

**Series:** Being faithful disciples in a God-defying world. (A study of Mark)

**Sermon Text:** 4:21-34 (cf. Matthew 13:24-35; Luke 8:16-18, 13:18-21) **Kids Word:** Grow

We're studying the fast-paced book of Mark, which presents Jesus as the Son of God.

- Last time, I pointed out a shift in *chapter 4*. Up to this point, Jesus confronted Israel's hard hearts with straight-forward truth. Suddenly, He shifted to teaching in *parables*, which are vivid stories comparing 2 things to make 1 point.
- The *parable* of the soils revealed their need and our need to have soft hearts, so we receive, repent & obey in response to God's Word. The next 3 *parables* reveal the absolute, unyielding sovereignty of God in nurturing His *kingdom* to full completion through the power of His Word (the *seed*). Today, we'll consider this...

**BIG IDEA: God's Kingdom is here and growing!**

Let's consider some key ideas in our text.

*21 And he said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? 22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." 24 And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. 25 For to the one who has (listened), more will be given, and from the one who has not (listened), even what (understanding) he has will be taken away." (as was true with Israel) ...33 *With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. 34 He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.**

*Kingdom understanding is freely available. (4:21-25, 33-34)*

- Jesus represents God's kingdom message or *light* that has come into the world (cf. John 1:1-9, 8:12, 12:46). His truth is not meant to be *concealed*, in the same way a flaming oil *lamp* is not meant to be *put under a basket or a bed* (i.e. a massive fire would result!). NT Wright said, "This is both a promise and a warning. The promise: don't worry, this kingdom-message will be public knowledge soon enough {i.e. at His return/the resurrection}. The warning: make sure you're listening now, because you will need to know."
- While *light* is freely available in this sin-darkened world, *kingdom* understanding depends on our willingness to *pay attention to what we hear*. How we *measure* it (i.e. the more we *pay attention*), the more we'll grasp (cf. **Proverbs 9:9**). If we ignore God, He has the right to *take away* what little we understand. We have no "right" to spiritual understanding, God freely gives it and takes it away depending on our willingness to receive and use His truth. This principle is also seen in the *parable* of the talents (cf. Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27).

*26 And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

*Kingdom growth is mysterious but certain. (4:26-29; cf. Revelation 14:15)*

- *God's kingdom*, through gospel preaching, breaks into this world like *seed* being *sown*. It falls everywhere, receives various responses, and eventually yields a tremendous *harvest*. *Kingdom growth* is slow & mysterious, like dead *seeds* coming alive & growing. It's nearly impossible

to track moment-by-moment, but its incremental progress is undeniable. It's like the *growth* of plants or children--one day we look up and wonder, "How and when did that happen?"

**30 And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."**

**Kingdom growth is small but exponential. (4:30-32)**

- Jesus said it's like putting super *small seeds* into the ground, which *grow* into a tree so massive that *birds can nest in its shade*. The mature *kingdom* will shade and protect believers from every nation (cf. Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6; Daniel 4:12, 21). God's historic people could not fathom how Jesus and 12 apostles were the *seeds* of their long-anticipated *kingdom*. His ministry confounded Israel's expectations of how *God* would bring His *kingdom* to earth.

**How can Mark's 1<sup>st</sup> century writings help our discipleship in today's God-defying world?**

**Keep listening with a soft heart.**

- *Hearing* is crucial & pivotal. This word appeared 4 times before chapter 4 & 40 times in the rest of the book! God freely offers *kingdom* understanding, but we must *pay attention* and utilize (*measure*) it. If you want to know God well, it's not complicated. Jesus explained things to the disciples who drew closest to Him. Is that you? (cf. **John 15:4**; 2 John 9)

**Keep believing in Christ's triumphant church** (the body of Christ; cf. Matthew 6).

- These 4 parables (including 4:1-20) drive home our need to *hear* the Word & respond in faith. We must believe in the *kingdom's* mysterious, yet inevitable and exponential progress. Its *growth* is hard to see in our broken world, just as it was for 1<sup>st</sup> century believers under Roman oppression; yet God is faithfully completing what He started through the church Jesus founded. While it's an imperfect institution, it's God's means of bringing His *kingdom* to earth. If you become tempted to abandon it, repent & keep believing in Christ's triumphant body!
- As culture keeps attacking the church, these *parables* inspire us with a bold, *growing* church, NOT one in steady decline until Jesus returns to rescue us. Our Christian-fiction books tell us--Just survive until Jesus returns to evacuate the church & destroy this wicked world. Have you read the end of the non-fiction Bible? God wins! NT Wright said, "Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about."

**Keep doing your part.** (cf. 1Corinthians 3:1-9...**3:6-7**)

- We're not a limping church; we're a triumphant church enlisted in a rescue process that began with Jesus & the 12! Let's believe in the mysterious, certain expansion of *God's kingdom*. In a sin-cherishing world, let's not cower & cover up the *lamp* of God's truth. Let's boldly declare what broken creations need to hear--repent & believe, the King of kings has come! Believe & be God's triumphant, strange, and unbending institution, not some weak parrot in a cage! Be a faithful farmer. Keep doing your part! Believe in God's power. Don't expect immediate results from spiritual investments. If you need that kind of affirmation, go cut grass or shovel snow.
- Being results driven can leave us unsatisfied in God's mysterious work and progress. Our call is to simply take God's *light* with us daily, to let it shine boldly, and trust God to do whatever He pleases. Like *mustard seeds* (or the widow's mite) God uses the seemingly insignificant to

grow His massive Kingdom. To put it another way, our smallest words, actions, and moments can be filled with eternal significance...even if people don't seem to like them or us.

- David Platt Wrote, “Embrace the kingdom now when it is small, and you will share in it when it is worldwide! ...Who would have imagined that starting with only a group of 12 men, Christianity would grow to where it is today? But it won't stop there. It will continue to grow until every people group on the planet is found in the kingdom. God will ensure this growth. Are you certain you are part of it?... What an encouraging word for those who think they labor in vain, who endure rejection and persecution, and who may even experience martyrdom!”

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

### Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Israel's perspective:** “A sower sowing seed is not just a familiar picture from everyday farming life. It's a picture of God sowing Israel again in her own land after the long years of exile; of God restoring the fortunes of his people, making the family farm fruitful again after the thorns and thistles have had it their own way for too long. There is even a hint of the restoration of the garden of Eden (Isaiah 40:8; 55:10–11) ...They believed that Israel would be rescued lock, stock and barrel; God's kingdom would explode onto the world stage in a blaze of glory. No, declares Jesus: it's more like a farmer sowing seed, much of which apparently goes to waste because the soil isn't fit for it, can't sustain it.” (NT Wright)
- **Palestinian fields:** “If you've ever farmed or planted a garden, the sower's method might seem odd to you in this story, however it was common back then to scatter seed, then “plow” (i.e. break up the soil) with a pointed stick because the terrain was quite rocky. Fields in ancient Palestine were long, narrow, and windy strips divided by little paths that became hard as pavement by the feet, hooves, and wheels of those who used them.” (NT Wright)
- **Sickle:** ““In goes the sickle at once, because harvest has arrived.’ That's a quotation from the prophet Joel (3.13). Jesus is telling them that God's promised moment is indeed coming – but it won't look like what they were expecting. God is not simply vindicating Israel and condemning those outside.” (NT Wright)
- **Application:** “The story is a warning against looking down on the small beginnings, in Jesus' Galilean ministry, of the great work that God was to do. It can function as a warning, too, against looking down on the small beginnings – a moment of vocation, two or three people meeting to pray and plan – that often, today, herald the start of some great new initiative that God has in mind. How could this have possibly been the beginning of something so massive?” (NT Wright)

### Articles:

### Songs/Videos:

### Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:

1. Go for a single, not a home run...don't drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.

## **Challenge Questions**

*Review the BIG IDEA: God's Kingdom is here and growing!*

**-Simple questions...**What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

### **Preparation questions for Mark 4:21-34.**

- How is a lamp like God's Word and kingdom in 4:21-25?
- What is mysterious about seeds and God's kingdom in 4:26-29?
- How is God's kingdom like a mustard seed in 4:30-32?
- What do these parables say about God's responsibility and ours?
- What did Jesus do in private, that He didn't do in public? (4:33-34)

### **Application questions from Mark 4:21-34.**

- What seems to help you listen and respond to God's Word best?
- What does your closeness with God reveal about your investment in spiritual things?
- What excites you about kingdom growth? What frustrates you?
- What inspires you to persevere when progress seems painfully slow?
- Why can't we separate the church from our Christian life?
- In what areas do you need to believe God, stand more firmly, and let His light shine?

### **Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...**

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddestrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddestrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>