A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

The Mustard Seed and the Storm

Hope That Holds · Book 5



Studies in Mark, Mark 4:30-41

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Trinfinity Enterprises

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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The Mustard Seed and the Storm

Studies in Mark | Mark 4:30-41

Passage	Mark 4:30-41
Big idea	God's kingdom starts small and grows beyond anything we can picture, and the King who rules it has power over every storm we face.
Memory verse	Mark 4:41
Session length	60-75 minutes
What to bring	Bible (SLB), this handout, pen. If you can, bring a few mustard seeds to pass around.

Before You Meet (Leader Prep)

For the leader only. Read the passage at least twice during the week and pray for the group by name.

In work and in my walk with God, I have seen small seeds of faith grow over years, and I have seen storms hit out of nowhere. The same Jesus who grows His quiet kingdom also commands the wind and the waves (Mark 4:30-41). I wrote this study for believers who feel their faith is too small or their storm is too loud.

I have worked on guitars for more than 20 years, and for about the last 4 I have built under the Trinfinity Guitars name. Trinfinity Enterprises is also the name I publish my books under, and my faith books are free to read and share. None of it started with a big

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launch. It started with one project at a time. Big things in life and ministry usually start smaller than anyone notices.

- Read all of Mark 4 and the first verses of Mark 5. The storm happens on the way to the other side of the lake, and Mark 5:1 shows where they landed.
- Look at a map of the Sea of Galilee so you can show the group where Capernaum is and where "the other side" was.
- Pick up a small jar of mustard seed from the spice aisle. Seeing how tiny it is makes the point better than any description.

Opening (5-10 minutes)

Most big things start small. A huge oak starts as an acorn. A church that seats thousands may have started in someone's living room. Jesus used two pictures in this passage: a tiny seed that becomes a large plant, and a storm that turned grown fishermen into scared kids. One shows how God's kingdom grows. The other shows who is really in charge of it.

First, what is a parable? The word comes from the Greek *parabole*, which means to place one thing beside another so you can compare them (Vine's Expository Dictionary). A parable sets something we know from everyday life next to a spiritual truth we do not yet understand. It takes us from the known to the unknown, usually in a short story with a setting, something that happens, and a result.

Icebreaker: What is something in your life that started small and grew into something bigger than you expected: a friendship, a business, a hobby, a family?

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The Passage (10 minutes)

Have one or two people read the passage aloud.

> **Mark 4:30-34 (SLB)**
>
> [30] And He was saying, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or in what parable shall we compare it? [31] ***It is*** like a grain of mustard, which, when it is sown on the earth, is smaller than all the seeds that ***are*** on the earth; [32] and when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all the garden plants, and produces great branches, so that the birds of the sky are able to nest under its shade." [33] And with many such parables He was speaking the word to them, as they were able to hear. [34] But without a parable He was not speaking to them; but privately He was explaining all things to His disciples.

> **Mark 4:35-41 (SLB)**
>
> [35] And He says to them on that day, evening having come, "Let us pass over to the other side." [36] And having dismissed the crowd, they take Him along as He was in the boat; and other little boats also were with Him. [37] And a great storm of wind comes, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that it was already being filled. [38] And He Himself was on the stern, sleeping on the cushion. And they wake Him and say to Him, "Teacher, does it not concern You that we are perishing?" [39] And having been awakened, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be quiet! Be silenced!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. [40] And He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How ***is it that*** you do not have faith?" [41] And they feared a great fear, and they were saying to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

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Setting the Scene (5 minutes)

Who wrote it	John Mark, a helper of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25) and later close to Peter, who calls him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). Early church writers said Mark wrote down what Peter preached (Papias, quoted by Eusebius, Church History 3.39.15). The Gospel itself does not name its author.
To whom	Mostly Gentile believers, likely in Rome. Mark explains Jewish customs and Aramaic words for readers who would not know them (Mark 7:3-4; Mark 5:41).
When and where	The events took place on and around the Sea of Galilee. Mark likely wrote in the 50s or 60s A.D.; scholars differ on the exact date.
What comes before	Jesus taught a large crowd from a boat (Mark 4:1). He told the parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-20), the lamp (Mark 4:21-25) and the seed that grows while the farmer sleeps (Mark 4:26-29).
What comes after	They reach the other side, the country of the Gerasenes, where Jesus frees a man from a legion of demons (Mark 5:1-20). Jesus has power over the sea and over the spirit world.

What It Means (15 minutes)

Verses 30-31: The smallest of seeds

Jesus asks, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:30)? How did God's kingdom on earth look 2,000 years ago?

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Pretty small. For centuries it had mostly been tied to one nation, Israel. That does not mean God was absent from everyone else. It means His attention and focus were on His people. Gentiles (people who were not Israelites) could join only by becoming part of Israel and following the Lord's commands. Even in Jesus' day His followers were a small group of fishermen, tax collectors and ordinary people.

"Sown" means scattering seed broadly over the ground so it can grow. Jesus picked the mustard seed because everyone in His day knew it and knew how tiny it was. Black mustard seed is only about 1 mm across (about the size of a pinhead), according to the PROSEA plant database. Jesus' point is not a botany lesson. The mustard seed was the smallest seed His listeners planted in their gardens, and it was the common picture for something tiny.

Jesus used the same seed when He talked about faith: "if you have faith like a grain of mustard, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). True faith is not about how big it feels. It is about who it rests on. Even the weakest, mustard-seed faith works because it is faith in God, and "For with God no declaration will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

I wrote New Beginnings, a Scripture-based 12-step course, because recovery showed me how much believers need a Christ-centered path. I did not know who would read it. I just put the lessons on paper. Jesus compared God's kingdom to a mustard seed that starts tiny and grows large (Mark 4:30-32). God asks us to plant the small seed in front of us and trust Him with the growth.

Verse 32: Large enough for the birds

The seed "grows up and becomes greater than all the garden plants, and produces great branches" (Mark 4:32). The words about birds nesting in its shade come from the Old Testament. In Ezekiel, God promises to plant a tender sprig on the mountain of Israel that grows into a great cedar, and "under it shall dwell every bird of every wing; in the shadow of its branches they shall dwell" (Ezekiel

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17:23). Daniel 4:12 uses the same kind of picture for a great kingdom that shelters everyone.

This fits the New Testament church. It started small and humble and grew as it matured. Jesus sent His followers "to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and John saw "a great multitude which no one was able to number, out of every nation" (Revelation 7:9). The branches are His people, and the leaves and fruit are the blessings that come through them, inside and out.

It also fits one person's faith. As your faith grows, so does the fruit of the Spirit in your life. You know a true believer by their fruit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

The tree also pictures salvation, which grows so large that it gives the birds shelter, protection, safety, comfort and fellowship. As the birds find shelter in the tree, we find shelter through salvation. As they find food there, we find nourishment through the Holy Spirit.

Right now the kingdom can look small next to the world's political and military powers. But what we see is still the seed, not the full-grown plant. It keeps growing, and one day it will be big enough to give safety and rest to everyone who lives in its branches.

Verses 33-34: Read it, then explain it

Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables "as they were able to hear" (Mark 4:33), but "privately He was explaining all things to His disciples" (Mark 4:34). Here Jesus is doing what we would call expository teaching: He gives the Word, then explains what it means.

You can see the same thing in Nehemiah: "They read in the book, in the law of God, making it clear and giving the sense, and they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). First you read the Word to the people. Second, you explain it so they understand it.

What a blessing it must have been to get a private tutoring session on Scripture from God Himself. Jesus also said parables would reveal truth to those who were ready to hear and hide it from

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those with hard hearts (Mark 4:11-12, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10). Some people walked away scratching their heads.

Verses 35-37: The storm

That evening Jesus said, "Let us pass over to the other side" (Mark 4:35). They were on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum, heading east. After a long day of teaching He may have wanted quiet time with His Father, away from the crowd.

The Sea of Galilee sits nearly 700 feet below sea level, with hills and mountains around it. When cool air comes down off those hills and meets the warm air over the water, a calm lake can turn violent fast (That the World May Know). These fishermen knew this lake. If they were scared, this was no ordinary storm. The boat was "already being filled" (Mark 4:37).

In May 2020 my life hit a sudden storm. My drinking caught up with me, and my wife caught me. It was tempting to wonder whether my marriage and future were finished. The disciples woke Jesus in a violent squall, and He calmed the sea with a word (Mark 4:37-39). Even when the waves are crashing, He has never left the boat.

Verses 38-39: Asleep in the stern

Jesus was "on the stern, sleeping on the cushion" (Mark 4:38). Why does that matter? It shows His human side. He was worn out from a full day of teaching and healing, so tired a storm did not wake Him. John also tells us Jesus got "wearied from the journey" (John 4:6). It also shows His complete trust in His Father.

The disciples woke Him up with a hard question: "Teacher, does it not concern You that we are perishing" (Mark 4:38)? Think about a time you went through something hard while someone who loved you was right there and let you work through it. Remember learning to ride a bike? You were scared of getting hurt, and maybe you wondered why the person holding the seat let go. But they were close by the whole time, ready to grab you and comfort you if you fell. Jesus was in that boat with His disciples too.

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Then comes one of Jesus' greatest miracles, and it shows He is God. He did not yell or panic. He "rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Be quiet! Be silenced!'" (Mark 4:39). The word for "be silenced" is phimoo, which means to muzzle (Blue Letter Bible). Mark used the same word when Jesus told a demon, "Be silenced" (Mark 1:25). The wind ceased "and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39). Not slowly calmer. A great calm, right then.

Any Jewish listener would remember that only God rules the sea: "You rule over the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You calm them" (Psalm 89:9) and "He settled the storm into a calm, and their waves were hushed" (Psalm 107:29).

Verses 40-41: Who then is this?

Jesus asks, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you do not have faith" (Mark 4:40)? Do Jesus and the Father question our faith when we do not rely on Them for everything? Has your lack of faith ever led you down a road of fear? Remember, Jesus is right there with you. He is your rock and your salvation.

Then "they feared a great fear" (Mark 4:41). This time they were not afraid of the storm. They were afraid of the power Jesus showed by calming it with a word. They may have already believed He was the Messiah, but now they were starting to see He truly is who He says He is. Their question, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41), shows they still did not fully understand.

That reminds me of what Jesus told Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29). The disciples, the Pharisees and the crowds all saw His miracles, and not all of them believed. Those of us who have never seen Him and still trust Him have been blessed.

Today I am sober since May 29, 2020, still married after 36 years, and watching my daughters and granddaughters grow. I could not have saved my own life or my marriage through willpower. The disciples looked at the calm water and asked who this was that even the wind and sea obeyed Him (Mark 4:41). When God brings

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you through a storm you could not survive alone, all you can do is worship.

Remember: faith like a mustard seed.

Key Terms

Term	Plain meaning	Where it appears
Parable	A short story from everyday life set beside a spiritual truth to explain it.	Mark 4:30, 33
Kingdom of God	God's rule as King, starting now in the lives of His people and coming in full when Christ returns.	Mark 4:30
Gentiles	People who are not Jewish.	Background
Expository teaching	Reading a passage of Scripture and then explaining what it means.	Mark 4:33-34; Nehemiah 8:8
Stern	The back of the boat, where the steersman usually sat.	Mark 4:38
Rebuke	A sharp command to stop. Jesus uses it on demons and on the wind.	Mark 1:25; Mark 4:39

Where Christians Read This Differently

Christians agree that the mustard seed shows God's kingdom growing from small to great. They differ on a few details.

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- **The birds as the nations:** Most teachers, past and present, read the birds as people from every nation finding shelter in God's kingdom, which matches Ezekiel 17:23 and Daniel 4:12.
- **The birds as trouble:** Some Bible teachers point out that birds in the parable of the sower stand for Satan snatching the Word away (Mark 4:4, 15). They read the large plant as the visible church growing into something bigger than God planned, with harmful influences settling in its branches.
- **How the kingdom grows:** Some Christians expect the gospel to steadily win the world before Christ returns. Others believe the kingdom grows now but comes in full only when Christ returns. Both see the parable as a promise that God's kingdom will not stay small.

My view: The tree is the kingdom and the church, which started small and keeps growing, and the birds are the people who find shelter, safety and fellowship in it through salvation.

Discussion Questions (20-25 minutes)

What does it say?

1. What two things does Jesus compare in verses 30-32? How does Mark describe the plant once it is grown?
2. What did Jesus do while the storm raged (verse 38), and what were the disciples doing?

What does it mean?

3. Why would Jesus pick something as small as a mustard seed to picture God's kingdom?
4. The disciples "feared a great fear" after the storm stopped (verse 41). Why were they more afraid after the miracle than during the storm?
5. What does it tell you about Jesus that He can be tired enough to sleep through a storm and powerful enough to stop it with a word?

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How do I live it?

6. What storm are you in right now? What would it look like to trust that Jesus is in the boat with you?
7. Where have you seen God take something small in your life and grow it?

Takeaway (5 minutes)

> **This week:** God grows big things from small beginnings, and the One in your boat is Lord of the wind and the sea.
>
> **Memory verse:** "And they feared a great fear, and they were saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'" (Mark 4:41, SLB)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that Your kingdom keeps growing, even when it looks small to us. Grow our faith from a mustard seed into something that gives shelter to others. When the storms come, remind us that You are in the boat, and that the wind and the sea still obey You. In Your name, Amen.

Going Deeper (Optional)

- Matthew 13:31-33: Matthew's version of the mustard seed, paired with the parable of the leaven.
- Mark 6:45-52: Jesus walks on the water to His disciples in another storm.
- Psalm 107:23-32: Sailors cry out to the Lord in a storm and He brings them to safe harbor.
- Jonah 1: Another man asleep in a boat during a storm, with a very different ending.

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- Isaiah 43:1-3: God's promise to be with His people when they pass through the waters.

Leader Notes

Question 3 (why a mustard seed): It was the smallest seed farmers in Galilee planted, and people used it as a picture of something tiny (see Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6). Jesus is saying His kingdom may start with almost nothing, a carpenter and a handful of fishermen, but it will end up larger than anything around it.

If someone says the mustard seed is not the smallest seed in the world: That is true; orchid seeds are smaller. Jesus was talking to Galilean farmers about seeds they sowed "on the earth" (Mark 4:31), and among those the mustard seed was the smallest. He was using the language of everyday life, not writing a science book.

Question 4 (afraid after the miracle): The SLB keeps the Greek of verse 41 word for word: "they feared a great fear." A storm can kill you, but a Man who commands the storm is something they had never seen. They were face to face with God's own power (Psalm 89:9). That kind of fear is awe, and it leads to the question Mark wants every reader to answer: who is this?

Question 5 (asleep and in control): Jesus is fully man and fully God. He got tired like us (John 4:6; Hebrews 4:15), and He has the authority only God has over creation (Psalm 107:29).

Sources

Every outside fact in this study comes from one of these. Scripture is from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) throughout.

- Meaning of parabole: W.E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, vol. 3, p. 158 (paraphrased, not quoted).
- Mustard seed size: "Brassica nigra (PROSEA)," Pl@ntUse, https://plantuse.plantnet.org/en/Brassica_nigra_(PROSEA) (seed about 1 mm across).

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- Sea of Galilee elevation and sudden storms: "Sea of Galilee Geography," That the World May Know, https://www.thattheworldmayknow.com/sea-of-galilee-geography.
- The Greek word phimoo (to muzzle) in Mark 1:25 and Mark 4:39: Blue Letter Bible lexicon, Strong's G5392, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5392.
- Mark as author: Eusebius, Church History 3.39.15, quoting Papias.

Acronym List

SLB: Steadfast Literal Bible

A.D.: Anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of our Lord"

PROSEA: Plant Resources of South-East Asia, a plant reference database

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The Mustard Seed and the Storm

✦ ✦ ✦

Jesus told a parable about the smallest seed in the garden, and that same evening He stopped a storm with a word. This study walks through Mark 4:30-41: how God's kingdom grows from small beginnings, why Jesus could sleep through the storm, and the question Mark wants every reader to answer. Who then is this? Built for one small group session of 60 to 75 minutes.

And they feared a great fear, and they were saying to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Mark 4:41 (SLB)

Book 5 of 5 in the collection Hope That Holds

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