

February 1 , 2026

“The Christian Church”
Lesson 1

Mark 4:26-32
Eph. 4:4-6, 11-18

Intro

Jesus used parables as a way of teaching. It was a well-known method used in the ancient world. Jesus often compared something common to his hearers to a less understood spiritual truth. Many of his parables teach about the “kingdom of God (in Matthew, he uses “kingdom of heaven”). We see the comparison from the words used, as in Matt. 13:24—“The kingdom of heaven is like...”. The kingdom parables often have applications regarding Jesus’ intentions for the church. Today’s lesson looks at two of this kind of parable.

Read Mark 4:26-32

1. vs. 26: This verse begins the third of four parables in Mark 4
This is the parable of the sower, the seeds, and the different types of ground
Seed had to be spread by hand in Jesus’ day—there are no mechanical machines
This required skill to minimize how much seed got wasted
2. vs. 27: Once the seed is in the ground, the farmer has done his biggest task
The seed will grow without him—while he sleeps even
And the farmer doesn’t know how this happens; he just knows that it does
The comparison here is to how the kingdom of God grows
We might plant (or even water), but how the “crop” grows is out of our control
Only God knows what is going on with the seed
3. vs. 28: Here we see the seed become a full mature plant
It has a stalk coming from the ground with sprouts (the “head”) indicating growth
It continues to grow until the head is full of seeds
4. vs. 29: The seeds have been planted for the purpose in this verse: the harvest
That is true of the Christian life as well
The planted seed grows until the time of “harvest”
This would be our death and entrance into heaven, or Jesus’ return
5. vs. 30-31: Jesus’ second parable about the kingdom deals with a mustard seed
This is the smallest seed His listeners would have been familiar with
The mustard seed is as small as one millimeter in diameter
6. vs. 32: This tiny mustard seed can reach full growth in about 90 days (3 months)
Some people have seen mustard plants as tall as 10 feet high

The mustard plant is not technically a tree, but its growths resemble branches
They are big enough to support the weight of small birds
Again, this parable has application to the church
The church's growth will be astoundingly quick, just like the mustard seed
The church's growth came from small beginnings—just 12 disciples
From those 12, it is estimated that more than 2 billion people identify as Christians

Read Ephesians 4:4-6

Paul here is explaining to the Ephesians what the church is to be like

7. vs. 4: The church is meant to grow, just like the mustard seed
As it grows, more people will be part of the body
It is inevitable that these people will not all have the same backgrounds or views
Paul addresses the need for church unity through the seven “ones” in vs. 4-6
Here, he says the church is one body, and there is one Holy Spirit helping each person
All Christians have received the same Holy Spirit, and are part of the same body
He also says there is “one hope” we all share as Christians
He is referring to an eternal life with God
Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and now sits at God's right hand
We also will be resurrected from the dead because of our faith in Jesus' resurrection
We too will share an eternity in heaven with Him
8. vs. 5: The next three “ones” are “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”
The “one Lord” is Jesus Christ
He alone saved us from our sins by His death on the cross
Therefore, He alone is the Lord over His people, the church
“One faith” means all Christians are to believe the same things about Jesus
What Jesus did must be acknowledged by the church if it is to be His church
“One baptism” means there is not to be separate baptisms for different groups
Jews and Gentiles alike are to be baptized into Christ—they are one body
The Christian's baptism is in Christ, not to a human leader / teacher / preacher
In 1 Cor. 1:12-15, Paul corrects them for being baptized into groups
They are to be baptized into Christ, the “one Lord” of the faith
9. vs. 6: The last “one” is “one God and Father of all”
Paul uses the word “all” four times in this verse to show our connected lives
God is “the Father of all”: He created everything, including human life
He is everyone's Father, so we are all part of His family
God is “over all”: He exists outside of creation
There is nothing above God in power or authority
God is “though all and in all”
“Though” indicates how God does thing: through grace, mercy, etc
“In” shows a location
God is “in” us through the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives
God is “in” all of His creation; He is present everywhere

Read Ephesians 4:11-18

10. vs. 11: Here, Paul tells what God had done to ensure His church functions correctly
He notes that God gave the church five different groups to lead the church
Apostles were appointed by Christ Himself, and have His authority
Only apostles or one closely connected to one are seen as legitimate authors of NT books
Prophets speak for God, saying what He wants said to His church
The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20)
Evangelists proclaim the good news about Jesus
They are mentioned only here, in Acts 21:8 and in 2 Timothy 4:5
Pastors are those who attend to the needs of the church members
They are sometimes referred to as “overseers” (Acts. 20:28)
Teachers instruct from God’s word on how to understand God and Scripture
They also instruct on how to live a godly life based on Scripture’s teachings
11. vs. 12: The purpose of the previous roles in vs. 11 is explained here in vs. 12
All of the groups are there to “equip His people for works of service”
The goal of all the groups is to bring believers to spiritual maturity
The reason for this is so all may share in “works of service”
The second half of the verse says this is so the church body “may be built up”
“Built up” can also be translated as “edify”
Church leaders are always to build others up, never to tear down
Church leadership is about “the body of Christ”, the church
12. vs. 13: Paul’s conclusion of the thought begun in vs. 11 is an echo of 4:4-6
The church is to have a “unity in the faith”
There aren’t to be divisions—we are one body with one Lord, having one hope
We are to have one faith: the doctrines of the church as shown in Scripture
- Besides a unity of faith, we are to be unified in our “knowledge of the Son of God”
If all have the same knowledge that Scripture teaches about Jesus, we will be unified
The end goal shown here again is maturity in the faith
13. vs. 14: If we accomplish the knowledge of Christ and unity of faith, this verse tells the end result
We won’t be infants in the faith, but mature believers
This will allow us to not get deceived in matters of the faith
Those who deceive are not sincere but mistaken people, according to Paul
They are crafty and “deceitful” in what they say
This points to them as knowing what they say to be untrue and harmful
They do it anyways, perhaps for monetary reasons
Being knowledgeable and grounded in the faith prevents being “tossed back and forth”
We won’t be in doubt when someone tries to shake our faith
We will be solid and unmoveable

14. vs. 15: “Truth” is what we are to speak, “in love” is how we are to speak it
Both of these are marks of a spiritually mature Christian
Doing this with each other will help others to also become spiritually mature
15. vs. 16: Paul returns to the church-as-body idea, but makes it more specific
The body has multiple parts that work together by the ligaments that connect them
This is how the church is to be as well
The church is not made up of all the same parts; it has various parts that fit together
The church’s goal is to develop a unity in its members, held by the same faith in God
Then the church can lead those who don’t know Jesus to Him, by words and actions
If the members of the church love each other, the world will see that and respond
16. vs. 17-18: These two verses show what the Gentile Christians have come from
They had futile thinking and darkened understanding
This double negative resulted in them being separated from God
They are no longer to live as they formerly did, but as the Scriptures instruct them

Application: Church growth was rapid in the 1st Century, and at times may be rapid now. Rapid growth can certainly be seen in new Christians as they get grounded into the faith through reading and studying what Scripture says. However, a greater number of new people will likely also bring a growth in the number of opinions and interpretations, which could lead to divisions and discord. Paul’s solution to a growing and diverse church is the “seven ones” of Ephesians 4:4-6. These things still define the basis for church unity today.

Prayer: Father God, we desire to be one with You, and one with each other. Help us to base our faith not on what we think, but on what You have said and what Your inspired Apostles have written. Help us to speak the truth in love, and to desire the best for each person in the church, knowing we will not be the same in all actions or opinions. In Jesus’ name, Amen.