?

Is it a hardened heart? We have heard about the kingdom all your life, but you're just indifferent to it. Hollow heart. Maybe you followed for a wee while, but then fell away.

Are you a hungry heart? Always seeking the pleasures and possessions of this world. Or are you a healthy heart? You hear God's word. You respond in faith and obedience. How's your heart?

[13 : 25] How's your heart? Great question. I love Jesus when he asks us this question. How's your heart? But for the disciples, when they heard Jesus telling this arable parable, they all asked him.

They came to Jesus. Mark tells us they came to him privately in verse 10 and said, why do you speak to the crowds in parables? Why are you always speaking in parables?

And Jesus says in verse 11, read it with me. He answered them and said, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

You might read Jesus' answer there and think, well, that's a bit strange, and it seems a bit secretive. But what Jesus emphasized, and what Jesus explained to his disciples, is that growth in the kingdom of heaven is all of grace.

[14 : 38] Growth in the kingdom of heaven is all of grace. Because without grace, there's no growth. Without grace, there's no growth. Which is why Jesus goes on to explain in the following verses, verses 14 to 16, he explains that he keeps on speaking to the crowds in parables.

Because just like Isaiah did in his day, when the Lord called him to preach, and to sow the seed, and to keep on sowing, Jesus says, we need to keep on sowing this same seed.

We need to keep on sowing the seed. If growth in the kingdom of heaven is all of grace, then we need to keep on sowing. We need to keep on sowing.

We need to keep on plowing. We need to keep on working in the field. Whether our field is a field full of hardened hearts, or hollow hearts, or hungry hearts, or full of healthy hearts, we need to keep on sowing.

Because growth is all of grace. We need to keep on sowing because growth is all of grace. And this is why when Jesus explained that the first arable parable draws attention to the soil, he immediately went on to tell another arable parable, which focuses on the sower.

[16 : 03] That's what we see secondly. So the sower. First one is the soil. The second parable is the sower. The true parable of the sower, you could say.

Look at verse 24. It says, Jesus put another parable before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.

And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?

Now last Wednesday evening at our midweek meeting, we saw that Ephesians chapter 4, it confronts us with a very important question. How do churches grow?

[17 : 03] How do churches grow? And as we looked at Ephesians chapter 4, we saw that Paul, there in the chapter, he explains and he emphasizes and he even exhorts us to see that churches grow when we're walking worthily together and churches grow when we are working well together.

Churches grow when we're walking worthily together because we're to walk worthy of the calling to which we've been called. And churches grow when we're working well together. We work together as a team.

But as we said, growth is all of grace because as we often sing in Psalm 127, I think we sang it on Wednesday evening, except the Lord to build the house, the builders build in vain.

Which is what our Bible reminds us and reaffirms to us time and time again, that it's all of grace. Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but God gives the increase.

God gives the increase and God gives the increase because growth is all of grace. But you know, when we talk about church, I think we mentioned this on Wednesday evening, when we talk about growth as a church, what do we mean?

[18 : 17] Because how do you define growth? How do you describe growth? How do you determine if a church is growing? Is it if our attendance is growing?

Is it if our followers on Facebook are growing? Is it if our views on YouTube are growing? Is it if our finances are growing? Is it if we're growing in grace?

Is it if we're growing in holiness? Is it if we're growing in our relationships with one another and with our community? When we talk about growth, what do we actually mean?

Because as Jesus shows us in this second arable parable, he shows us here that we can have numerical growth, but not all numerical growth is good growth and all of grace.

We can have numerical growth, but not all numerical growth is good growth and all of grace.

And we see that because in this parable, to the naked eye, the growth in this arable parable, it seemed like there was good growth in the field. If you had seen the field from a distance, after the good sower had been there with a good soil, with a good seed, you would have thought, well, what a great job he's done.

[19 : 34] Great job in the field. But on closer inspection and closer investigation, we're told that not all of the growth in the field was good growth. And not all of it was of grace.

Jesus tells us that there was a good sower who sowed good seed. But there was also an evil sower who sowed worthless weeds. But do you notice the advice that was given?

Very important advice was given to the good sower. He wasn't told to go and pluck up what he had planted and planted somewhere else.

No, the advice that was given was let both grow together until the harvest. Let both grow together until the harvest.

Because at harvest time, we're told, I will tell the reapers, gather the good seed into bundles for the barn, but gather the worthless weeds into bundles for burning.

[20 : 39] Gather the good seed into bundles for the barn, gather the worthless weeds into bundles for burning. Let both grow together until harvest. And you know, Jesus there, he's showing us that we can have numerical growth.

But not all numerical growth is good growth and all of grace. And Jesus said this because, well, Jesus isn't into numbers. Jesus isn't into numbers.

That's something we need to remember. There were crowds that followed Jesus. You read John chapter 6, there are thousands following Jesus. And yet by the end of John chapter 6, Jesus is asking his own disciples, are you going to go away too?

There were crowds that followed Jesus. And the gospel writers, they always picture and portray the crowds that follow Jesus as a negative thing because Jesus wasn't into crowds.

He's not into the numbers game of counting church attendance or views on YouTube or likes on Facebook. Jesus isn't into crowds because Jesus knows there are crowds in hell.

[21 : 47] That's why Jesus wants disciples. Jesus wants committed Christians. He wants people to come to him and confess him as Lord and commit their life to him for salvation.

And the gospels teach us so clearly that Jesus would far rather one wholeheartedly committed Christian than 10,000 people just going along in the crowd.

My friend, Jesus wants individuals, he wants us with a healthy heart to respond in faith and obedience to the mission, ministry, and message of the kingdom. Because being a fact or a figure in the field, well, that doesn't amount to much.

Being a part of the crowd doesn't count for anything. Being a number is nothing. Because what Jesus wants is discipleship. What counts for Jesus is a healthy heart.

What counts is wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ. What counts is a good sower with good seed. What counts is a good sower with good seed.

[22 : 55] And Jesus there, he's not talking about the preacher. He's talking about the Christian. A good sower with good seed. As we said, that's what the focus of this second parable, this arable parable, is all about.

It's all about the sower. It's all about being a good sower with good seed. It's about being a good sower with good seed. And as Christians who are part of the kingdom of heaven, that's what we're to be.

We're to be good sowers with good seed. We're to be good sowers with good seed. Which should raise the question in our mind, how are we to sow?

If you're to be a good sower with good seed, how are you to sow? How am I to sow? And Jesus teaches us we're to sow, first of all, in time. We're to sow in time.

We're to sow with patience. Because the advice given to the good sower with good seed was, yes, there's an enemy. And the enemy has come in. He's an enemy of the seed.

[24 : 01] He's an enemy of the sower. He's an enemy of the soil. He's even an enemy of your soul. But he says, give it time. Give it time. Be patient.

Let the good seed grow. And wait for the harvest. Wait for the harvest. Sow in time, he says. Sow in time.

And you know, that's how Luke even described the good seed in his gospel. When the good seed landed on the good soil, Luke describes what Jesus says.

He says, it bore fruit with patience. It bore fruit with patience. Which is so true because when the good sower scattered his good seed, he wasn't a careless sower.

He was a careful sower. He didn't just throw the good seed into the wind and hope for the best. No, the sower, he scattered the seed as best as he could. But as you know, when any sower finishes sowing the good seed, they would look at their field at the end of the working day and see that their field was no different to when they had first started that day.

[25 : 13] And that's because as all good crofters, I'm sure you're all good crofters or good gardeners, you know that results aren't instant. You know that waiting is always part of this process, which is why we're to sow in time.

We're to sow the good seed with patience. And when that comes to the kingdom of heaven, though, that's when it can be very difficult and very draining when we're looking and longing for people to be saved.

But that's also the advice a senior, more seasoned minister gave to the younger, more enthusiastic and energetic minister. when Paul wrote to Timothy, he reminded him, Timothy, preach with patience.

You will not get instant results. Preach with patience. Paul said to Timothy, Timothy, preach the word and when you preach it, preach it in season and out of season.

Preach it every season and in every season reprove them, rebuke them, exhort them and teach them with all patience. So in time, sow in time, Timothy, and sow in tears.

[26 : 30] Sow in time and sow in tears. And you know, I love those words in Psalm 126. We're going to sing them in a moment because they not only remind us that we have precious seed to sow but also that we're to sow this precious seed in our homes and among our family.

We're to sow this precious seed in the lives of our spouse and our siblings, our children and grandchildren, our family and friends, our neighbors and neighborhoods, our workplaces and workspaces.

We're to sow this precious seed and we're to sow in time and we're to sow in tears. We're to sow in time and we're to sow in tears. Tell me what the psalmist said.

A streams of water in the south. Our bondage, Lord, recall, who sow in tears a reaping time of joy and joy they shall. That man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless, love that word, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing, shall return.

How are we to sow, my friend? My Christian friend, how are we to sow? We're to sow in time and we're to sow in tears. We're to sow in time and we're to sow in tears.

[27 : 52] And you know, sometimes I think that that's what Paul really meant. That's what he really meant when he said Paul may plant, but Apollos, he was the one who watered.

We were to water the sown seed of God's word by preaching with tears and praying with tears and pleading with tears. My friend, we're to sow in time but we're also to sow in tears because Paul may plant and Apollos may water and we need lots of Apollos's to water.

We need people to water because God will give the increase and God gives the increase because growth is all of grace. It's all of grace and because it's all of grace, Jesus shows us lastly and very briefly this third arable parable which centers on the seed.

so the soil the sower and then thirdly the seed. The seed, verse 31, Jesus put another parable before them saying, the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

It is the smallest of all seeds but when it is grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

[29 : 14] Now as you know as Jesus explains elsewhere he says that the seed is the word of God. The seed is the word of God but in this arable parable Jesus depicts the seed of God's word like a mustard seed.

Jesus describes the mustard seed he says there it is this verse 32 it is the smallest of all seeds. In fact the mustard seed boys and girls the mustard seed has a diameter of one millimeter.

One millimeter. It is a small seed but it is a strong seed. It is a small seed but it is a strong seed. And you know Jesus uses as you will see later on in Matthew's gospel he uses this illustration of the small but strong mustard seed when he talks about small but strong faith.

But here Jesus he is not talking about faith he is speaking about growth. And he says that the mustard seed is not only small but strong. It is a seed that I do not know if you like mustard the boys often try it at the dinner table and they turn their nose up at it.

It packs a punch with taste. But it is a small but strong seed because it packs a punch with power. That is what Jesus is getting at here. It is a small but strong seed because it packs a punch with power.

[30 : 37] And that is why Paul said in Romans 1 that the word of God is the power of God. It is the dunamis of God. The dynamite of God.

The power of God unto salvation. There is a lot of power says Jesus packed into that small but strong seed because it is able to grow. It is able to have an impact and an influence upon many people.

It is able to grow from a tiny seed into a tall and towering tree. Now when a mustard seed is planted it does not actually grow into a tall and towering tree.

The mustard seed grows into a small shrub. But Jesus contrasts this tiny mustard seed with a tall and towering tree in order to emphasize and in fact to explain what the kingdom of heaven is really like.

Because like this small but strong mustard seed the mission ministry and message of the kingdom will have a small beginning. It will in fact have a tiny beginning.

[31 : 42] It will begin with the incarnation and then it will follow on by calling twelve ordinary men. They will be called commissioned and commanded to serve this extraordinary saviour.

And Jesus explains that the kingdom of heaven will grow and it will keep on growing until it's this tall and towering tree. And its branches as Jesus explains to the disciples in Acts chapter 1 the branches of this tall and towering tree they will spread out from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and they will cover the uttermost parts of the earth.

And its growth explains Jesus it will be all of grace. It will be all of grace because the king in the kingdom of heaven has promised.

He has promised here in this passage he's promised throughout his word I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

It's a wonderful reminder my friend that growth is all of grace. It's the growth of God. And these three parables about the soil and the sower and the seed they teach us and they remind us they reassure us that in order to possess and put into practice vision 2024 we need to have a passionate pursuit for the glory of God and the gospel of God and the go of God and also the growth of God the growth of God because growth as Jesus teaches us it's all of grace it's all of grace but as sower we need to keep on sowing and we need to keep on sowing in time and in tears we need to sow in time and sow in tears may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray O

[33 : 49] Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for the parables of Jesus and these parables teach us so much not only about our God but also about ourselves and Lord we confess that we need to be more healthy we need to have that healthy heart that receives God's word and seeks to live according to it and Lord help us to be faithful sowers to sow this good seed the precious seed of God's word and to keep sowing it to sow it in time and to sow it in tears and Lord we pray that thou would give to us a burden a burden for our homes and our families a burden for our congregation and our community that we Lord would be wholly taken up with these things realizing profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul

Lord speak to us then we pray as thy people encourage us to keep on sowing and to keep sowing in time and to keep sowing in tears bless us Lord we pray do us good we ask lead us Lord into the week that lies before us Lord a week that some of us might have perfect in weakness cleanse us and we pray do us good we ask for Jesus sake Amen we're going to sing in conclusion those words in Psalm 126 Psalm 126 page 419 in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 126 we're singing the whole Psalm when

Zion's bondage God turned back as men that dreamed were we then filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody they among the heath said the Lord great things for them hath wrought the Lord hath done great things for us whence joy to us is brought the whole Psalm to God's praise when Zion's bondage God turned back as men that dream were we then filled with laughter was our heart our tongue with melody and them they bound the heathen said the Lord grave things for them hath thought the

Lord hath done grave things for us whence joy to us is blood as streams of water in the south our bondage Lord we call is low and tears shall we in time of joy joy they shall that man who paid precious seed in going forth doth mourn he doubtless bringing back his sheaves rejoice joy it shall return the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen now don't put it off Kenny John I've got a question I forgot my questions question one what does the word parable mean cast alongside what type of heart is a heart worth having a healthy heart growth in the kingdom of heaven is all of grace what does grace stand for God's riches at Christ's expense that wasn't a question what is the size of a mustard seed one millimetre and the kingdom will grow to a tall and towering tree well done