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Two Parables of Seeds Growing (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses two parables about the growth of seeds. The first parable describes how some people receive the word of God and bear fruit, while others do not. The second parable conveys how the growth of the kingdom of God is dependent on God's work and not just on human efforts. Gregg highlights the importance of understanding the message behind these parables and encourages individuals to mature as part of a larger Christian community by cooperating with God's work.

Transcript

And therefore I don't remember exactly what the reference is, but I might be able to find it quickly. In Colossians, in any case, someone might be able to find it before I. He says to understanding what the will of the Lord is, not being... Let me see here. I certainly wish I had looked this up.

I had no idea I'd be wanting it. But the actual statement, as it reads in the King James, I'm not sure quite how it is here in the New King James. It's in Colossians.

He says something like, do not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. I think it's in the second chapter, but I'm not sure about that. Someone find it? Could be in Ephesians.

There's so much in common. I'm pretty sure it's in Colossians. Okay, well, we're not going to look for it for long.

If I could have found it, it would have been good to have in your notes soon. It says, essentially, be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Is it 2.2? I don't know if it's that early.

Now that's a good one, too. That's a different one than I'm thinking of, but that's a good verse on the same subject. Thanks.

Colossians 2.2 says that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the

mystery of God, both the Father and of Christ. That's a good verse on that, but that's not the one I was thinking of. Now, I should probably turn it over to Ephesians, but I was pretty sure it was in Colossians.

Anyway, I don't want to get all tied up here. But the more I don't find it in Colossians, the more I think it probably is. Yeah, it is in Ephesians.

Sorry about that. 5.17. You've already studied Ephesians and Colossians together to know how much they have in common. Ephesians 5.17. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

In Deuteronomy, we're told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, all our mind. And the mind is something that God gave us to help us to know Him. It's not the only thing.

You can't know God strictly mentally. But, I mean, you've got to have a spiritual revelation, too. But understanding is an important factor.

Jesus said, when people hear the word of the kingdom and don't understand it, that makes them susceptible to the devil just snatching it away. Whatever you don't understand, there's two ways you can go with that. Three ways.

There's three ways you can go with that. If you hear something you don't understand, one is you can just get confused, and that's not profitable. Another thing you can do is just put it out of your mind.

Another is that you can allow your lack of understanding to be an incentive for you to search and seek understanding. Obviously, those are three possible things. The persons in question, who hear the word and don't understand it, and the devil snatches it away, obviously, they're the ones that just put it out of their mind.

They don't understand it. They don't want to put out the mental effort to get to understand it. They don't even want to be bothered with being confused about it.

So, they just get snatched away. They just don't have it in their mind anymore. It's gone.

And, you know, chalk it up to a wasted morning, listening to this guy talk on the hillsides here. Okay? So, the first group are those who, through lack of understanding, lose interest. And the devil just takes it away, and they don't remember it, and don't think about it anymore.

Then, he gives a second thing, and that is, of course, those that fell on the stony ground. Mark 4, 16, these, likewise, are the ones on stony ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's

sake, immediately they stumble.

Now, the heat of the sun, which withered the plants in the parable, is seen to be persecution and tribulation because of the word. That is, these people, unlike the ones who give it no further thought, they do give it thought. They embrace it.

They like it. The message of the kingdom is good news to them, but they don't understand it enough to understand the kind of commitment it's calling them to make. They have no root in themselves.

It's a shallow acceptance. Something about it is appealing, but they obviously are not willing to make the sacrifice. The fact that tribulation and persecution, because of their commitment to the word, dissolves their commitment, shows that this is where the weakness lay in them.

They were not willing to pay the price. They weren't willing to die for what was true. They didn't have that kind of a commitment.

And that is an evidence that they have not really dealt with the root cause of sin in their life, which is self-interest, self-centeredness. If a person is dead to self, then persecution can't scare them, can't intimidate them. Nothing can drive them off.

If a person is not thinking about self, but just thinking about God. If a person is saying, OK, God, I surrender myself, I take up my cross, I follow you, then of course you're already acclimated to persecution. You've, in a sense, welcomed it.

It doesn't matter. The only person who is put off by persecution is a person who still has a stake, who still has an interest in himself. And so here, the stony ground is a heart that has not really broken.

Self is an unbroken wild ass that has not been conquered yet. It's been attracted to the grain, been attracted to the food of the kingdom of God. And perhaps this is illustrated in the people in John chapter 6, who, when he fed them with bread, they came back the next day.

In fact, they pursued him zealously, joyfully, waiting for their next meal. But when he began to talk to them about the cost, they vanished. And certainly that is the case with many people.

It's not so much that they just put the word out of their mind. There's something initially about it that attracted to them. Many people come into the church, the visible church, in response to the good vibes or the temporary sense of guilt they feel under preaching, or some attractive friends that they want to be with in the church, or they're afraid of hell, so they kind of want to get a ticket out of hell, but they don't want to pay the price for it.

And when the persecution comes, it just wasn't in the contract. They didn't count on that. That just wasn't what they were planning on, and it's not something they're willing to pay.

These are those who have not counted the cost. The word has come. It's been received, but not deeply.

And therefore it's easily dislodged as soon as there's resistance that makes adherence to the word uncomfortable. And so this is the second category of those who don't follow him to fruition. And then, verse 18, Now these are the ones sown among thorns.

They are the ones who hear the word. And by the way, these ones apparently have plenty of root. There's no stone in this particular soil.

Their roots go down. They've got what it takes to endure persecution. They've died this self at a certain level.

That is, they're willing to die for the faith. They're willing to endure tribulation and persecution. But these ones are conquered not by opposition, but by prosperity.

These are two enemies of the word of God. But neither of them needs to conquer it. Persecution certainly is one thing that drives off people who are nominally committed.

Another thing that separates them is prosperity. He says, these are the ones who receive the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things. Now Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

The Bible says, if you delight yourself in the Lord, he'll give you the desires of your heart. But these people are not delighting in the Lord fully. They want the Lord and they're even willing to suffer for him, but they are very much attracted to things of the world as well.

They're allured. They're softened by luxury. And therefore they become fruitless.

Now, of course, one of the things we need to ask ourselves is, being fruitless, does that mean they're not saved? Is this a description of people who are saved but have no fruit? Or are these people lost? It's hard to say. It's hard to know exactly how he wants us to apply the details of the parable. Obviously, if they don't produce fruit, they're essentially worthless to the planter of the seed.

I mean, the only reason the seeds are there is because the owner is looking for fruit from his field. Plants that don't produce fruit, they don't get harvested. They get burned off before the next planting season.

And whether we should press the analogies so far is to say that Christians who get

caught up in the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and desire for other things, if these people actually get... they lose it. They're lost. I don't know.

But certainly, the parable does not give us any clue that God is pleased to have plants that don't produce fruit. Why would he? What farmer would plant seeds that he didn't want to get fruit from? And therefore, whether the people are saved or not, the fact that they're unfruitful is a disaster. If they go to hell, it's a second disaster.

But even if they go to heaven, it's a disaster because they squandered an opportunity to give God what he wanted out of their lives. You know, God has something he wants from us all. He knows what we can produce if our hearts are good soil.

It may be only 30 or 60 for some and 100 for others, but the fact of the matter is he knows what he can expect. And if he doesn't get it for no better reason than that we got distracted by the things of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, then there's going to be a price to pay for that. God is getting ripped off.

And Jesus probably had more things to say about money and wealth as a danger to the soul than any other subject. Jesus never said, Beware of lust. But he said, Beware of covetousness.

He didn't say, Beware of drunkenness. He didn't say, Beware of anger. Now, he taught against all those things, but he didn't say, Beware of them.

To beware of something means it's creepy. It's something that could sneak up on you. You better keep your eyes open because it's a danger that you might not spot if not warned.

And Jesus said, It's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. He said a lot of things like that. A lot of things he said had to do with the danger of being attracted to wealth.

Now, there is some evidence in the Bible that a person could have wealth in some cases and not be in violation of this. I mean, they may not care about their wealth in the way that most rich people do. But that's a rare case.

It's a rare case. And the irony is that virtually every rich Christian thinks that they're one of those rare ones. And there are a lot of rich Christians in our society, for example.

In fact, all of us are rich by the standards of the world, globally. But even in our society, there are some that stand out as extremely rich Christians. And if you talk to them about passages like this, invariably they say, Well, it's not having money that's bad, it's the love of money that's bad.

As if there's a great difference between the two. Jesus indicated there's not a whole heck

of a lot of difference between those who have money and those who love money. Because he said, Where your treasure is, your heart will be.

That's sort of like an axiom of fact. This is like a law of nature in the spirit. Where your treasure is, your heart will be.

Which means you'll love whatever it is you treasure. Whatever it is, wherever you put your treasures. And it's in that context he says, Therefore, don't lay up treasures for yourself on earth.

Where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal, but lay up treasures for yourself in heaven. How do you do that? Three times he tells us how to do that in the Bible. Three different contexts.

He says, Give to the poor. That's the deposit box for heavenly account. You give to the poor.

It says in the Old Testament, He that shows mercy on the poor lends to the Lord. The Lord will repay him. And that's how you make your deposits in the bank of heaven is help the poor.

Particularly, I would say missionaries and Christian poor, but even non-Christian poor. That is, if there's a surplus after the Christians have had their needs met. It's of course endeavor to do good to all men as we have opportunity.

Especially those in the household of faith. But that's really how one lays up treasures in heaven. And Jesus said to do it.

Because he said, Where your treasures are, your heart will be also. If your treasures are on earth, your heart is going to be earthbound. And how is that any different than this description? The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things.

That is certainly one of the things that Jesus brings up more than anything else. Now to the Jewish ear, this is strange. Because in the Old Testament, and all of Jesus' listeners have been conditioned by Old Testament thinking.

Prosperity was one of the things that was one of the marks of God's blessing. At least it was so interpreted. That God would judge the wicked by taking away his estate.

And give it to the man who had shown mercy on the poor. Or on the man who had been righteous or whatever. But Jesus comes along and has to kind of turn their ideas on their heads.

And say, Listen, it's riches that's really the enemy. As much as the birds of the air. In the parable, there is no sense in which the birds of the air are a worse threat to the seed.

Than the thorns and thistles are. They are equally threatening. They both destroy the plant.

They both destroy the crop. And the birds of the air are the devil. But the devil is not your only problem.

And self isn't your only problem. But the world. You've got the world, the flesh and the devil here.

The birds represent the devil snatching the seed away. The hard heart is self. The person has not dealt with the issue of self-serving.

That's why persecution and tribulation drive them away. Their heart is hardened. They have not been broken in terms of their self-commitment to themselves.

And of course, then you've got the world. The cares of this world. The deceitfulness of riches.

These are the three things that prevent Christians from growing. And prevent people from becoming Christians in the first place. The world, the flesh and the devil.

Or world and self. And devil. These are three enemies.

And riches are an important thing in the world. Remember Jesus when he said, Don't even worry about what you're going to eat or what you're going to wear. He said, After all these things, the Gentiles seek.

People who are in the world and their heritage is in this world. They can seek for those things. They're appropriate for them.

But not for you. You seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and the other things to be added to you. Desire for other things.

Chokes out the word and it becomes unfruitful. Paul certainly seems to be speaking about this. Maybe about this very passage.

When in 1 Timothy chapter 6, He describes the fate of the one who has desire for other things and desires to be rich. 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 9. In the previous verse to this, he says, Having food and clothing, with these we should be content. But in verse 9 he says, But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare.

Into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. For which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Certainly this sounds like the thorns and thistles passage of the parable before us.

Getting pierced through with the thorns of the griefs that later come from unfruitfulness. Love of money is the desire after other things and the deceitfulness of riches.

He says some have strayed from the faith. He says, those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare. And they get drowned.

An image like being choked. The thorns and thistles choke the seed. People's souls get drowned or choked.

Asphyxiated by the love of money. The desire for things. Now I realize that all around us we will see not only Christians who seem to be good Christians.

And yet live in a great deal of luxury. And not only see such people but hear people encouraging the very same. So that if you would say what Jesus says on these subjects.

You would definitely stand in bold contrast to our culture. Including our Christian culture that our nation has. And I frankly think that that shows how far gone the church is.

You know, if you hold up a straight yardstick next to a tree. And the tree starts in the right place but is way off in the wrong direction. It just shows how crooked the tree is.

And if you hold up the yardstick about what Jesus taught. About love for the world and the deceitfulness of riches and stuff. To the way the church thinks about it and lives right now.

I guess it's scarier than some people realize. When Jesus said, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. Is going to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

But those who do the will of my Father. How could one ignore the many, many, many times Jesus talks about. And Paul talks about this love of money issue.

And how that that drowns men's souls. And that, you know, they're not doing the will of the Father if they're pursuing the wrong course. And remember Jesus in making that statement about many will say to me that day.

Lord, Lord. He's talking about a lot of people who had every reason they thought. They had every reason to believe they were saved.

It was a total surprise to them on the day of judgment to find out they weren't even saved. Why? Because they never took Jesus seriously, quite obviously. How can anyone be saved if they don't take Jesus seriously? That's what salvation is, is believing in him.

Can you believe in him and not take him seriously? I don't see how. Now, there is that fourth category. Oops, I turned back to Matthew.

I want to go back to Mark here. The fourth category is in verse 20. But these are the

ones sown on good ground.

Those who hear the word accept it and bear fruit. Some thirtyfold, some sixty, some hundredfold. Actually, I think it's in Luke's version that actually gives a spin on this that's very helpful.

In verse 15, Luke 8, 15, they're parallel to this. Luke 8, 15. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word, with a noble and good heart.

I think the King James says a good and honest heart. But a noble and a good heart. They keep it and bear fruit with patience.

And the word patience here in the Greek means endurance. Now, this is, of course, in contrast to those who had no root and didn't endure. When the tribulations and persecutions came, they endured only for a while and then fell away, he said.

But here, these people are going to endure. They receive the word, but they're going to endure. And it's because of the state of their heart.

Once again, the state of the soil in the parable represents the state of a heart. And he makes it very plain here. These ones that fell on good soil, that word meant with a noble and good heart.

Or a good and honest heart. I don't know which is a better translation. The King James or the New.

But the idea here is the person doesn't have any agendas to defend. They just are purely and disinterestedly desiring to know God's word and to live according to it. And so, a lack of understanding is not going to prevent them from pressing in.

Persecution and tribulation is not going to drive them off. Thorns and thistles are not even going to get a chance in their lives. Because they're instructed by Jesus to care nothing about such things.

About the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. We're pilgrims and strangers on this planet. And so, these people have a heart that is receptive.

They're teachable. They accept it and it produces fruit in their life. Now notice, they don't produce fruit.

The seed produces fruit. The seed is the word. And it's the word of God that produces fruit.

Even as the first time fruit ever appeared on the planet was when, what? God spoke and said, let there be these fruit bearing plants and so forth. In Colossians chapter 1. This time I know it's Colossians. In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 6. Or 5 and 6. It says,

because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.

Of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel. Which has come to you as it has also in all the world. And is bringing forth fruit.

As it is also among you since the day you heard it. And knew the grace of God in truth. So, you heard this word.

And you knew the grace of God. You received it. And it is producing fruit in you.

Just as it is in all the world wherever it's been sown. So, the field which probably is the world over. In Jesus' own day it was probably Israel.

But, of course, the seed now is scattered worldwide by his agents. Is going to produce fruit. There's good reason to believe from this parable that the majority of hearers will not produce fruit.

And even those who do won't all produce the same amount of fruit. Now we could ask, well, what is the fruit? There's two ways of looking at the fruit. Both of them have biblical grounds.

One would be, of course, converts or multiplication. The seed that is sown produces more of its own. Jesus said, you know, unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it produces much fruit. Jesus was going to die. He was a grain of wheat.

He's going to produce a lot more. He's going to reproduce himself in much fruit. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians is not converts.

But it is, in fact, in you. It's fruit that you produce in your life. Love and joy and peace and gentleness and meekness.

Again, it's a reproduction of Christ in you. I don't know which he has in mind. Although in referring to the fruit of the kingdom, he probably is referring to the latter more than the first.

I suspect that he's talking about these people become godly. These people become true followers of Christ. That's the fruit.

And therefore, that some produce 30, some 60, some 100, suggests that perhaps even when Jesus comes back or when death interrupts our growing season, we won't all have attained the same amount of fruit. But Jesus doesn't show any less favor toward those that produce 30 than those that produce 100. He doesn't even say, and some really pleased the master by producing 100.

He just said they all produce fruit, some 30, some 60, some 100. Undeniably, the seed was good and the ground was good in each of the cases. And therefore, factors unknown to us determine why some produced only 30 and some 100.

But 30-fold is okay. The farmer is happy to get 30-fold and God is happy even with those who produce the least amount of fruit so long as they respond to the word with a good and honest heart. Now, one point I want to make.

Jesus was probably, in talking about sowing the word of God, the word of the kingdom, he was talking probably about his own evangelistic efforts among the people of Israel and how the remnant was being sorted out in this way. The remnant had right hearts. And therefore, by giving up these parables and preaching to them, he was drawing the remnant to himself.

They were going to produce the fruit. A whole bunch of non-remnant Jews were going to fall away or drift away or pay no attention for various reasons that he elaborates here. I suspect, though, that this applies far beyond the mere evangelization of the lost.

I think that while it is true that Jesus is probably talking about evangelism here initially, we have the word sown to us every time we read the Bible or every time we hear preaching or teaching or somebody speaks to us a word in season from the Lord. Then the seed is sown again. There is a seed planted or at least potentially planted.

We hear the word a great deal. We have access to the word. We get inundated with seeds sown.

But it doesn't necessarily guarantee there will be a good fruit from it because our heart has to remain receptive. It has to remain a good and receptive heart. Look at James chapter 1 real quickly here.

Then we'll go to the next parable, which is shorter and doesn't need quite so much to be said about it. In James chapter 1, in verse 21, he says, Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness, which I take to mean teachable spirit, the implanted word, which is able to save your souls, but be doers of the word and not hearers, only deceiving yourselves. And he goes on to explain why that's a bad deal to do.

But he says in verse 25, But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one should be blessed in what he does. He's writing to people who are no doubt believers already. And he says that they need to be receiving with meekness the implanted word.

The word continues to be implanted after you're saved. There are many things that need to change in our lives after we're saved, and those are changed the same way the creation was changed by the word of God in the successive days of creation. God

created the heavens and the earth initially.

That's analogous to you being converted, or at least when you made light. Paul says, God who caused light to shine out of darkness, he shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians 4, 6, so that our conversion is analogous to God creating light. And he did so by his word, just as we're converted by receiving his word.

But the creation thereafter heard many more words from God. Let there be a firmament. Let the dry land appear.

Let fruit-bearing trees appear. Let the waters bring forth. Let the earth bring forth, and so forth.

And every advance in the perfecting of that creation took place by the introduction of the word from God and the creation receiving that word and responding to it and producing what God commanded. Therefore, we who are in Christ in a new creation have the analog to that in our own lives. As we continue to hear the word of God spoken, we still need to receive the implanted word.

We still need to see more fruit produced. And if our hearts become hard, if we become enamored with the things of the world, not only is there the possible danger ultimately of not being Christians, but simply of not benefiting from the word that is sown. Remember, it says in Hebrews chapter 3, speaking of the Jews who did not come into the promised land in the days of Moses, in the book of Numbers, speaking about them, well, it talks about them in the end of Hebrews chapter 3, but it also, in the beginning of chapter 4, makes a statement about them that I'd like to point out to you.

It says in Hebrews 4, 2, For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them, but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. So, the failure to receive the word with faith and mix it with faith, to apply faith to it, to put your trust in it, it can cause the word that is preached not to profit you. And that's what is being said there.

Now, there's one other brief parable. Well, let's go on here. Mark 4, 21.

And he said to them, Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? Now, we talked about that in the Sermon on the Mount that comes from there. But there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret, but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.

It's not at all certain to me why this is given in this context. Basically, he says, Everything that God has hidden is going to be brought to light, or maybe everything we've hidden is going to be brought to light. Certainly, that's true on the Day of

Judgment.

I don't know if he's talking about another context as well here or not. And he said to them, Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you.

And to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

This also has its parallels in Matthew 13. Apparently, what it means is, if you have anything of a heart for the truth, more will be given to you. If you don't have such a heart or an inclination, even what little you already have will be taken from you.

God's going to be doing some radical separations between the wheat and the chaff, between the sheep and the goats, between the good ground and the bad ground, the trees that bear fruit and the trees that don't bear fruit. These kinds of divisions are being made. All the Jews had a little bit of knowledge of God, but those who had a heart for it would be given more.

Those who didn't have a heart for it were going to have even what little they had taken away. There's going to be a great polarization in the ranks, it seems to me, he's saying. In verse 26, we have another very brief parable.

And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow. He himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself, first the blade, then the head, and after that the full grain in the head.

But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. Now, the harvest is probably a reference to the day of judgment. We can't be certain about that, but there is in another parable, which is found only in Matthew 13, the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Jesus explains all the details of that parable, and one thing he says is, the field is the world, the harvest is the end of the world. He'll send out his angels, and they'll gather and so forth. That is in Matthew 13, with reference to the wheat and the tares.

Here is a harvest too. We don't know that it's always the same harvest, but I think it might be fair to suggest that it is. Now, the kingdom of God is like a man who scattered seed on the ground, and he sleeps at night.

Up to that point, it almost sounds like the second parable in Matthew 13, which is the parable of the wheat and the tares, because that starts out also with a man sowing seed in his field, then he goes to sleep. But in that parable, while he slept, an enemy sowed tares among the wheat. We'll study that next time.

But that's not how this parable goes. Both of them start with a man sowing his field with seed, and then going to sleep. But the point that is made here is not that something is done behind his back while he's asleep that is evil, but the point that's being made here is that while he's asleep, something happens that is desirable, something that he clearly isn't causing to happen.

The ground produces fruit, crops, by itself, it says in verse 28. And though the man sleeps by night and rises by day, the seed sprouts and grows, and the guy doesn't even know how, it just happens. What is the point to this? It seems to me fairly obvious that he's saying something very much like what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3, where he said, I plant, and Paul waters, and God is the one who gives the increase.

And that there is a human element in the growth of the kingdom of God, but the principal element is the work of God. Man has to be faithful to plant seed, man has to preach the gospel, but the progress of the kingdom and the success of the kingdom does not lie within the power of man to make happen. It's God who gives the increase, not man.

Now, if man doesn't sow any seeds, God can't give any increase. God's kingdom is dependent, in measure at least, on man's cooperation. But not to the extent that we have to make it happen.

The sowing of the seed is the preaching of the Word. We preach the Word and we then watch God work through His mighty Word, through His Spirit convicting people and so forth. Now, a lot of times the Word works too slow for our preferences, we're a little impatient, or even it doesn't work on everybody we would like it to work on, so we'd like to get things under control through other means and try to bring in the kingdom of God through legislation and political action and so forth.

But that's, I think, just the point here, is that no, the sower, he just has to sow. The seed is made to grow by something supernatural, something superhuman. The ground itself, in a way the farmer doesn't understand, produces the fruit.

So also, the kingdom of God, though it may seem that men are not cooperating with God at a high level, it still makes its progress. No one can explain how. God gives the increase.

And that's the point. Now, he takes this parable as far as the harvest, which is probably the end of the world when the growing season is over, when he collects his fruit. It may be significant that in verse 28, he breaks down the growth of the seed into bits.

He said it's first the blade, the little blade of grass that comes up, the stalk is like a little blade of grass, then the head appears on the stalks, and after that, the full or the mature ripened grain in the head. Now, the wheat and the corn and so forth that he's talking

about, the grain heads form on the stalk long before the grain is edible. There are heads of grain on the stalks before the grain can be harvested and eaten.

It's still green and unripe. So he's simply giving again something that is well known to anyone who is involved in any sense in agriculture. But why does he give these details? It may not be significant.

Maybe he's just embellishing the story by giving all those details. However, possibly he's trying to tell us something important too about the kingdom of God. Later on, he's going to talk about the mustard seed and the leaven and how the kingdom starts very small as a mustard seed and grows into a great tree.

Or like leaven put in a lump. A little bit is put in a big lump and yet it leavens the whole lump. That it starts out small, but it later has a tremendous impact and becomes very large.

Certainly there is that here, whether that's the point he's making is maybe open to question, but he says first it starts out as a little blade. Eventually though, he gets what he wants, a crop that he can harvest. He gets mature and ripe grain.

Now, intermediate between the blade and the ripe grain is the formation of the ear. The ear of corn or the ear of wheat that appears there. Or the head, as it's called here, the head of wheat, the ear of corn, by the way we usually speak.

The head appears before the grain is ripened in it. Now, I don't want to make more of this than Jesus intends because I don't know how much he may have intended, but it's interesting that in Jesus' own day the kingdom began to sprout up small like a blade. He himself was a seed that fell into the ground and died, but he did so so he might come forth and bring much fruit.

But in the process of producing fruit, before the harvest, there would be the formation first of the heads of grain, or the King James Version says the ear, which is why I keep using that word, the King James, I'm more familiar with. It says the ear and then the full corn in the ear is how it says the King James. The head of grain, or the ear, is a collection of individual grains that have not yet ripened, but they ripen within the community, as it were, of the head.

In connection with each other, they grow and they ripen together in these collections, in these gatherings. And you can perhaps guess where I'm going with this. It seems to me that the fellowship of believers in individual congregations, individual communities, Christian communities, or fellowship groups, is the context in which individual Christians ripen or mature.

That they're all connected to the same stalk, so each head, though it appears to be independent, is not. They're all drawn from the same stalk. They're all part of the same

plant.

It's like the vine and the branches. Jesus is the vine, we're the branches. We're individual branches, but we're all connected to the same stalk, so we're all one.

The body of Christ, likewise, is an image that Paul uses that conveys the same idea. We're all members. We have an individual function, but we're all connected into one organism.

So also, in the grain that he's describing, the stalk forms, and then these heads form that have all these individual unripe, immature grains in them. But in the atmosphere, in the environment of that head, in the context of that ear, the individual grains ripen until they're all harvestable. They're all, at least most of them, usable.

And I think what this, the way that this connects with reality to me, is that God has arranged Christians, even prior to their maturity as individuals, into congregations or into communities, into fellowship groups, in the context of which they ripen together. Maturity doesn't happen alone. Maturity doesn't happen just by you going off in the woods and saying, I'm going to wait here for Jesus to come back and I'm going to become perfect in the meantime.

You get perfected in the context of relationships. You mature in the context of relationships. And so there are gatherings or groupings of Christian grains that are not yet mature, but they ripen and mature as they are in these groupings, which is basically making an appeal for local churches here.

They're all really connected to each other at the organism level, but they are independent or individual, ripening communities of grains. And grain doesn't ripen without them. But when I say local churches, of course, my definition might be different than some of what constitutes a local church.

I'm not calling every organization that the world calls a church a church, but really gatherings of true believers for the purpose of churching, for the purpose of being a worshiping community and having an expression of the body and ministry of Christ. Those groupings are the growth context for individual Christian growth. And that's what I think is perhaps hinted at here too.

But the main point of the parable is not the blade and then the ear and then the full grain in the ear, or whatever. But the main point of the parable is that while man must do the sowing, the kingdom will grow by God's doing, not by man's. It is God who ultimately produces the fruit of the kingdom for himself, not without our cooperation.

But certainly without our genius. And our skill is not what it depends on. Yes, Jamie?