

Mark 4:21-34

A Lamp on a Stand

21 He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

24 “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

The Parable of the Growing Seed

26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Introduction

“The Kingdom of God has Drawn Near” is the Basic Message of Jesus according to Mark.

Jesus’ parables offer a vision that assures us that the kingdom of God is a wonderful and awesome reality.

The kingdom of God cannot be hidden or silenced.

It cannot be hindered or manipulated.

And the kingdom of God will fill the earth.

Mark contains few parables in his gospel, but the ones he includes really count.

The Text Today concludes an Extended String of Parables, beginning in Mark 3:23.

Parables are comparisons, meant to cast two things alongside one another to provide analogy, contrast, or a reflection.

Jesus’ parables have a way of reordering conventional assumptions and values.

They don’t explain *how* one is supposed to recognize the reign of God, but they make it clear that we will need to adopt new ways of perceiving God’s Kingdom.

In the two parables out the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed, Mark explicitly mentions “the kingdom of God.”

These parables illuminate aspects of God’s reign.

In both stories, Jesus speaks about seeds to indicate that God’s new order will take root and eventually come to fruition, whether people desire it or not.

1. So these Three Parables relate to Kingdom Truth, Trust, and Triumph.

A. One of the most Stabilizing and Wondrous Realities in the World, is realizing the Comprehensiveness and Grandeur of God’s Plan for the World.

B. That Plan is the Establishment and Advancement of His Kingdom, a Kingdom that will Finally Encompass All Nations and People Groups, and the Best of Every Culture.

1) The Church is the Only Group of People Submitted to that Kingdom, and the Church's Mission is to Proclaim that God's Kingdom to the World and then Disciple Believers to live out these Kingdom Principles into Every Area of Thought and Life.

C. In the 4th Chapter of Mark, Jesus has been Teaching Us the Realities and Implications of this Great Kingdom.

1) He has just finished Encouraging Us, His Messengers and Representatives, with a Glimpse into the Hearts of People that Explain why Some Believe and Others Reject His Words.

2) Now, Jesus is Speaking to Those who have Received the Message of the Kingdom and is Encouraging Us with the Long-Range View of the Effects of that Message, and how we are to Respond to it.

2. Parable #1 - Expressing the Kingdom Truth (vv. 21-25)

A Lamp on a Stand

21 He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

24 "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."

A. The Literal Structure of the Parable is Clear.

21 He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"

- 1) No one brings a lamp into a room only to hide its light.
- 2) We bring light into a room to illuminate it.
- 3) The surface level of the parable is easy enough but the difficulty comes in the rationale.
- 4) The light refers to something that is presently "hid" or "secret," but intended to come to light or revealed.
- 5) So the question now becomes "What is presently hidden? And What is to be revealed?"

B. The Responsibility of All who have Received the Truth of God, is that they are Now Enabled by the Spirit of God, to Now Proclaim to the World, the Truth about God's Kingdom.

- 1) Jesus uses the illustration of a lit lamp to express this idea.
- 2) One does not light a lamp just to hide it under a basket or a bed.
- 3) That defeats the whole purpose of lighting a lamp.
- 4) Therefore, if your mind and heart have been illumined by the Word of God, you are to be the light that God has regenerated you to be.
- 5) An open and godly lifestyle is essential, but it needs to be expressed in the explicit truths of the gospel and the Word of God, and done so verbally.
- 6) That is what Jesus is teaching here.

C. The Next Verses are Most Informative.

22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

1) Jesus explains that while He has hidden truth from those who reject God's Kingdom for a time, it will not always be this way.

- 2) At Pentecost the Spirit will come, the New Covenant will embrace every nation, and the apostles and the church are to take all of His truth and speak it to the world.
- 3) Jesus proclaims that His Kingdom is hidden from those who reject Him and will be given to believers precisely so it can be revealed to all the world.
- 4) For this to happen, we have to have ears to hear with obedience and responsiveness.

D. Jesus then uses an Interesting Phrase.

24 “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. (v. 24a).

1) We need to perceive the reality of and have divine insight into the truth you are hearing from the Word of God.

E. Jesus goes on to say that We Only Get Back what we Put Into our Study and our Listening.

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and even more.

- 1) Literally, the phrase is, “Whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you and added to you.”
- 2) In other words, if you put in the effort, you will get that amount back and much more besides!
- 3) Jesus cautions his disciples to focus their hearing which is a renewed call to spiritual discernment.
- 4) This is couched in the language of “measure”, which is something that is measured for distribution.
- 5) Therefore, if the disciples pursue the message of the kingdom and embrace it, more will be given to them.
- 6) The deeper the disciples grow into the life of the kingdom, the more they will receive.
- 7) However, those who do not seek the kingdom, who fail to understand the message, and oppose the message of the kingdom, whatever they have will be taken from them.
- 8) Disciples must lean into the kingdom and bend their ear to hear.
- 9) Only then will the kingdom of God take root in their lives and bear fruit.

F. This is True because of What He Goes On to say on Verse 25.

25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

- 1) Therefore, whoever has and has properly received the truth will receive greater revelation and understanding from God, and whoever does not have the truth, because he rejects it, will lose even what he has.
- 2) This refers to someone's ability to pursue, understand, and to embrace the truth.
- 3) It is of utmost importance on how we listen to, study, and read the Word of God

3. Parable #2 - Exercising Kingdom Trust (vv. 26-29)

26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.
 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.
 28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

A. No other Gospel contains this Parable.

- 1) Probably because it's boring.
- 2) Its plot has all the suspenseful drama of an ordinary, elementary school, life sciences textbook.
- 3) There are no surprises and everything proceeds according to plan.

- 4) Jesus simply speaks about seeds and what they are supposed to do.
- 5) They grow and produce.
- 6) Moreover, they grow and produce without your help or your intricate knowledge of germination or photosynthesis.
- 7) In other words, the reign of God will take root, whether in the world, in society, or in someone's heart.
- 8) It will grow gradually and automatically.
- 9) It will grow perhaps so subtly that you won't even notice, until at last it produces its intended fruit.
- 10) It is the nature of God's reign to grow and to manifest itself. That's what it does.
- 11) As a lamp belongs on a lamp stand, God's reign, like a seed, must grow, even if untended and even if its gradual expansion is nearly impossible to detect.

B. The Whole Point of this Parable is the Divine, Sovereign Power of Christ through the Word to Create, Sustain, and Advance His Kingdom.

- 1) A sower goes out to sow, casting seed, who does his duty and then goes to sleep.
- 2) While he sleeps the seed sprouts, apart from his work or initiative.
- 3) The soil produces crops literally "automatically," or "by itself", and there is a progress to them.

C. The Kingdom of God is Established Progressively.

- 1) First is the present spiritual realm where Jesus rules and reigns over the world and especially His people.
- 2) And then comes the millennial empire.
- 3) And finally comes the new earth.

D. All of the Impetus for this is the Power of God.

- 1) We certainly have a role.
- 2) We sow the seed, and apart from that sowing, it will not be done.
- 3) But the decisive power is divine and sovereign.
- 4) We could be asleep and He does His work!

E. Why is this an Expression of Trust in God?

- 1) Because ultimately it does not depend on us.
- 2) We have an important and necessary role, but the results are the Lord's.
- 3) Even our doing is enabled by Him.
- 4) You don't have to manipulate people.
- 5) You don't have to be culturally relevant.
- 6) You don't have to be cool.
- 7) You just have to faithfully proclaim "the whole message of this Life in Christ" in all its glorious implications and applications, and trust the Lord to bless it as He sees fit.
- 8) What God chooses to do with your faithfulness is up to His wise plan and loving character.
- 9) But your faithfulness is up to you.

F. Verse 29 says that even though the Power is Not the Sowers, he Rejoices in the Harvest.

- 1) This is a metaphor for the final judgment.
- 2) When all is said and done, God's people will be vindicated and rewarded.
- 3) And unbelievers condemned and consigned to eternity in hell.

4. Parable #3 - The Expected Triumph of the Kingdom of God (vv. 30-32)

30 Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it

grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

A. Compared to the Previous Parable’s Matter-of-Factness, the Story of the Mustard Seed reads like a Dense Novella.

- 1) At first glance, it reaffirms things people have already learned about God’s reign.
- 2) Something very small will eventually morph into something much larger.
- 3) And also, something that appears obscure and insignificant will turn into something public and grand.

B. Yet there is more. The Reign of God Won’t just Grow for the Sake of Looking Pretty, but Creatures will find that it Provides them Shelter and Security.

- 1) Those are all important points, but they do not capture the real energy in this parable.
- 2) The parable’s punch comes in at least two funny things Jesus says.
 - First, God’s reign isn’t like any ordinary seed.
 - In some ways it resembles a mustard seed.
 - This is not the kind of crop most people would sow.
 - Where Jesus lived, mustard was prolific like a common and sturdy weed.
 - It could pop up almost anywhere and start multiplying.
 - Imagine Jesus speaking today of thistles or ground-ivy. But bigger.
 - In any case, the reign of God apparently isn’t much of a cash crop.
 - And yet it grows.
 - It is not easily eradicated.
 - Second, Jesus describes the fully grown mustard plant as “the greatest of all shrubs.”
 - It can grow dense, but it is hardly magnificent.
 - Jesus must have been grinning as he spoke.
 - The humor and the absurdity are part of the main point.
 - Jesus could have likened God’s reign to the cedars of Lebanon if he wanted to describe something awesome.
 - Instead he describes something more ordinary, and yet also something more able to show up, to take over inch by inch, and eventually to transform a whole landscape.
- 3) This parable therefore depends on satire.
 - The reign of God will mess with established boundaries and conventional values.
 - Like a fast-replicating plant, it will get into everything.
 - It will bring life and color to desolate places.
 - It will crowd out other concerns and resist our manipulations.
 - Its humble appearance will expose and mock pride.
 - As a result, some people will want to burn it all down in a pointless attempt to restore their fields

5. The World Around Us is fallen.

A. American Culture is Secular, Brutal, Ungodly, Apostate, Hostile, and Growing Worse (apart from the gracious restraint of God).

B. Surely it is Tempting to Doubt God’s Program and His Sovereignty.

1) Surely, as we look at the carnality, worldliness, immaturity, foolishness, poor doctrine, it is tempting to give up and bail on our role in the plan.

2) But God has a fresh word of exhortation and encouragement: Focus on the end of the story.

3) Knowing that our work is inevitably tied to and leads to the triumph in the last day, we are to remain faithful to Him in the long day until that final day comes.

C. Part of this Encouragement Stems from a Proper Understanding of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus gives us here.

1) The kingdom starts small.

2) It came first in the person and work of a Galilean carpenter in a backwoods part of the world.

3) It then extended to a group of equally unimpressive fishermen and laborers, then to dozens and then to several hundred more.

4) Then, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, and thousands came, though still a minority.

5) Today, millions have saved due to their professed faith in this man and have given themselves to His Kingdom.

6) And it has not yet reached its heights as it will the final day.

D. Like a mustard seed, the smallest seed in Palestine, the Kingdom Starts Small, even Seemingly Insignificant and Overlooked.

1) But it grows into an unmistakable, unstoppable, glorious thing.

2) Of note is Jesus' evident allusion to Ezekiel 17, a clear prophecy of the rule and reign of the Davidic Messiah.

3) Under His rule, many birds (they portray Gentile peoples) will find shelter and safety in the kingdom's tree.

4) The growth of the kingdom in this age is directly related to its fullness in the future, the age to come of the millennial empire and the new earth.

E. Here, Jesus not Only Hints that the Kingdom in this Age is the Same Kingdom Promised and Prophesied in the OT, that will Be Established Progressively Over Time Instead of just All at Once.

1) But He also alludes to the fact that in its present and future forms the Gentile peoples will play a massive role.

2) Truly, His gospel is for the whole world, and the Davidic kingdom promise is "the charter for all humanity" (2 Sam 7:19).

G. Mark closes by saying that Jesus, for now, Proclaimed the Truth to the Rejecting Masses in Parables, but Privately Explained Everything to His Disciples, Preparing them to Reach the World (vv. 33-34).

1) John Piper has often said, "Life is hard. God is good. Glory is coming."

2) Most of the 12 to whom Jesus spoke, not to mention the hundreds more who were following Him, would suffer immensely for their loving and persistent proclamation of His lordship and kingly rule.

3) The kingdom, as expressed in the church, would face many trials and difficulties as they proclaim His lordship to a lost and dying world.

6. And Jesus Himself has said that Many will Reject Him.

A. So, Where is Hope to be Found?

1) In knowing the end of the story.

2) The kingdom of God will endure, and grow into something that covers the whole earth, with Jesus reigning from Jerusalem forever.

3) The King of Kings will triumph.

4) The world will be reconciled to its Maker.

5) Jesus Christ will have the preeminence in redeeming millions from every people group in every age.

6) And He graciously and lovingly includes us in the execution and final fulfillment of that glorious plan!
