

Text— Mark 4:26-32

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

A number of years ago it was not uncommon to regularly hear about the so-called “church growth movement” – CGM – which was being pushed by various denominational and non-denominational leaders. The idea was to use all sorts of gimmicks, such as entertainment events, dinners and sales, to get people to come to a local church and join it. The big problem with the CGM was that while it may have filled pews and bolstered membership numbers, it never did make Christians— nor could it or can it do so.

The Holy Bible, God’s Word, is quite clear as to how people actually become true Christians, followers and sincere confessors of Christ, for the apostle Paul by inspiration of God states in 1 Corinthians 12:1-3, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” And how is it that the Holy Ghost works faith in Christ in the hearts of people? 1 Corinthians 1:21 answers, “after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Romans 10:17 adds, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Therefore, church growth gimmickry – such as promoted by the CGM – never actually grows the Holy Christian Church; rather, the Lord God grows His Church through His Holy Word.

Just prior to our Scripture selection for today is Jesus’ parable of the sower and the explanation of it which He gave to His disciples. It is quite clear in that parable that the Word of God is indeed the means by which the Kingdom of God, the Holy Christian Church, is grown.

Our sermon text for today reinforces the facts and can help us keep them straight in our minds as it tells us of:

“REAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH GROWTH”

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) How real Christian Church growth occurs
- 2) Why real Christian Church growth is amazing

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Verses 26 & 27, ----- (Mark 4:26-27)

Here Jesus enters upon relating another parable in which the power of God’s Word working among human beings is likened to seed, for Jesus says: *So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.*

Think about a farmer or gardener who plants seed. The farmer or gardener plants the seed in the ground, but from that time forward he cannot see what that seed is doing while it is covered with earth. The person who planted the seed simply goes about other tasks, sleeping each night and awakening each morning. In due time, the seed springs up and grows, and the farmer or gardener does not know how that took place but simply observes that it did take place since there are presently plants growing out of the ground.

Now let’s apply the events to spiritual things. Faithful pastors and teachers plant the Word of God in the soil of their listeners’ ears and minds, while praying it takes root and grows in the hearts of those listeners. Nevertheless, faithful pastors and teachers cannot see if that Word of God has actually taken root in their listeners’ hearts, nor can they make it do so and grow; they can only plant the seed of God’s Word, they cannot force anyone to believe it. The pastors and teachers of God’s Word continue to go about their duties

which they were called to do; but, in time they will behold the results of the seed of the Word of God which they planted, for some listeners come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and are fruitful in that faith.

Accordingly, spiritual growth is a miracle of God and is NOT something faithful pastors and teachers accomplish by their own power. Yes, it's as the apostle Paul plainly states in 1 Corinthians 3:5-7, where we read, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Thus, real Christian Church growth occurs by God's power as He works through His Holy Word in the hearts of human beings.

Verse 28, ----- (Mark 4:28)

As I mentioned earlier in the case with a farmer or a gardener who has planted seed: the farmer or gardener plants the seed in the ground, but from that time forward he cannot see what that seed is doing while it is covered with earth. The person who planted the seed simply goes about other tasks, sleeping each night and awakening each morning. In due time, the seed springs up and grows, and the farmer or gardener does not know how that took place but simply observes that it did take place since there are presently plants growing out of the ground. Indeed, it is so, *For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.*

It is a marvelous miracle of God when one sees the result of corn seed which has sprouted: a little plant breaks forth from the soil, then as the days pass it grows bigger and bigger and finally produces ears which grow into full ears of corn.

Likewise, when God's Word is sown among human beings, it is a marvelous miracle of God when it takes root in the heart and one then believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and subsequently continues

to grow in that faith and brings forth the fruit of good works, for Isaiah 61:11 declares, "as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." Furthermore, Philippians 2:13 informs us, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Therefore, it is plainly evident that real Christian Church growth occurs by God's power as He works through His Holy Word in the hearts of human beings.

Verse 29, ----- (Mark 4:29)

The farmer or gardener who has sowed seed and has seen plants shoot forth from that seed subsequently benefits from the product, for *when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*

Similarly, faithful pastors and teachers who have sown the seed of God's Holy Word will see benefits as souls are harvested for Jesus Christ who will finally reward them with eternal life when they depart this world, either in death or because the end of the world has come. Yes, when the faithful followers of Jesus Christ stand before Him, He will say to them, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:21)

Therefore, let us never forget how real Christian Church growth occurs: God works it by means of His Holy Word when it is preached, read, or attached to the sacraments instituted and commanded by Christ. God's Word, His Law, shows people their sinfulness, while the Gospel of Christ shows people their only Savior from sin, for Romans 3:19-26 and 1:16-17 states, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the

righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." God does the saving, all of it. Hence, it is a fact that real Christian Church growth occurs by God's power as He works through His Holy Word in the hearts of human beings.

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As we ponder our sermon text to its conclusion, let us see why real Christian Church growth is amazing.

Verses 30-32, ----- (Mark 4:30-32)

Jesus again uses a parable to teach spiritual truths, for He says in the concluding verses of our sermon text: *Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.* So, once more Jesus likens the Kingdom of God, the Holy Christian Church, to the action of seed.

Notice that Jesus refers to but one grain of mustard seed, which is one of the tiniest seeds

existing. A tiny seemingly insignificant mustard seed when planted into the ground, germinates and grows into a large tree-like plant in which even the birds can reside in the shadows of its branches.

Likewise, God's Word – Law and Gospel – seems insignificant to worldly-minded self-righteous folks who are stuck on themselves and man's philosophies or science-falsely-so-called. And yet, tremendous growth occurs when God's Word takes root in human hearts and thereby moves people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. God's Word has brought forth a huge multitude of conversions through the years.

For example, on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost miraculously empowered the apostles of Jesus Christ to speak God's Word in the various languages of the world, Acts 2:12-13 relates that the people, "were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." Subsequently, the apostle Peter preached God's Word, showing people their sins by means of the Law and testifying of Jesus Christ by means of the Gospel, and Acts 2:37-42 informs us, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Thus, after hearing one sermon in which God's Word was expounded, 3000 people were converted and believed on Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Hence, God's Word indeed is powerful as He works in and through it; so, real Christian

Church growth is amazing.

Another example of the power of God's Word when rightly preached is seen in a case where Peter and John were preaching in the temple at Jerusalem. Peter pointedly told the people of their past sinfulness in desiring Jesus to be crucified while demanding murderous Barabbas be released. Peter then told the people, as Acts 3:19-23 reports, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

But what happened next? Acts 4:1-4 relates, "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Yeah, around 5000 people came to faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Hence, we again see that real Christian Church growth is amazing. God working in and through His Holy Word works wonders.

Furthermore, the apostle John was given a glimpse into heaven and the future it holds for all true believers in Jesus Christ; and, John informs us in Revelation 7:9-10, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb,

clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Consider the huge multitude of believers present in heaven worshiping the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Oh, not everyone who hears God's Word believes it; but, many have been converted and brought to faith in Jesus Christ, for Isaiah 55:8-11 reports, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Thus, real Christian Church growth is amazing as God accomplishes it by means of His Holy Word which, like seed, grows and bears fruit, abundantly.

Having seen from our sermon text some facts about real Christian Church growth, let us hold fast to the true Word of God and the true God of which it testifies. Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord, because God in His Word assures us concerning Christ Jesus, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Yes, my friends, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:16-18) God grant that we hold fast to Him and His Holy Word. Amen. m.e.l.