

# **MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL**

## **SECOND DIVISION**

### **II. 1:14-4:34 *WHAT IS THE MESSIAH'S "WORKING" PLAN?***

#### **FIFTH SECTION: THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A FIELD**

Mark 4:1-34

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

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### II. 1:14-4:34 WHAT IS THE MESSIAH'S "WORKING PLAN"?

<b>KINGDOM</b> Colossians 1:12, 13; Eph 2:1-10	<b>PRIESTHOOD</b> 1 Peter 2:4-10; Hebrews 7:22-10:39	<b>BODY</b> Ephesians 5:22-33	<b>HOUSEHOLD</b> Ephesians 2:19-22	<b>FIELD</b> 1 Corinthians 3:6-9
1:14,15 To <b>Galilee</b> : A political entity He preached the kingdom Repent Believe	1:32-34 At the <b>door</b> <b>Received</b> people Ministered to them A priest at the door	2:13-17 Called Levi <b>Doctor for the sick</b> Condemnation of law upon sinners The Savior of sinners	3:7-12 A great crowd came to Jesus from many regions The demons cried " <b>Son of God</b> "	4:1-9 The Sower Jesus at work <b>preaching (planting)</b>
1:16-20 4 Fishermen at the <b>Sea of Galilee</b> : A commercial scene Leave Follow	1:35-39 Early <b>prayer</b> <b>Represented</b> people to God <b>Preached</b> in towns <b>Represented</b> God to the people	2:18-22 <b>Disciples fast &amp; feast</b> The order of law - moral & spiritual orientation Help with God & help for living	3:13-19 <b>12 Apostles</b> called, appointed, designated to <b>be</b> with him He will send them and they will have authority	4:10-25 The Mystery to those who seek The Sower is " <b>interpreted</b> " ( <b>watering</b> ) for the 12 & others How to respond to parables?
1:21-28 The demon cast out in the <b>synagogue</b> : A religious scene Hear Obey	1:40-45 A leper cleansed <b>Sacrifice &amp; Priest</b> Jesus' testimony to the priests A sacrifice	2:23-28 They plucked grain <b>because of their hunger</b> Spirit of law - our real needs met - Lord of Sabbath is concerned	3:20-30 <b>Holy Spirit</b> " <b>House</b> ", " <b>Eat</b> ", " <b>Family</b> ", " <b>Kingdom</b> ", Unity, strength, holiness.	4:26-32 Seed parables <b>Growth</b> through invisible agent (God) Miraculous <b>growth</b>
1:29-31 Peter's Mother-in-law healed at <b>home</b> : A domestic scene Rise Serve	2:1-12 A paralytic and a break-in <b>Sins forgiven</b> <b>By God's authority</b> The way to God	3:1-6 <b>A hand</b> healed Save life or kill? Do good or evil? Purpose of the Law is that we do good. Each member is important	3:31-35 The family called. <b>Mother, brothers, and sisters?</b> <b>Whoever</b> does God's will.	4:33,34 Jesus spoke only in parables Jesus explained everything to <b>his own disciples (The field)</b>

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

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#### FIFTH SECTION: *THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A FIELD*

Mark 4:1-34

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The outline:

I. The parable of the sower, 4:1-9

- The Jack fruit
- Spiritual farmers
- The sowing farmer
- Farming is hard work
- Physical and spiritual sustenance
- The ups and downs of planting

II. The parable explained, 4:10-25

- Shifting gears
- Those who 'stuck around' for more
- Drawing parallels
- Explanations help
- Disappointments and the bad soils
- Rootless
- Lots of worries, mate!
- God or mammon?
- The more you use the more you will be given

III. Two more parables about growth, 4:26-32

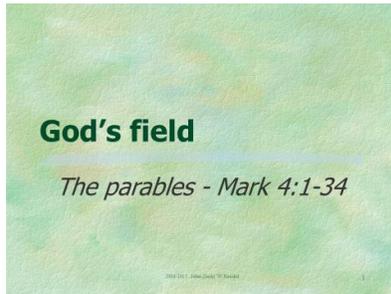
- Wow, you are so much taller!
- The truth about growth
- Great growth!
- The invisible agent
- Growth in numbers and in depth
- For the birds!

IV. "A full personal and private explanation!" - Parables and explanations, 4:33-34

- Just stories!
- Stories *and* explanations!

Questions to aid in the study of this section, Mark 4:1-34

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL



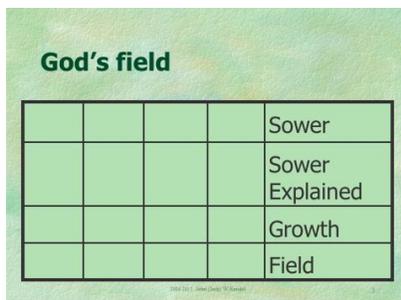
In this division of the gospel Jesus described the kingdom using the parables. Parables are a form of story.



In this case the image is that of a field. Let's read what Paul says about the kingdom as a field in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

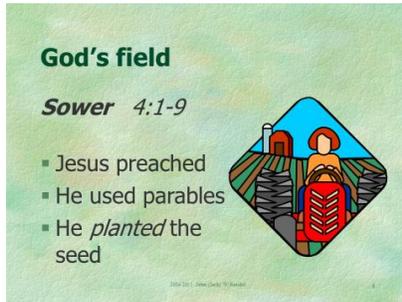
*5 ¶ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building (NAS95).*

These four parables and their explanations fit into the second division in the last section, or column on the table of contents. What Paul wrote to the Corinthians about God's field lines up with the main elements or sections of Mark's description of Jesus' preaching using parables about sowers, seed, grounds, growth and field.



# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

## I. The parable of the sower, 4:1-9



### The Jack fruit

I discovered a particular kind of tropical fruit when I was in India. It is larger than a football and is green, or greenish yellow. It has little bumps all over the outside, something like goose bumps, but bigger. Really, it is quite ugly. You could not guess its name. It is called the 'Jack fruit'. So my name is identified with fruit. But all who follow Jesus, are identified in Scripture with fruit, the fruit of the Spirit found in John 15 and Galatians 5:22, 23.

### Spiritual farmers

The young son of one of our coworkers in Operation Mobilization, was talking to the church pianist. The pianist asked him: What do you want to be when you grow up? God has wonderful *plans* for you.

He answered: Does that mean I'll have to be a farmer?

The pianist asked: No, why?

He answered: Because you said something about wonderful *plants*!

(A quote from Cody [Patrick] Currey, Currey Family Newsletter, summer 2001)

In a sense the Lord wants us all to be *spiritual* farmers. He commanded his disciples to look out on the harvest fields (John 4:35-38), but these verses imply the involvement of others besides Jesus' disciples so we can take the exhortation from Jesus as one we should all accept. He taught his followers to pray that the Lord will send workers in his harvest (Matthew 9:35-38).

We come now to a part of the gospel dealing with farms, fields, seeds, fruit and harvests.

Once again Jesus was by the lake teaching. Again the crowds are so large he had to get into a boat and teach from the boat. He taught many things by parables. This was how Jesus started his preaching. He addressed the large crowds and later we see the next step he took. While he started with the crowds he went on to teach another group, those who stayed to listen to more of what he said. The writer also says that he taught them many things and yet in this gospel he only really refers to just a few parables at this point, and they have to do with fields, seeds and farming. He limited his material to this image and symbolism. In this section he was describing the kingdom as a field.

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

## **The sowing (planting) farmer**

Jesus told the story of the farmer who goes out to plant seed in his field. The crowds may have even been able to see someone sowing his field, not far from where Jesus was teaching them by the lake. Jesus was in fact telling the story about himself. There was a parallel between the farmer sowing the seed in the field and Jesus preaching of the Word of God. Later he explained that the farmer sowed the Word. Paul developed the same idea in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 when he took up the image of the field. He writes, "I planted ...." He started the work. He pioneered.

What were the basic elements of the story?

1. The farmer. He works by sowing seed.
2. The seed. It is scattered. Its destiny or results will be determined by the grounds at least to some degree especially left to itself.
3. The bad grounds:
  - a. The path. Here the ground was bare and hard so the seed remained on the surface and the birds came and ate it up.
  - b. The rocky places. It did not have much soil. The seed sprang up quickly because it did not have much soil. But with the sun the plants were scorched and withered for lack of root.
  - c. The thorns. The thorns grew and choked the plants so they did not bear grain.
4. The good grounds: On the good ground it came up, grew, and produced a crop.
  - a. Multiplying 30 times
  - b. " 60 "
  - c. " 100 "

What can we say about Jesus' teaching? It was simple but sufficient. It was graphic and yet sane. It was inspiring yet sensible.

## **Farming is hard work**

For people in an agrarian society the impact of this parable must have been great. It has its impact on us who are not farmers. Some of us may have experiences on a farm at some point in our lives. My grandfather was a farmer in Michigan and I worked with him. Farming was hard work.

I was 'dying' to drive the big tractor and finally one day that happened. Grandpa had carried me in his lap on the tractor when I was younger. I was getting the feel for driving it. One day he told me to get on the tractor alone, so I finally drove off to the field on my own. He gave me a field to disc and drag. This broke up the large clods of dirt turned over by the plow. I was thrilled and enjoyed that so much, at least for awhile. I went up the field; I went down the field. I turned around and went up the field and down the field. About the 20th time I did that I began to realize just how boring it might all turn out to be. This was going to be work.

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

What is more, I was not in an air conditioned and heated cabin but out in the hot air of summer with the gasoline fumes blowing in my face! There was no CD or DVD player on that tractor, and I did not have an iPod. Another job I had was to walk along behind grandpa as he drove through a field and to pick up the stones. I would walk behind and occasionally hop up on the tractor and ride if the distance between stones was great. I was not so keen on that job. I wasn't driving.

So it is with spiritual work there may be long periods of hard, maybe even less than "inspiring" work! As the farmer perseveres on the job so must we. The practical application is incredibly apropos. When we worked door to door visiting people in Granada, Spain, 1971-72, we spent two years covering the city 2½ times door to door. We set up book tables in the main plazas and distributed many books and tracts. We witnessed to many people and visited again and again those who showed some interest.

## **Physical and spiritual sustenance**

In the time of the Judges Israel came to appreciate its crops. From time to time the Midianites invaded the land and carried off all the food and cattle. The Israelites retreated to caves and dens in the mountains and hid their crops from the enemy (Judges 6:3-6). Gideon was called by God to throw off this scourge, and where did the angel of the Lord find Gideon? He was grinding wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites (Judges 6:11ff).

Earlier there is a story about Acsah the wife of Othniel who asked her father for a field and because it was in the desert region she asked for water. He gave her the upper and lower springs (Joshua 10:15-19; Judges 1:11-15). She had a vision for developing that land and producing crops. With some water she could turn the arid land into a garden. She was ready for hard work. She not only had to work the ground but had to irrigate it as well. Acsah would have appreciated parables!

There is a beautiful story in the time of the Judges about a Moabite woman who came back to Israel with her mother-in-law, Naomi. They were both widows and poor. She went into the fields of Boaz to pick up the wheat left behind by the reapers (The book of Ruth).

Samson got revenge on the Philistines by burning their fields of grain. Later he was made to grind their corn in Gaza after they captured him. The prophets used vineyards, orchards and fields to illustrate God's relationship with Israel, his people (Judges 15:4-6; 16:21).

In reality one of the main issues in all these stories was the issue of feeding the hungry. People need sustenance. God fed his people miraculously in the desert with manna (Exodus 16:15, 35; Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 78:24; John 6:31). When they reached Canaan the manna was cut off because they could eat the fruit of the land (Joshua 5:12). The parables of Jesus were given to feed his generation and many succeeding ones spiritually. Jesus has given us spiritual food to sustain us. Using another image we could say his life and teachings are like spiritual and moral 'adrenalin'!

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

## The ups and downs of planting

The Lord had Jim stop in the flurry and demands of his activities as a school principal in Africa to speak to someone the word of God. He described it like this:

“I didn’t really have the time to stop and chit-chat. It had been a typical jam-packed week with staff meetings, a few trips to a nearby city to get the copier fixed ... again, Bible classes for grades 3-6, letters to type and school board minutes to send out. Now, just after being the narrator for our 5th/6th grade musical, “Joseph the Dreamer”, I was headed to a high school, for conferences with Danny’s (his son) teachers. But there was an urgency in Mrs. Nagi’s (name changed) voice that prompted me to slow up and respond,

‘Well maybe we can talk for a few minutes here outside the chapel.’

I remembered back to a year ago when (our school) had agreed to accept Mrs. Nagi’s daughter, Isa for third grade, we knew we were admitting a ... family (of another religious background, our school being a Christian school). During that year though, Isa accepted Christ as her own Savior after seeing a film at ... (our school) called “Sammy Morris”. (This had been very meaningful to *my wife*, ... as she remembered her own commitment in grade three to Christ after seeing the same film!) With that in mind, in spite of feeling the pressure of time, I began to listen to Miriana Nagi’s story. Just a short time into our conversation I knew this (conversation) ... far outweighed my afternoon plans.

Miriana was dissatisfied with her purposeless life. Her marriage was crumbling, and her personal quest for peace and joy was short-circuiting in confusion and disillusionment.

‘Mr. C\_\_\_\_\_, I guess what I’m trying to say is, I need a reason to keep going in life.’

‘... Lord!’ I silently prayed. ‘She initiated this. ... how open this lady is. Please help me share the answers for life I’ve found in you.’”

Jim led Miriana to Christ that afternoon. The Lord called on Jim to plant His word in her heart.

Since then I saw Jim in March of 2004, and he shared honestly with me that Miriana has not been following the Lord. I was thankful for his honesty. This is the reality of the ministry. But let’s not give up on praying for people in whose hearts God’s word has been planted. Will Miriana prove to be amongst those who produce 30, 60 and 100 fold or amongst those who are overwhelmed by the devil, the world and their own inner struggles?

When it comes to sowing, pioneers are needed; evangelists are needed; every follower of Jesus is needed. You can pray for peoples all over the world who do not yet have a witness about Jesus or a church.

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

## II. The parable explained, 4:10-25



### Shifting gears

My father went to a small church in the country and heard the gospel preached. It was a few miles from home. Later he invited his oldest sister to accompany him. It was quite a trek back and forth but she had a driver's license. My aunt wasn't very comfortable shifting the gears on the old Model A Ford so they came to an arrangement. She would steer the car and dad would change the gears for her. He told her when to press down on the clutch and he would move the stick. That's how, I was told, they got to church. It shows just how keen they were to hear more and grow in the faith. Their testimony led to the salvation of my grandparents.

### Those who 'stuck around' for more

To those people, the twelve and those with them, was given the secret of the kingdom. Jesus explained the parable of the sower to them. They came for more. They wanted an explanation. They asked him about the parables. He explained the parables to them, for the secret of the kingdom belonged to them. However, he kept teaching those on the outside with parables. It seems quite obvious that you could pass from one on the outside to one on the inside by gathering with those who wanted further explanation. The key was to be interested in coming back for more.

As for those on the outside Jesus proclaimed some very ominous words. He took up a chant from Isaiah 6:9 and 10. "*They may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven (NIV).*" The purpose of these stories was not to entertain as some may very well have thought. No, these stories were given to lead people to repentance and forgiveness.

### Drawing parallels

Then Jesus explained the parable of the sower, after directing a rebuke at them. Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? This is an issue. These disciples did want more so they gathered around Jesus. But that still did not cause them to understand the parable's meaning spiritually. They needed someone to teach them. They needed someone who could draw the parallels between the physical elements of the story and what they meant spiritually. Jesus provided that teacher that they needed. He was that teacher. Most believers need teachers just like that.

The Corinthian church profited much from the teaching of a man powerful in the Word, Apollos (Acts 18:24; 19:1). Paul referred to him when he wrote to the church in Corinth as the one that

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

God used to water the seed. Paul expanded on the idea that God has raised up leadership in the church in the persons of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They are used to perfect the saints for the work of ministry according to Ephesians chapter 4.

At the same time we must remind ourselves that being an evangelist, pastor or teacher is not to enhance those peoples' reputations or position but to explain their service to the saints. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians, the one who plants and the one who waters are nothing, but rather God who gives the increase or the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are simply fellow servants with the same purpose. Is it not amazing that Jesus should give himself to that tough work day by day of teaching and explaining, hour after hour?

## **Explanations help**

Most of the parable of the sower is given to explaining the bad grounds on which the seed falls. The preacher is the sower. The seed is the Word being preached. There are really two types of ground, good and bad. But under each of these categories are variations, which we experience in the work of the local church and in the work of missions as they reach out further and further into the unreached peoples of the world. Jesus' explanation helps us understand people who do not believe or apparently believe, and those who do truly believe.

Three categories are explained in both the good and the bad grounds.

Let me stop and turn this all around and begin with the good grounds. Remember that Jesus said that of the good grounds, some would produce 30, some 60 and some 100 fold. Let's understand that of those who do really respond with sincerity to the gospel some will produce more and others less. If you look at Dwight L. Moody, Bakht Singh, Watchman Nee, Billy Graham and wonder at how mightily God used them, remember that he foretold this in the parable of the sower. Some would produce 100 fold. It is tempting to look at one's self and wonder why I don't do as much as these renowned people of God. But this is explained when Jesus said some would produce 30 and some 60 fold. Keep something else in mind; in this world the final rewards are not given out. There may be many unknown people who are producing 100 fold. We just need to keep our hand on the plow and not look back.

## **Disappointments and the bad soils**

Now what about the bad soils? They are disappointing but we must be realistic in our ministry and understand why people fall away. The first is the pathway. This is where seed falls on the path and the devil comes and snatches it away right after they hear it. These people hardly have time to respond and the devil snatches the word away.

## **Rootless**

Other people are like the seed sown on rocky ground. They hear the word and receive it with joy but they are shallow with no root and wither when persecution or trouble comes because of the word. There will be those who apparently come to Christ in church planting and you think that this will be one of those people that the Lord will use to build his church in that difficult place. But it won't be long before the awful truth dawns and we realize that trouble has destroyed whatever these people had. They turn away; they back into the darkness.

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

N\_\_\_ had recently come to acknowledge and follow Christ. But now it was Carnival time in Brazil. The local church was leaving on a four day retreat during the fiestas. Forty were going! N\_\_\_ had been coerced into drinking just before the group gathered at the church to leave for the retreat. N\_\_\_ saw the group gathering and came to them. The crowd across the street jeered at him ... they became silent and disbanded as they saw him welcomed. The pastor, helped him shower, gave him coffee and stayed with him. He was embarrassed, sad, upset and sorry. He continues to follow as the Lord teaches him. The son of the bar tender has received Christ!

“Where is Alu? Not with us! The times I have managed to contact Alu by phone, since his return to the largest city of his country, he has seemed uncomfortable. He promises to meet me, or at least to call and set up a date, but he hasn’t. It is clear that he is avoiding us. He professed faith in Jesus, we saw growth in his life, but now we don’t know where he stands with the Lord. It may be that the family pressure was too strong for him. This is the tragic pattern of many new believers in this Middle Eastern land. Many profess faith, but 2 or 3 years later most are no longer walking with Jesus. We hope Alu is only going through a time of struggle and has not abandoned what he started with so much promise.” What Alistair and Nadia Brown (Not their real names) share in their newsletter is not unusual. The pressures are very real and in some places almost unbearable.

## **Lots of worries, mate!**

Others are like those who get choked by the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires of other things and they are unfruitful. The worries of life are common to all but they get through to people and they get so tied up by their worries that they are unfruitful. Their worries paralyze them. They can’t teach Sunday school; they can’t witness; and they can’t serve in the church. Their worries overwhelm them.

## **God or mammon?**

Riches can choke the word so that the person who is rich is unfruitful. Is it preoccupation with these riches? Is it the work it takes to guard and maintain riches?

The desire for other things makes the word unfruitful. Are we getting two jobs because we need the money or because we have a desire for other things? Could we drop the other job and serve the Lord by visiting, teaching, giving, and doing other activities to strengthen church and mission? Maybe it isn’t time but just a desire for these things. All we can do is think about them. We glue our nose to catalogues and spend hours dreaming! If we have to do some research to find the best article to buy it is understandable that we search the catalogues. Use them for what they should be used for.

The sower sows the word, the word of God. The secret of the kingdom is not to be kept secret. It is to be a light to those who seek. Maybe this is why Jesus repeats his words, *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear (4:9, 23 NIV).”*

## **The more you use the more you will be given**

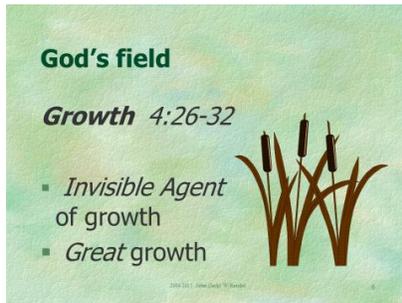
Jesus went on to another very important concept. The more you hear and use the more will be given to you. It is very important that you come back to hear more and more from Jesus. But we also need to use what we hear. The more we use of what we hear the more will be given to us.

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

The more we receive and the more we grow, using what we receive, the more will be given to us. Jesus continued pressing home this principle, “Whoever has will be given more ...”, but he also pointed out the opposite! Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. When we think of Judas Iscariote this principle rings a bell. Here was man who was one of the twelve, Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. He heard these things as did the rest but he did not apparently use what he heard for his own growth, and there came a day when his lack of all that he had heard and experienced was revealed. He was one who did not have, and even what he had, the outward trappings of a disciple, were taken from him.

What Jesus warned us about, and the case of Judas, seem to go hand in hand to help us understand that indeed there will be those who seem to be Jesus’ closest followers but in the end they are not, and are found completely wanting. Even their apparent commitment is stripped from them. There will be those of whom it is said, “Why, they were never true Christians in the first place!” And you will not be naive saying it.

### III. Two more parables about growth, 4:26-32



#### **Wow, you are so much taller!**

Have you had the experience of seeing a child after an interval of a year and have been surprised by how tall they were. It happened to me just recently. I went to a friend’s house and stopped for a moment in my tracks when I saw his older son. The boy had shot up several inches! All I could say was the old worn out, “Wow, you’ve gotten a lot taller!” It’s physical growth!

We have spiritual growth, too. People grow spiritually. After years of not seeing someone we are surprised that now they are pastoring, teaching others, leading folk to Christ, counseling others, directing Sunday schools and evangelistic teams, planting new churches, and serving humbly in the church and on ministry teams. We are profoundly amazed and deeply pleased by their maturity.

#### **The truth about growth**

Paul explained the truth about growth to us. He emphasized that God was the one who gave the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). In the parable about growth in Mark 4:26-29 Jesus mentioned that the farmer scattered seed on the ground. “*Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how (4:27 NIV).*” This is a farmer he is talking about, a man accustomed to the soil and how it is cultivated, prepared and sown with the seed. He knows all about cultivating and watering and finally harvesting the crops. But when it comes to growth he does not know how it happens, not really. He is heavily involved in all the steps

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

before, during and after growth, but growth itself is not his to accomplish. Isn't it refreshing to know that God gives the increase?! Growth is visible to the eye but how it occurs is a mystery.

Growth in the spiritual world is the same. We see the fruit of spiritual growth in a person's life but how it occurs under the surface, in the heart, is a mystery. God is at work! Paul put it this way in Philippians 2:12-13, "*12 So then, my beloved, even as ye (you) have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who worketh (works) **in you** both to will and to work, for his good pleasure (AV/KJV).*" First he puts their job of obeying squarely **on** them. Then he points out that God is at work **in** them. It is good to be challenged to obey. It is healthy for us. It is strengthening to us. Yet, how refreshing to know that God is at work **in** us. We are not flailing about aimlessly hoping against hope that what we do has any value. God is at work **in** those who believe and obey! It is amazing!

## **Great growth!**

But Jesus did not stop there. He pressed the lesson of growth home. He told us that God's growth is great growth! He referred to the mustard seed, which is extremely small, yet when planted it grows into a tall plant in the garden, so large that the birds can nest in its branches.

## **The invisible agent**

So the kingdom of God has an invisible agent who brings growth in a person's life who follows Jesus, just as there is an invisible agent that makes a tiny mustard seed grow into a large plant. That invisible agent is God (Philippians 2:12-13). Because this invisible agent is God the possibilities for growth are enormous. What is impossible with man is possible with God. While the visible church is not necessarily the mirror image of the invisible church, for nominalism is ever with us, the size and growth of the visible church may give some idea of the growth of the true or real church. Today the visible Christian church is the largest religious grouping in the world. Only the judgment of Christ will eventually reveal to us the truth. Even if true Christianity is not the largest religious grouping in the world it is extensive and found in every continent and in thousands of people groups.

## **Growth in numbers and in depth**

Three hundred to four hundred thousand Christians now worship in 2,000 churches across one of the countries of Asia, according to Luis Bush. In 1991 it was 50,000 Christians, up from only 25 in 1961. Three to four hundred believers were imprisoned for converting or baptizing converts between 1961 and 1991. All this is true in spite of the fact that the new constitution grants freedom of religion but there remains a state religion and 'proselytism' is still forbidden.

The growth is not just numerical according to reports that reach us from time to time. Daniel Ho, Director of the National Evangelical Fellowship in another country of Asia, says that country has seen 600 new churches since 1992, making Christianity the country's fastest growing religion. He believes the NEF's goal of planting 4,000 new churches before the year 2000 will be reached. The Anglican church seems to be leading the way. Adds Ho: 'It is not unusual to hear of churches which pray all night and hold regular days of prayer and fasting.' (News Bytes, March 1996, editor Debbie Meroff, from DAWN FRIDAY FAX 2 Feb. '96)

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

May growth in my church or my ministry team be in depth as well as in numbers!

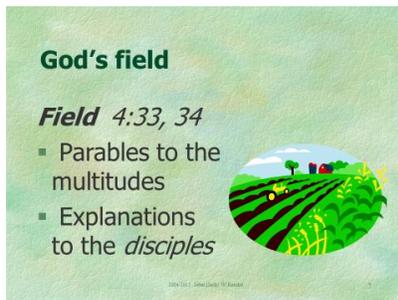
So why has the word of the good news of Jesus not reached every people group in the world? Maybe we have not persisted in reaching every one. Let us refocus and go for “gold” when it comes to reaching the world for Christ and seeing his kingdom grow in every nation. God is the agent of growth, it seems we have but to obey, planting and watering the seed. Matthew 9:38 exhorts us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send workers into the harvest fields.

## For the birds!

Someone might ask what the birds in the parable of the mustard seed represent. In the parable of the sower we are told they represent Satan who snatches the seed that was sown in them. This parable of the mustard seed is shorter and seems to emphasize growth but not just growth, great growth. Do the birds simply picture growth because a plant that can sustain the weight of birds is bigger than most vegetables or grain? Or could they represent all those who would enter the church that were really foreign to it because they were not true believers and followers? The parable, found elsewhere about wheat and tares, pictures the true believers mixed with the false (Matthew 13:24-30).

Another might find in the birds those who are benefited in some way by the church while neither claiming to be a part of it nor trying to falsely imitate it. It is a comfortable place to get out of the sun and into the shade. Maybe Mark is not really making a point of any of these things here but rather emphasizing the great growth that takes place when God is at work in us. Remember that the text says, ‘... with such **big** branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade’ (4:32 NIV).

## IV. A full personal and private explanation! - parables and explanations, 4:33-34



## Just stories!

Jesus persisted in his use of parables to teach. You might say he enticed people to listen, to be inquisitive and finally to ask for an explanation. For those who gathered but would only listen to the stories, they only heard stories. They did not understand and hear the spiritual explanation.

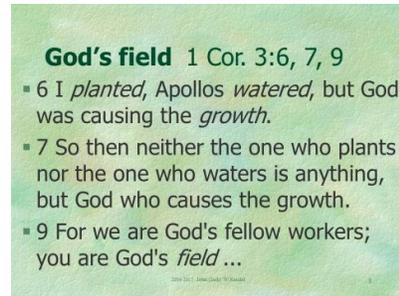
## Stories and explanations!

How encouraging to hear that when Jesus was alone with his own disciples he explained everything. Jesus had entered Galilee preaching the kingdom of God. He did this on the heels of his herald John being arrested. What he was doing was fraught with danger. He proceeded to do it all alone. Soon he was gathering a group of close followers who listened and believed and

# MARK: OUR PREACHING MANUAL

wanted more. When they came for more he obliged them. Here it says in 4:34, “he explained everything.” Do you have a few questions about the Bible and the teachings of Jesus? It seems that to his own disciples, at least in those days, he explained everything. Will he do it again for us? Would that depend on how badly we want to know?

If you have a desire from the Lord to enter the ministry and spend your life explaining the Scriptures to others, know this, that if you come to the Lord for understanding and return to learn more from the Bible week by week, He will explain it to you. Then you will be able to explain it to others! What a joy! What a thrill!



Let's remember Paul's explanation in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 and 9. Some plant, some water, God gives the increase and we are God's field!

## Questions to aid in the study of this section, Mark 4:1-34

1. Who are the 4 groups of people involved in God's field?
2. How does Jesus personally illustrate what he is teaching through the parables?
3. In this immediate context of Mark 4:1-34 how does Jesus perform the work of both the one who plants and the one who waters?
4. Who is not named specifically in the parables but who is indispensable to spiritual growth? (4:26-32)
5. There are people 'out there' who want spiritual mentors. If you haven't thought about this before then make a short list of people for whom you could pray. Who are the people in whom God would like you to plant or water spiritual seed.
6. As preachers, evangelists, pastors, teachers and those who disciple others what hope do we have to be able to explain the Scriptures to people?