

KINGDOM.

LESSON 9

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> 1 SAMUEL 2, 3, 7 and 8
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your personal times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (1 Samuel chapters 2, 3, 7 and 8). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN ROMANS]</i> (3) ROMANS 2:5
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Review two by two.

(3) Romans 2:5. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]</i> THE SEED GROWING IN SECRET and THE YEAST and THE MUSTARD SEED
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**“The parable of the seed growing in secret” in Mark 4:26-29,
“the parable of the yeast” in Luke 13:20-21
and “the parable of the mustard seed” in Mark 4:30-32 are parables about
THE GROWTH OF GOD'S KINGDOM.**

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal.

We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

A. THE PARABLE OF THE SEED GROWING IN SECRET.

Read Mark 4:26-29.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The growth of a plant is a mystery. In the realm of nature, “growth” is always a mystery! Whether it is the growth of plants or trees, or of animals or people, nobody can adequately explain why and how growth takes place! The farmer scatters the seed on his field, fully realising that he cannot cause those seeds to grow. He lacks all control over the processes of germination, sprouting, growth, fruit forming and fruit bearing. Many days and nights pass in which the farmer does nothing to the plants and yet, growth takes place! But he does not know *how*! All the farmer can do is trust that the seeds will grow and wait patiently till the harvest-time. To be sure, he can cover the seeds with soil, pull up the weeds, loosen the soil, add fertiliser, perhaps even give water to the plants and protect it from the glaring sun. All these things are important, but they do not cause the growth!

The seed of a plant is a potential miracle. All by itself, without any visible cause and apart from any human help, the seed in the soil sprouts, grows a tall stalk, forms an ear and finally develops the full grain in the ear. It is as if *God has entrusted the secret or mystery of growth to a tiny seed*, so that now, as it were, the seed knows exactly what it has to do, when to do it and how to do it. God has entrusted a great potential power or ability to the tiny seed.

The growth stages. The transition from one stage of growth to the next is so gradual that it is imperceptible. The farmer cannot indicate the precise moment when the tall stalk develops into an ear, or when rows of full kernels are produced in the ear. But under normal conditions, growth is inevitable. Nothing can stop the growth process.

The harvest points to success and victory. Mark 4:29 literally says, “Whenever the fruit or crop permits, at once he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” The description of the harvest is dramatic: “At once”, when the harvest-time comes, the farmer will harvest the crop without any delay!

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of this parable is found in Mark 4:1-25 and 30-34.

From Mark 4:33-34, it would appear that when Jesus spoke the parable of the sower in verse 3-9, the parable of the seed growing in secret in verse 26-29 and the parable of the mustard seed in verse 30-32, he was speaking to the crowds. It says, “With many similar parables (as these three parables) Jesus spoke the Word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.”

(2) The story of this parable is contained in Mark 4:26-29.

(3) The explanation or application.

Jesus does not explain the parable. The parable must therefore be interpreted from the story itself and its context. (See E).

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The sower or farmer. Some Christians believe that the man or farmer in the parable of the seed growing in secret represents Jesus Christ, because in the parable of the weeds among the wheat the sower of the wheat is Jesus Christ. But that would mean that Jesus Christ does not know how the seed germinates, grows and bears fruit. That would introduce a thought into the parable that is foreign to the central point or main message. Thus, in the parable of the seed growing in secret, “the sower” or farmer is not an essential or relevant detail of the parable. He only enhances the story.

The seed scattered on the ground. Jesus does not explain this. In the story it is the first stage of growth and as such it is a relevant detail of the parable. The seed must be related to God’s kingdom (kingship), that is, God’s sovereign reign in the hearts and lives of people. It may point to the God’s Word that is sown in peoples’ hearts and bears much fruit (Mark 4:14). It may point to God’s gracious and sovereign work through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, convicting the world of guilt in regard to sin and convincing them of righteousness and judgement (John 16:8). Or it may point to God’s extensive work, causing the gospel and his Word to be proclaimed from one place to the next and from one nation to another (Matthew 24:14).

The transitional stages of the plant. The transition from one stage to another is imperceptible. The various stages of the growth of the plant, like sprout, stalk, head and full kernel in the head, are not explained or applied by Jesus. They reinforce the idea of the potential power of the seed to grow through all these stages towards maturity and the harvest. Thus, the transitional stages of growth of the plant should not be given *separate* meanings. *They do not represent specific identifiable stages of spiritual growth in individuals, or stages in world evangelisation.*

The harvest. Like in the parable of the weeds among the wheat, “the harvest” reminds of the final judgement when Jesus Christ returns. However, Jesus does not explain or apply this detail. It only reinforces the idea that God’s sovereign and irresistible work through his word in the hearts and lives of Christians cannot be frustrated. God’s work will succeed and it will bear fruit!

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A

parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the seed growing in secret in Mark 4:26-29 is a parable about “the growth of God’s kingdom”.

The main message of this parable is the following. “Not man, but God alone is the Author of spiritual growth. God alone is the Author of the establishment and progress of his kingdom, that is, his reign in the hearts and lives and spheres of people on earth.”

God’s sovereign will causes the Word of God in the Bible to assert its increasingly powerful influence upon the hearts and lives of people and thus also on society in general. This fact is a great comfort and an encouragement to Christians. Christians should wait patiently for the harvest to arrive, because when it arrives, it will arrive in total victory! God’s plan concerning his kingdom must be carried out and is certainly going to be carried out! The coming of God’s kingdom is irresistible!

- God’s kingdom is a present kingdom - it has come at the first coming of Christ!
- God’s kingdom is a continually transforming kingdom – it has continual transforming influence in the hearts and lives of Christians, makes them more Christ like and causes them to bear more fruit.
- God’s kingdom is a continually extending kingdom – it spreads all the time to all the people groups on earth and to an increasing number of people on earth!
- God’s kingdom is a future kingdom – at the second coming, God’s kingdom will be a complete and perfect kingdom. A great multitude of saved people that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language will stand before the throne of Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:9) and this present earth will be totally renewed (2 Peter 3:10-13)!

The seed grows according to its own inherent God-given laws, which the sower (farmer) cannot see. Likewise, God’s gracious and sovereign work in God’s kingdom grows according to God’s gracious and sovereign will!

Realising and acknowledging God’s sovereignty (his eternal plan, his sovereign will that will be done and his almighty power that enables him to carry it out) is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom acknowledge their complete dependence on God. They are dependent on God for their salvation from beginning to end and for their spiritual growth in every aspect of their lives. They are dependent on God for the establishment of their congregations everywhere and for their lasting influence in the societies in which they live. And they are dependent on God for the final and irresistible completion and perfection of everything!

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Read. Isaiah 55:10-11; 14:24,27; Psalm 138:8.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable teaches?

Notes.

In Isaiah 55:10-11 is written, “As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God’s words in the Bible will accomplish what God desires and will achieve the purpose for which he has sent it!

Likewise, God will fulfil his purpose for each of his children and he will never abandon the works of his hands (Psalm 138:8)! What he began, he will continue and finish (Philippians 1:6). All God’s purposes will become reality and no one can stop him from carrying out his purposes (Isaiah 14:24,27)!

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or messages of the parable? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

This parable is a warning against so much human enthusiasm, human idealism and human impatience with regard to God’s work. People ask, “Why does God not establish the fullness of his kingdom sooner in this dark and broken world?” The result is often discouragement, pessimism, doubt, and the loss of diligence and perseverance. This parable wants to turn our pessimism into optimism and trustful idealism. Wherever we sow, there will one day be a harvest! Even if there is much we do not understand, God’s plan and programme cannot and will not fail!

This fact does not rule out the fact that Christians should work together with God (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). But the parable of the seed growing in secret emphasises God's sovereign work in the hearts and lives of people. That is why God says, "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light!

B. THE PARABLE OF THE YEAST.

Read Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The quantity of meal. The Bible literally says that the woman "took yeast and hid it in three measures of meal until it worked all through the dough." "A measure" (Aramaic and Greek: sata) is estimated to be one third of an ephah, thus about 7.3 litres. This was quite a large quantity of meal, in total about 22 litres of meal (Genesis 18:6; Judges 6:19; 1 Samuel 1:24).

Yeast. Yeast is a substance consisting of fungous cells. These cells develop by germination in contact with sugar liquids and produce fermentation. Yeast is used in making wine and in raising bread.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

- (1) The setting of this parable is the same as that of the other parables in Matthew 13:3-35 and Luke 13:18-21.

It shows that Jesus spoke the parables of the yeast and the mustard seed to the crowds in close connection with the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds among the wheat.

- (2) The story of this parable is contained in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21.

- (3) The explanation or application.

Jesus does not explain the parable. The parable must therefore be interpreted from the story itself and its context. (See E).

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Teach. Whenever Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is *like* ..." he wants to teach what happens during the reign of God now on earth and what will certainly happen when the reign of God in its final phase is unfolded at the second coming of Jesus Christ. On the final judgement day, events described in the parables will certainly have taken place. This means that people living today are included in the events described in the parables! Each parable of Jesus Christ has a message for you and me today!!!

Discuss. Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The yeast. The yeast is a relevant detail, because Jesus compares the kingdom of God with it. However, this detail has been interpreted differently by different Christians. In the Bible, a particular symbol may have either a bad or a good significance, depending on the context. For example, the symbol of "a serpent" is *bad* in Genesis 3:13, where it represents Satan, who deceived Eve and tempted her to sin (It is also *bad* in Psalm 140:3; Proverbs 23:32, Isaiah 27:1, Matthew 23:33, 2 Corinthians 11:3 and in Revelation 12:9). However, the symbol of "the serpent" is *good* in Numbers 21:8, where it symbolised Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross (It is also good in John 3:14). Likewise the word "lion" represents Satan in 1 Peter 5:8 and Jesus Christ in Revelation 5:5.

Likewise, the symbol of "yeast" has a *bad* meaning in Matthew 16:6, where Jesus warns against the teachings and religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their teachings consisted of human efforts to attain justification (salvation) and their religion consisted of outward conformity to their man-made standards. They disliked wholehearted devotion to truth and righteousness. Jesus called their teaching and religion "yeast", because, like an increasingly penetrating principle, it influenced their own as well as other people's lives. The symbol of "yeast" also has a *bad* meaning in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, where Paul denounced the wrong sort of glorying about spiritual gifts, which at the same time tolerated internal division and sexual immorality in the congregation. The main vice of the Corinthian congregation was spiritual pride.

But in the parable of the yeast, the symbol "yeast" has a *good* meaning. Jesus teaches clearly that it represents "the kingdom or kingship of God", that is, "the reign of God, which is wholeheartedly acknowledged in the hearts and lives

of Christians.” Yeast has the characteristic to ferment until it has permeated the whole batch of dough. Thus, “yeast” represents the transforming influence of the kingdom or kingship of God in life!

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the yeast in Luke 13:20-21 is a parable about “the growth of God’s kingdom”.

The main message of the parable is the following. “Once the reign of God has been established in the hearts of Christians, it will continue its process of influence until it has transformed and renewed everything!”

This parable emphasises especially the inward growth of the kingdom of God (cf. Luke 17:21). The reign of God in the hearts of Christians will affect every sphere of their personal lives. It will save them, preserve them and recreate every aspect of their personality, character, behaviour, relationships, work and ministry.

Realising and acknowledging the sovereign work of God in the inward growth of his kingdom is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom acknowledge God’s complete sovereignty in all matters that relate to the inward growth of his kingdom. The kingdom in its final stage will have permeated the whole personality of everyone who will be a part of the new heaven and new earth. Christians will become completely Christ-like (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:1-3).

C. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Read Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The mustard seed. This seed is of Egyptian origin and it is the smallest seed among seeds that are sown in a garden. Proverbially it indicates anything very minute in its beginning. But though insignificant at first, the mustard seed grows and grows until it becomes a tree.

The mustard tree. In Palestine, the mustard tree is a very large garden plant and can reach a height of three to five metres. In the autumn, its branches become rigid so that many birds come to take shelter in it. The Bible says, they come “to make their tents” in its branches. Thus, the birds come to shelter from the storm, rest from weariness, and shade from the heat of the sun. They also come to feed on the very small black seeds, which they remove from the pods, but this feature is not mentioned in the parable. Thus, all in all, the picture of the mustard tree is that of a wonderful place to make one’s home!

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

- (1) The setting of this parable is the same as that of the other parables in Matthew 13:3-35 and Luke 13:18-21.

It shows that Jesus spoke the parables of the yeast and the mustard seed to the crowds in close connection with the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds among the wheat.

- (2) The story of this parable is contained in Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19.

- (3) The explanation or application.

Jesus does not explain the parable. The parable must therefore be interpreted from the story itself and its context. (See E).

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The mustard seed. It is a relevant detail, because Jesus compares the kingdom of God with it. Because this is the *smallest* of the seeds of the garden plants, it represents the insignificant small beginning of the kingdom of God in the world.

The mustard tree. It is also a relevant detail, because the mustard seed becomes a very useful mustard tree. The mustard tree, which is *a very large* garden plant and gives a place for the birds of heaven to make their tents, represents the significant great results of the kingdom of God in the world.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the mustard seed in Mark 4:30-32 is a parable about “the growth of God’s kingdom”.

The main message of the parable is the following. “Although the kingdom of God has an insignificant small beginning, it grows to have significant great results in the world!”

This parable emphasises especially the visible and outward growth of the kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 24:14). The reign of God in the hearts and lives of Christians will eventually affect every sphere of life in the world. It will save many other people in the world, preserve them and recreate their family life, education, health services, government, justice system, industry, commerce, etc. It will lead to the founding of many new churches (congregations) everywhere in the world and to the conversion of an innumerable number of people in every religion, country and culture.

Realising and acknowledging the sovereign work of God in the outward growth of his kingdom is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom acknowledge God’s complete sovereignty in all matters that relate to the outward extension of his kingdom. The kingdom in its final manifestation will encompass everything that will be a part of the new heaven and the new earth. All things in the universe and on earth will be brought under the headship of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:10). Christians of all the different nations in the world will bring the splendour, glory and honour of their cultures into God’s kingdom (Revelation 21:24-27). They will take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). Nothing that causes sin or is impure will ever enter it (Matthew 13:41; Revelation 21:27).

D. A COMPARISON OF THE PARABLES OF GROWTH WITH EACH OTHER

Discover and discuss. How do these parables compare with one another?

Notes.

(1) The parable of the sower.

Read Mark 4:3-9. This parable emphasises the human responsibility with respect to the seed, the Word of God. The seed cannot sprout, grow, and bear fruit unless it falls into good soil. It means that the gospel or the message of the New Testament will only bear fruit when the heart of man responds favourably to it. Man always has a responsibility to respond favourably to the Word of God. Once an expert in the law asked Jesus, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied by asking him, “What is written in the Bible? How do you read it?” The expert in the law replied, “You must love God with everything and your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus commended him and challenged him, “You have answered correctly. *Do this* and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28). The preacher or teacher of God’s Word must not only explain the word of God, but must always challenge the hearers to respond favourably to the Word of God!

(2) The parable of the seed growing in secret.

Read Mark 4:26-29. This parable emphasises the divine sovereignty with respect to the seed, the establishment and progress of his kingdom through his Word and his Spirit. No man, but God alone is the Author of physical and spiritual growth! God alone causes the establishment and progress of his kingdom on earth. God alone causes the establishment and progress of his reign in the hearts, lives and spheres of people. It is because of his sovereign will that the spiritual seed, the Word of God, asserts its increasingly powerful influence upon the hearts of people and consequently on society in general.

(3) The parable of the yeast and the parable of the mustard seed.

Read Mark 4:30-32 and Matthew 13:31-34. The parables of the sower and the seed growing in secret emphasise what we should do and what God does with regard to his Word in the areas of spiritual growth and bearing fruit. The parables of the yeast and the mustard seed, however, emphasise the abundant result of spiritual growth, when man co-operates with God.

Philippians 2:12-13 says, “Therefore, ... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Thus, when you work out your salvation (the parable of the sower), because God is working within you (the parable of the seed growing in secret), then abundant inward growth (the parable of the yeast) and extended outward growth (the parable of the mustard seed) will be the definite result! The parable of the yeast emphasises this inward growth (transformation), which the reign of God causes in the hearts, lives and spheres of people. The parable of the mustard seed emphasises this outward growth (extension), which the reign of God causes in every country in the world.

E. A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLES CONCERNING GROWTH IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Discuss. What are the main teachings or messages of the parables of growth? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) The main message.

The main message of these parables about the growth of God's kingdom is the following.

"When man's favourable response to God's word co-operates with God's irresistible work in his heart and life, abundant growth will be the result, both in the inward and outward life of man and in every sphere of human society in the world."

Philippians 2:12-13 says, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is GOD who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." When man willingly co-operates with God's sovereign work within him, then abundant growth is the result!

The parable of the sower emphasises the human responsibility to respond favourably to God's Word. The parable of the seed growing secretly emphasises the irresistible sovereign work of God's Word and Spirit in people and in the world. The parable of the yeast emphasises the inward growth (transformation) which the reign of God causes in the personal lives of individuals and the parable of the mustard seed emphasises the outward growth (extension) which the reign of God causes in the whole human society in the world.

(2) Spiritual growth is a mystery.

Mark 4:26-27 speaks of the mystery or secret of growth. Nobody can fully explain the secret of either physical or spiritual growth. We can observe growth and fruit bearing, but we cannot cause any person to grow and to bear fruit. As a matter of fact, John 15:5 says that of himself a person can do "nothing" (of eternal value). A person can only turn to God in true faith when God gives him the grace and power to do so. He cannot be converted unless he is first of all regenerated (Jeremiah 31:18; John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29; 2:12-13; 4:13).

It is only because of God's sovereign will that the Words of the Bible assert their increasingly powerful influence upon the hearts and lives of people and thus upon every sphere of human society in the world. Christians can evangelise the lost and disciple the saved, but they cannot cause people to be born-again, grow spiritually or bear fruit. Only God causes this kind of growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)! Christians must leave God's work to God and trust God to work!

(3) The Word of God has great potential power.

Mark 4:28 speaks of the potential power of the seed, that is, the Word of God. Apart from human help, God's Word knows what to do, when to do it and how to do it (Isaiah 55:10-11)! God's Word works in an irresistibly and sovereign way in the hearts of people (Jeremiah 23:28-29; Hebrews 4:12). God's Word travels from one person to another and from one nation to another (Acts 19:10,20). God's Word increasingly causes its power and influence to be felt in every sphere of life (1 Peter 1:22 - 2:3). That is why Christians make every effort to preach God's Word and see to it that God's Word is recognised and obeyed in every sphere of life, like the family, the congregation, the government, education, agriculture, industry, commerce, and mass communication.

(4) The harvest at the second coming will be the final victory.

Mark 4:29 speaks of the final victory at the harvest-time at the end of the age. The complete victory of God's kingdom is absolutely sure! All the time the harvest is approaching. At God's appointed time, Jesus Christ will return, gather all believers that have ever lived on earth (Matthew 25:31-33) before his throne in the sky (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and after the final judgement descend with them onto the new earth (Revelation 21:2-5). Then the kingdom in its final form will have been realised. God's plan and programme concerning his kingdom must be carried out and is certainly going to be carried out!

(5) God's kingdom is established by implantation from without.

The parable of the sower, of the weeds among the wheat, of the seed growing secretly, of the yeast and the mustard seed all teach that whenever Jesus Christ as Saviour and King enters human hearts, this happens by implantation from without! Nobody can pull himself up by his own shoelaces! Likewise, nobody can think, talk or work his way into God's kingdom by himself! No one can climb up a ladder (of the law, religious or good works or religion) to God. God takes the sovereign initiative and draws people to Christ (John 6:44,37). He takes the sovereign initiative to send Christ and other people to sow the seed of the gospel in your heart. They preach the gospel to you before you can even begin to respond by conversion and faith (Acts 13:46-48; Romans 10:14-17; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29). God works irresistibly through the Holy Spirit to cause the seed of the gospel to germinate, grow and bear fruit (Isaiah 55:10-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15).

(6) God's kingdom operates from within outward.

The parable of the yeast and of the mustard seed teach that once the reign of Christ through the Word and the Holy Spirit has been established in the heart of a person, it begins to operate also from within outward! The reign of Christ will continue its process of influence until it has transformed and renewed everything. "The kingship of Christ within"

(Luke 17:21) penetrates every aspect of a Christian's being and results in changing his thoughts, motives, attitudes, character, and his speaking, behaviour, relationships and ministry, just like yeast penetrates the whole batch of dough. And "the kingship of Christ without" exerts its influence for good in the person's own individual life, his circumstances, his family life and his life in society, just like the mustard tree becomes a place for the birds of the air to make their home.

The kingship of Christ is in the process of capturing every area of human life. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul states his purpose as a Christian worker, "We demolish (false) arguments (against Bible, Christ and Christians) and every pretension (claim of non-Christians) that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (the Bible), and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." God's kingdom not only brings people into a personal relationship with God, but its purpose is to bring every thought into submission and therefore in harmony with the mind of Jesus Christ. The kingship of Christ progressively brings more and more tongues to confess Christ as Lord and more and more knees to bow before him as Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

The great result of God's kingdom in the world is that every aspect of human culture and human endeavour begins to be blessed. Not only the Church, but also science, art, literature, education, farming, business, industry, commerce, government, and all the other departments of human thought and endeavour begin to be blessed by the activities of the Christians in society. Throughout the Christian era, Christians have had a great influence on the establishment of hospitals, care of the handicapped, the abolition of slavery, the restoration of woman's rights, the alleviation of poverty and the education of the illiterate. They have had a great influence on the promotion of honesty and incorruptibility among people who govern and do business and on the treatment of prisoners of war, of women, of the working classes and the underprivileged. The kingdom of God promotes truth, love, holiness, faithfulness, sincerity, courage and justice, etc. among the people on earth! The Bible does not teach that this ideal will be reached before the second coming of Christ. Only through the cataclysmic events at the second coming of Christ, will the kingdom of God in its perfect and final form be established. But meanwhile, the growth of God's kingdom is taking place through the proclamation of the gospel and through the obedience of Christians to God's Word.

(7) The outward manifestation of God's kingdom is gradual.

The parable of the mustard seed teaches that the beginning of God's kingdom is seemingly insignificant, but from this small beginning great results will grow. This truth is "a mystery" or "secret" (Matthew 13:11), which needs further clarification or re-emphasis.

Christ's loyal followers were often impatient. Relatively speaking, this group was so small and weak that at times they must have almost despaired. They also looked for revolutionary changes or cataclysmic events to happen immediately or at least very soon (Matthew 21:8-9; Luke 9:54; John 6:15; Acts 1:6). They expected that Christ would immediately turn the whole world upside down, gather his people into his kingdom and destroy his enemies (cf. Matthew 3:10-12).

They may have thought of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the exaltation of Israel, its expansion among the nations and its cosmic significance during the Messianic age (Genesis 22:17-18; Psalm 72:8-11; cf. Isaiah 54:2-3; Isaiah chapters 60-62; Jeremiah 31:31-40; 32:36-44; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 2:12-13; 4:1-8; Micah chapter 5; Zechariah chapter 2; 8:18-23, etc.). For example, "Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him. ... In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you'." (Zechariah 8:22-23). When the Jews and the followers of Christ thought about these passages in the Old Testament, they often lifted them out of their contexts or explained them without the full light of the New Testament revelation concerning Israel.

The same Old Testament teaches that spiritual great results generally develop from small beginnings (cf. Isaiah 1:8-9; 11:1; 53:2-3; Ezekiel 17:22-24; Daniel 2:34-35,44; Zechariah 4:10). For example, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it'." (Ezekiel 17:22-24).

The truth that the kingdom of God will grow from a very small beginning to very great results is confirmed in the New Testament. Luke 12:32 says, "Do not be afraid, *little flock*, for your Father has been pleased to give you *the kingdom*." And in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, we read, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

The parables of growth in the New Testament teach that God's rule of grace, no matter how despised and seemingly insignificant at its beginning, is destined to go forward and continually conquer more and more people, their hearts, lives and every sphere of their lives. They encourage the followers of Christ to be patient, to trust and obey, to keep on praying and proclaiming the gospel, because God's plan and programme cannot fail and will not fail! When the gospel

of the kingdom (the kingship of Jesus Christ) has been preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, then the end will certainly come (Matthew 24:14)!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<i>[REACTIONS]</i> PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group *to pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	<i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i> FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study “the parable of the seed growing in secret”, “the parable of the yeast” and “the parable of the mustard seed” together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of 1 Samuel 15, 16, 17 and 18 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (4) Romans 2:15. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. Romans 3:1-20. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.