

## The Early Church – Growth of Mk. 4:26-32

Introduction:

### I. We need to understand exactly what church growth is.

- A. Church growth is not taking faithful members from other congregations.
  - 1. When this occurs, a congregation may grow, but the Lord's church is not growing.
    - a. This is simply stealing members from other congregations.
    - b. It is not necessarily that this is wrong (depending on the way in which it is done), but it is not church growth.
  - 2. Church growth occurs in two main ways.
    - a. Numerically
      - 1) When we do the work of the church, more people will be added to the Lord's body.
      - 2) This is exactly how the first century church grew (as we will look at in a moment).
    - b. Spiritually
      - 1) Not only do we grow in number, but we also grow closer to God.
      - 2) **II Pet. 3:18** - but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
      - 3) **Acts 17:11** - These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.
- B. Notice the rapid growth of the early church in the book of Acts.
  - 1. **Acts 2:41** - Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.
  - 2. **Acts 2:47** - And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.
  - 3. **Acts 4:4** - However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.
  - 4. **Acts 5:14** - And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,
  - 5. **Acts 6:1** - Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.
  - 6. **Acts 6:7** - Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.
  - 7. **Acts 12:24** - But the word of God grew and multiplied.
  - 8. **Acts 16:5** - So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

9. Acts 19:20 - So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.
10. There are at least 18 references to the growth of the early church.

For the remainder of this lesson, notice the two main lessons that we can learn from these parables of Christ.

## II. Growth comes only when the seed is spread.

- A. The seed (word of God) must be planted if we are to expect growth.
  1. If growth is to be expected, the seed must be planted (4:26-32).
  2. It is up to us to plant the seed of the kingdom for others (we looked at this last week in detail, but notice these passages in review).
    - a. Mk. 16:15 - And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."
    - b. II Tim. 4:1-2 - I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: {2} Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.
  3. We see the example of this in the early church.
    - a. Acts 5:42 - And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.
    - b. Acts 8:4 - Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.
- B. Jesus had previously told the Parable of the Sower (Mk. 4:1-8).
  1. Notice the four main types of ground.
    - a. Wayside (pathway)
    - b. Stony ground
    - c. Thorny ground
    - d. Good ground
  2. Common sense tells us that no seed can land on the good ground if the seed is not sown.
  3. We are not responsible for the condition of the heart of others, but we are responsible for sowing the seed of the kingdom.
- C. Just as in the Parable of the Sower, in these two parables that Jesus tells (4:26-32), the seed must be sown.
  1. Notice again the parables and emphasize the sowing that takes place.
  2. We must be about sowing the seed.
  3. The Lord's church cannot grow unless Christ is preached.
    - a. Many times people focus on numerical growth as an indication that the church is doing the right thing.
    - b. It is not an "end justifies the means" when it comes to following God's word.
    - c. When it comes to the church, we do not use gimmicks to get people in the doors, only Christ.

### III. Growth comes only from the power of God.

- A. Notice again from the parables that when the seed is planted, it grows.
  - 1. Notice again the parables and emphasize the growth of the seed (4:26-32).
  - 2. It grows, not because the one who planted it causes it to grow (“he himself does not know how” 4:27); but it grows because of the power of God.
- B. It is God who gives the increase.
  - 1. We are never commanded to grow the church; we are only commanded to preach the gospel to others.
  - 2. God has promised that He will give the increase if we work for Him.
    - a. I Cor. 3:6-7 - I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. {7} So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.
    - b. II Cor. 9:10-11 - Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, {11} while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.
  - 3. The power is not in us, but in the word of God.
    - a. Rom. 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
    - b. Heb. 4:12 - For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
    - c. I Cor. 1:21-25 - For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. {22} For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; {23} but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, {24} but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Conclusion: