

Pastor Writes

Greetings! There are many things in life which have very small beginnings but eventually produce great results. Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB) began with three men praying with a burden for the unreached and today they are one of the largest indigenous missionary sending organizations. God's kingdom likewise had very small beginnings. Just imagine that over two thousand years ago Jesus chose a band of twelve men as his disciples to be with him, preach the gospel and to heal and drive out demons in his name. Most of his disciples were uneducated, some were fishermen, a tax-collector and so on. Nobody ever thought that this message of the gospel would go anywhere beyond Israel. But today there is an international body of believers who belong to the body of Christ. Jesus himself taught his disciples using parables to explain the kingdom of God. We will be looking at two parables from Mark where Jesus teaches that, 'From very small beginnings God produces great results.'

The kingdom of God is likened to a man who scatters seed on the ground. The seed is the 'word' which was being sown through the ministry of Jesus. There is nothing extraordinary in the manner in which the seed grows. In this parable the man who sows the seed seems to have contributed nothing towards the growth of the seed apart from the initial sowing and the final harvesting. The seed seems to have grown on its own. Night and day whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. Any farmer knows that just sowing the seed and then doing nothing else will not produce a good harvest. The point of the parable is perhaps the pace at which the seed grows. Initially it seems as though nothing is happening and a sceptic may think that there is nothing happening. However, there is an inner dynamic in that message which will in due time produce its effect, even if human insight cannot fathom how the process works. The text says all by itself it produced first the stalk then the head and then the full kernel. There is a gradual but definite growth. In the same manner God's word that is sown in the hearts of people will have its effect in due course. God's disciple however will have to wait for God's time and for his work to be accomplished in his way. The final clause 'as soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come' has echoes of Joel 3:13 where harvesting is an imagery of the final judgment. Mark is probably using this imagery to show that the kingdom of God will be consummated at the coming of Christ again. The first parable is then a message about rightly interpreting and responding to the period of apparent inaction of the kingdom of God. Despite appearances to the contrary, it is growing, and the harvest will come. It will come in God's time and in God's way not by human effort or in accordance with human logic.

The second parable is about the mustard seed. It is a small and insignificant seed which grows to a point where it begins to give shelter to the birds of the air. Growth of the kingdom of God works both **within and without**. Without we have seen that there is a visible and physical presence of the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated with his own coming. The Kingdom grows as more people recognize the King and become his subjects. But the kingdom of God is within us also. As much as we start a relationship with Christ and become a Christian there is a constant growth within us. The more we allow the Spirit of God to work within us the more we reflect the character of the Heavenly King.

Moreover, we notice that the picture that Jesus draws for us is that the Kingdom of God needs to be a place where others would find it refreshing, as a place of rest and security. Trees in Scripture are sometimes symbols of nations as we see in Ezek 17:23 and Dan 4:12, 21 offering security for its subjects and subject states. The purpose of the kingdom is not that it becomes big from very insignificant beginnings and then boasts about its great achievement but rather that the kingdom should be one that serves the purpose of rest, security and shelter. Those who have responded to Jesus as king need to be agents of rest and security to others both as individuals and as a community. The parable is all about our own growth and as a community so that we may give ourselves for the service of others. The blessings of the reign of God is open to all people no matter what caste, class, colour, region, religion or sex they belong to.

As we meditate on this theme may we grow as members of the kingdom of God. God is slowly but surely working in our lives. We may be impatient with our imperfections but God is working in us as individuals and also as a community. God's kingdom is ever growing and may we celebrate that.

Shalom

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