

# Guest Speaker on Cork/Kerry Project

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[0:00] I want you to know that it's a great encouragement for us to know that you are here and to hear of what God is doing here and to just to see your faithful following of the Lord and your faithful witness here.

So it's an honor to be here with you. If you would turn to Mark chapter 4, that's where we're going to be. You may have seen the signpost in your seat. This is the signpost for Carrick Tool. Basically what this is is a reminder for you, whether you can use it as a bookmark or stick it around the refrigerator or whatever, someplace where I can remind you to pray for God to work in Carrick Tool.

Some of you have already been praying and we're very thankful for that. But I'd like you to know that God is answering those prayers. Since we arrived in the town, when we moved there, we knew that there was one family in the town that we could work with.

We also spent months of frustration trying to get moved, trying to sell the house in Yall, trying to buy a place in Carrick Tool.

[1:18] It just didn't seem like anything was working. In fact, it looked pretty much impossible in a few different ways. But to make a long story short, nothing is impossible for God. And he provided.

And he continues to provide. So not only has he provided us a house, a place to live, but he has also provided people.

People that have, Christians that we've discovered in the community, Christians that have moved into the community from other places, even from around the world. And actually, we're at the point now where we don't fit very well in our house anymore.

And we never saw that coming this soon. We really just praise the Lord for the work that he's done. We do have, we are a very diverse group. We have people from every continent except Australia. So if you know of anybody from Australia in Carrick Tool, we'd like to have them.

[2:16] But even more exciting, I think, is that we have seen one man who moved to Carrick Tool from the other side of the world who seems to have come to a real faith in the Lord.

And the last time we met in the home group, there were a couple of other people who don't know the Lord who attended. One of them very open to exploring what Christianity is about.

The other one I'm not so sure, but she was there. And that's what we want more than anything to see. We want to see people really engaging and really coming, turning to the Lord in real repentance and real faith.

But even if our house is getting full and getting over full, the reality is that we've really only scratched the surface. There are hundreds of people in our estate.

There are hundreds, there are thousands in the town. There are many more in the surrounding areas who simply don't know what it means to have a relationship with God. And what Jesus has done to make that possible for us through his death and resurrection, taking the punishment for our sin, to bring us back into the family of God.

[3:30] There are so many people around who simply don't have that understanding. And looking around us day to day, it can be overwhelming. How much need there is for the gospel and the lives around us.

And how do we move forward in that? How can God's kingdom take root in our country, in our community, in the broken lives that we see around us?

How can God's kingdom grow? So this morning I want to focus on three parables that Jesus told in Mark chapter 4. And we're going to look at how does God's kingdom grow?

So the first one we'll look at is in verse 3, where Jesus tells us something about how God's kingdom begins to grow in the hearts of people. So if you look with me, Mark chapter 4 and verse 3.

Listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil.

[ 4 : 35 ] It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root. Other seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

So they did not bear grain. Still others fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop. Some multiplying 30, some 60, some 100 times. If you skip down to verse 14, Jesus explains what he means by this parable.

He says, the farmer sows the word. Some people are like the seed along the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like the seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they fall away quickly.

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word. But the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires of other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like the seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop, some 30, some 60, some 100 times what was sown.

[ 5 : 49 ] Now usually, when we look at this parable, we think about the different kinds of soil, the different kinds of hearts that God's word goes into.

And we ask ourselves maybe the question, you know, what kind of soil is my heart? And that's a good question. It's a question we should ask ourselves because it's easy to assume maybe that we are good soil.

We all want to be good soil, right? Even if we are actually maybe withering or being choked with worry and care, with the deceitfulness of wealth or whatever it is, to the point that we're not really bearing fruit.

But that said, I want to take you in a different direction this morning. And what I want us to focus on is not the soil, but the seed itself. What is this seed that goes into the soil of hearts and produces life?

Life that can actually overflow 30, 60, even 100 times. Verse 14 says very clearly, the seed that is sown is the word.

[ 7 : 01 ] The beginning of growth in God's kingdom is the word of God. The word is the seed that brings life. It's the message of what God has done for us, of how we can have life in him.

It might seem small and insignificant, but Paul says it contains the power of God for salvation for all who believe. If we want to see God's kingdom grow, if we want to see it bear fruit, there is no other way to go about it than to sow God's word.

And what that means is that if we only give people ourselves, we are not giving them a real source of life. We can be very sacrificial. We can give ourselves in great ways, but our sacrifice actually can't give them life unless it points beyond ourselves to the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation.

We can't give away ourselves only. We can't just give people only ourselves and expect growth any more than a farmer can plant himself in the ground and expect to grow oranges.

It doesn't work. And the same goes for anything else that we can give people. I mean, a farmer can plant a great book on farming advice in the ground, and it might have really good advice in it, but nothing will grow.

[ 8 : 22 ] Maybe he could find a really engaging and entertaining documentary on farming, if such a thing exists. And he could plant that in the ground. And it doesn't matter how entertaining and wonderful that documentary is, nothing will grow.

We can give people good advice. We can give people great entertainment. We can give people wonderful moral rules to follow. Those are all fine, but they won't make life, real life, grow in the hearts of people.

Those things don't have that power. Nothing has that power, except the word of God, which is the power of God, the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation.

And that's why Paul says in Romans 10, how then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard of? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

So if we want to see God's kingdom grow around us, we've got to use our words and our actions. We've got to communicate God's word to others.

[ 9 : 33 ] We've got to plant God's word in the lives of others. The farmer sows the word. So the beginning of growth has got to be the seed of God's word.

But how does that seed grow? What happens next? So let's look at the next parable and we'll see. Starting in verse 26 of the same chapter, chapter 4 of Mark.

He also said, If you notice in this parable, the sowing has already been done.

The word has gone out. The seed is on the ground. So now what does the farmer do? He sleeps and he rises. In other words, he waits.

He waits for the life that is in the seed to do what life does, to grow. Now he might water. He might weed. He might do lots of other things to help to improve the conditions for the seed to grow.

[ 10 : 55 ] But still, he can't make anything grow in himself. He still has to wait for the life to do what he can't do for it. To make it grow.

And that's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 3, he says, What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed. Apollos watered it. But God is the one making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow.

The farmer knows that the seed he plants has life in it. As small as it is, as insignificant as it looks, it holds the power of life inside.

He knows how to plant it. He knows how to water it. He knows how to bring in the harvest when the harvest is ready. But the farmer cannot do the most important thing.

[ 11 : 58 ] The farmer cannot make that seed grow. And in the same way, we cannot force God's life to grow in people's hearts. We can scatter the seed.

We can tell people the truth of what Jesus has done for them. We can know that that seed has life in it, has the power to change any heart, to bring life to any heart.

We can water that seed, like Paul says that Apollos did. But Paul also says that when it comes down to it, only God gives the growth. We can have confidence in the seed.

because we can have confidence in God who causes the growth. God has given us these hugely important jobs of sowing, of watering, of harvesting, of getting the good news out, of doing whatever we can to help people's hearts to be ready to grow, to receive God's word.

But we've got to recognize that all the best sowing and watering in the world cannot create life. Only God can do that. He is the source of life.

[ 13 : 07 ] And all of our sowing and all of our watering has got to be done in dependence on Him to pour His life into people's hearts, to make His life grow.

But there might seem to be a problem because we've already seen in the first parable that some of the seed that we sow, in fact, it sounds like most of it, falls on soil and does not in the end produce fruit.

Hearts that reject the word of God. Hearts that may spring up and then get choked out by other things. Which raises the question, can we really be confident that God's kingdom will grow if so much of the seed seems to be unfruitful?

The answer is yes, we can be confident. And let's look at another parable to see why. If you look in verse 30, again he says, Jesus is making the point here that no matter how small, no matter how insignificant or unfruitful God's kingdom may look at any particular place, at any particular time, the growth of His kingdom is certain.

Not because of us. Not because of our amazing efforts at planting or our really expensive fancy watering cans. And that's good news for us.

[ 14 : 53 ] Because to be honest, we don't have many of us that are able to run, you know, big fancy programs or expensive events or whatever it is. But we don't have to worry about that.

We can carry on and we can do small things. We can do the things that we can do. And we can work hard at them. We can try, we can do our best to plant the seed as often and as well as we can. We can water it. But we can do all of this knowing, ultimately, that the kingdom will grow. Not because of our great efforts. but because of the one who the kingdom belongs to.

Because He has promised, I will build my church. And the gates of hell will not stand against it. It's that promise. And it's His power that gives us the strength to keep going no matter what might happen.

No matter what the future holds in our town, in Karagtuul, or here, we can keep going because we have God's promises. It doesn't depend on us.

[ 15 : 57 ] It depends on Him. And He has promised that His kingdom will grow. God is already providing for us in Karagtuul in ways that we never would have dreamed at this stage.

We've got opportunities in the community. We've got things happening that are... We're amazed at the opportunities that God is giving.

But this is God's work. And if things are going to happen, if people are going to be changed, it's going to be because of His Spirit bringing His life to people through the Gospel.

We've got to always be dependent on God and His promises, which is why we're so thankful and why we want you to pray. Because God answers the prayers of His people, and it's God's power that we need to work.

It can still be very overwhelming to look around and think that there are so many people around us who really don't know how to have a relationship with God through Jesus.

[ 17 : 05 ] And who's going to tell them? And then to look beyond, to see the towns and villages around us, just in Cork and Kerry, but beyond in Ireland and even around the world, where we may not know of anybody telling them how they can know Christ.

how Jesus has finished the work of salvation for everyone who trusts in Him. The task is really huge, not only in Ireland, but around the world.

And if it were not for God's promise that He will grow His kingdom, that He is the one who has the power to bring life, I mean, we could easily despair. But there's no need for that.

We are seeing God work. And if we look around us and if we think back, we can actually see that God has been keeping His promises right here in this area in Ireland.

If we only just even look at the Cork-Carrie project, 40 years ago, there was one little Baptist church in Cork City, Cork Baptist. Now there are churches, there's a church here, there's one in Middleton, one in Douglas, one in Vanden, Kinsale, Yall, Killarney, Tralee.

[ 18 : 17 ] There's outreach into Passage West and now into Cork-Tool. God is working. The seeds are growing. Fruits are coming into the harvest.

And we are seeing Him bringing life into new areas and new fields. That's very exciting. Now it's not only happening through the Baptists, but that is an example of what God is doing.

And the fact that God is working around us, though, should not lead us to just sit back and to be complacent. To just have the attitude that, you know what, God's going to do it anyway, so I don't need to get involved.

Not at all. Seeing God work and having the confidence, having the certainty of His promise should give us hope that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

We have the precious seed of life. The Word of God with the power to bring rebellious hearts back into relationship with their Creator. That seed can bring life even to the most barren, even to the most desolate heart.

[ 19 : 21 ] How could we ever just sit back with our bags of seed in the barn while so many fields around us lie hopeless and lifeless here and around the world?

I mean, if we really believe that God's promise is true, we would be sowing everywhere we can, even into the most desolate desert of a heart or a town or a nation because of the confidence we have that the seed that we sow has the power of life in it.

That life can transform absolutely anyone, any town, any nation because it is full of God's power.

He's the God who can make a mustard seed grow into a tree. He promised that His kingdom would grow in a similar way. He commanded that we sow His seed, His gospel, His truth.

Is there any greater joy than keeping that command and getting to actually see Him change hearts and transform hearts, bring life into a dead heart by His power?

[ 20 : 38 ] Psalm 126 says this, He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing His sheaves with Him.

I want that joy. I want you to have that joy. And the way that we'll get it is by going into the fields and sowing the wonderful truth of God's Word.

Amen.