

Mark 4:21–41

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Date: 24 May 2026

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[0 : 0 0] Verse 41. Again, Mark 4, 21 through 41. Hear the word of the Lord. 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?

For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest, nor is anything secret except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. And he said to them, Pay attention to what you hear. The measure you use, it will be measured to you. And still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given. And from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. The earth produces by itself.

First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. And he said, With what can we compare the kingdom of God?

[1 : 1 3] Or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. 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.

With many such parables, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately, to his own disciples, he explained everything.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, Let us go across to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.

And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

And they woke him, and said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

[2 : 2 5] He said to them, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear, and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thanks be to God. Well, welcome again this morning.

My name is Ethan Rice. I know many of you. And though you have not seen me in this position before, maybe some over there, it is not a reason for alarm, I hope.

No, in fact, as we close down me and my comrades the last two years of our pastoral residency here, I've been given the privilege to bring the word this morning, a privilege that I'm honored to have.

You all have become family to us, my wife and I. We've had our first child in your midst. We're having our second one soon, and you've all celebrated that with us already. And for that, we're thankful, and we would like to stick around if that's okay.

[3 : 3 6] The question that this text brings to mind for us this morning is, How do we hope in light of the message of the coming kingdom? How do we hope in light of the message of the coming kingdom?

You see, that's where we're at today in the book of Mark as we pick up in the fourth chapter in the 21st verse. As Pastor Pace was closing down last week, we had seen Jesus has been teaching, performing miracles, coming with this message, repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

And yet, even here in our passage, he's not done yet speaking about listening. And so, beckons the question, how do we hope in light of the message of the kingdom at hand?

I'm not very good at math. I went to a Bible college. Just to be honest, I also grew up in southern Indiana, so that just doubles down on that. But, we see in this text, four groups prior in Pastor Pace's text from last week are going to hear the word of God.

And yet, only one of them are going to actually receive it. That's a terrifying news. There is a whole lot of people that are not even hearing the word of God.

[4 : 58] And that the four groups of people in the text from last week that will hear the word of God, only one quarter, 25% of them will respond to it. I hope those are under-exaggerated numbers.

So, the question that I'm asking is, how do we hope in light of the coming kingdom at hand? We sing about it, and we just did. No matter what may come my way, I will always trust in Jesus.

No matter what may come my way, I can stand. My life is in your hand. But, do we actually believe it? Do we actually respond in such a way that the message of the kingdom, when it comes to us, we produce the fruit of obedience, of responding to it, of trusting in the hope that the text seems to demonstrate that it would?

I think that what we get on the backside of our message from last week, what we get in the text that Pastor Meeks just read for us this morning, is that there still is hope for those who hear.

There still is hope for those who hear. And this hope is built on two pillars in this text. And here's the first. The rewards of those who pay attention.

[6 : 13] There are rewards who continue to pay attention to the message of the kingdom of God.

The first half of our text offers a few parables, a few more parables that reach into our experience of life.

After receiving the word of the coming kingdom and offers hope despite the difficulty that we would still go through. Look forward to me in verse 21.

The first of these parables is this image of a lamp and a measure being brought together. He says, What does he mean when he's speaking of lamp here?

What does it mean that certain things are being brought to light? Well, I mean to tell you that he's speaking of the message of the kingdom, the secrets that have been brought in. Even if you look at verse 10, previously in chapter 4.

And when he was alone with those who were around him with the 12, when he was speaking his first parable, the 12 asked him about the parables. And he said to them, So whenever he comes back around and he's beginning to speak to us about this idea of a lamp being brought in, he's speaking to us, or he's speaking to his disciples about the lamp, the understanding of the kingdom that finally is breaking in.

[7 : 37] And he's saying, Be encouraged. Though now you only see in part and you're beginning to see it unveiled, there is a day coming where it will all be uncovered.

All the understanding will shine like a light breaking through. Makes me consider, even if you look upward, this dome that's above our ceiling, that is our ceiling.

And not necessarily the pieces of glass within the dome that magnify the light that might come through, but actually what I'm more interested in is the cover that now sits above it.

The cover above the dome, there's an outer dome that seems to be like it's damaged right now.

And there's a cover that is protecting that dome. And yet something it does is restrict the light.

Even now you can see it. It restricts the light from coming in. But there will be a day when that dome is fixed and we'll take that cover off and the light will flood into this auditorium and bring glory and magnify even further the services that we're having.

[8 : 43] There is a day when the understanding of the kingdom of God that those who hear, they can take hope because all will hear, all will see, all will know about the kingdom and that's brought in.

This is the first reward that we see. And yet it's coupled even further with this idea of measures, as the text says.

And Jesus is teaching in verse 24. He goes even further by saying, 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.

For the one who has, more will be given. And from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. The only imperative of this entire text, pay attention.

Pay attention to what you hear of the kingdom, of the secrets that have been revealed. There is a reward for the one who pays attention.

[9 : 45] They will be given more. I consider that even whenever we begin to understand the word of God and the secrets of the kingdom, we've just gone through the whole book of Ecclesiastes, if you've been with us, learning what it means like to live in light of the wisdom that's underneath of the light of the sun.

Or even before that, we were in the book of Titus, considering the wisdom that was due to how to live as a young man or an old man or a young woman or an old woman and what benefits there has in that, to live in accordance with this sound doctrine, as Paul would put it.

And there is still a day coming when you will realize that the things that you have stored up, the things that you have put in measure, put in place to yourself by taking on the word of God, uncovering those secrets, you will realize that is not a waste.

That is something that will go out and all will realize that this is wisdom. This is the secrets of the kingdom of God. That the measure you use will be measured to you.

We could speak, and I'm sure many of you could as well, about the benefits of a daily Bible reading practice or intercession with the Lord in prayer, drawing closer and nearer to him, trying to understand further of the kingdom of God that will be.

[11 : 02] And yet, we can get discouraged when we feel like those secrets or the understanding of the kingdom isn't quite clear. But I'm very apt in understanding, even now in this service, this is the first service where we have many children here with us this week.

It's not as if a child is going to understand with the same measure that a professor like Andrew Zulker would be able to. No, but the encouragement from this text is, use the measure that you've been given.

With what understanding, whatever capacity the Lord has given you in this life to be able to understand further the kingdom of God, there is hope in that. Use it, and it will be measured back to you plentifully.

And yet, there's still a warning. To the one who does not, even what he has will be taken away. So pay attention to what you hear.

That's the first reward we see. The second comes, and I'll take them in part together, this idea of the kingdom of God that Jesus will relate by way of two separate parables.

[12 : 11] The first is a parable of this seed that a man scatters, it says in verse 26. It says, This is the first parable, this idea of the unstoppable kingdom of God.

It will come slowly. You might look one day, and it just begins to be a sprout. Another day, you look back, and it's beginning to be a stalk, hip high, and you begin to feel the effects of it.

But there is a day coming when there will be the full harvest. Whenever the kingdom of God is grown up around you, and the call still here is pay attention.

Make sure you don't miss it. I grew up, like I told you, in southern Indiana, and just outside of our house, there was a massive thicket of blackberry bushes.

And these blackberry bushes would look dry most of the year. And it wasn't like we were going out there spreading the seed ourselves. We would just happen upon them and hope that we would get it and be paying attention for when it comes.

[13 : 37] Because when it did, what it meant was fresh blackberry cobbler, fresh blackberry ice cream. It was awesome. But there would be some years where all of us, all of our family members would not pay attention.

And we wouldn't be looking for the fresh produce, the harvest that was coming. And yet, if we had been, we would have been able to enjoy it. In this text, we're encouraged that it's coming.

The question isn't whether or not the kingdom of God is coming. The question is, will you be paying attention when it does? There's things in life that will cause us not to pay attention, things that might distract us.

Even if you think about the four soils that we looked at last week, one that falls upon the rock, one that falls upon the thorns. The thorns representing the people who hear the kingdom of God.

And when it grows up, they get choked out by these thorns, and the thorns are the cares of the world. What are we distracted by? What things take our attention off of the coming kingdom of God?

[14 : 45] Chasing after earthly pursuits, cares of the world, instead of focusing on God and his kingdom. It's not as if the cares of the world don't matter.

It's not as if God doesn't care about your particular circumstances or the things that we're going through. But the question is, are we paying attention to the thing that matters the most? The thing of Christ and his kingdom coming, that will come in full fruition, and will be the reward of the one who pays attention.

This third and final parable that is given is another parable of the kingdom of God. Jesus says in verse 30, with what can we compare the kingdom of God?

What shall we use for it? It's like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground, it's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. Yet when it is sown, it grows up, becomes larger than all the garden plants, and puts out its branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

This final picture that Jesus is giving us is conceding that the kingdom of God, though you see it now, may look like something small, will grow up into be something large and beautiful. We've seen a bountiful harvest, but now he uses the picture of a tree that grows up and reaches out its arms, and the birds can rest in its branches.

[16:09] It's the idea of rest, this idea of something starting small, something starting like you wouldn't want to pay attention to it, but it is worth paying attention to, not for what it looks like now, but for what it will become.

I'm struck too in considering that the people who would be listening to this crowd were from particular regions that would have been discounting, potentially, the kingdom that Jesus is speaking of.

Even if you look in chapter three, verses seven and eight, we're told of the many towns and cities that the crowd which Jesus was speaking to were coming from.

Judea, Jerusalem, Idomia, but it's particularly these brothers and sisters from Tyre and Sidon that I'm most interested in. These people coming from what the Bible consistently describes as a profitable port city in the Mediterranean.

Even now in Jesus' time, a city that was under Roman control, making much and much money. And I can only imagine that if I am one of these citizens listening to Jesus' teaching here about this magnificent kingdom that will be a beautiful harvest that will shed its light on the whole world when it comes someday.

[17:29] Well, I'm sitting here thinking, well, this man does pretty interesting miracles. He's quite the good teacher. But about this whole kingdom stuff, I just don't really believe it at all. And this encouragement and this text is, it's a part of the plan.

It starts small, but it will grow. Even if you consider Jesus' own motley crew, it's him and his 12 men. And yet, if you consider what has Christianity turned into over the course of 2,000 years, that it has grown into something large, producing fruit of its labors, producing something that would mean rest for those of the world around it.

this is the reward of those who pay attention to the kingdom of God, who pay attention to the message. There is still hope.

Pay attention. But Mark closes down these parables not with a further explanation of these parables.

In fact, the explanation that I've given is mostly coming from Jesus' prior explanation. And yet, what Mark brings attention to is that those who draw near to him are the ones who have a greater chance of making it.

[18:52] And this is our final reward, is that the one who pays attention will get more by drawing near to Jesus. At 33, we're told that with many such parables, he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.

He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples, he explained everything. So if you're struggling this morning with hope, I've heard of this message of the kingdom of God.

Just keep sitting. Just keep listening. Keep coming. If this is the first time you've maybe heard of this message at all, that there is a kingdom that is coming, and it is coming, and it will look beautiful, keep sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Keep coming back to the word. I'm reminded by the story in 1 Kings that we're told of the queen of Sheba, who upon hearing of the great wisdom of the king of Israel, decided that she would come and test with hard questions what she had heard about his wisdom to prove whether or not what he said was true, what he offered, if it was beneficial or not.

And the text says in 1 Kings chapter 10, and Solomon answered all of her questions. And he said to her, or she said to him, that when she had seen the food of his table, the sitting of his officials, the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, his burnt offerings that he offered in the house of the Lord, the text says that there was no more breath in her.

[20 : 33] My question this morning is, will we come and sit at the feet of Jesus and let him take our breath away? Because I imagine the kingdom that is to come, that is revealed even now through the text and the secrets of the kingdom of God, revealed in the word of God, the glory that all that the queen of Sheba saw is not even a fraction of what will come in the kingdom of God.

Trust in the reward of paying attention to the message of the kingdom. Yet even this authorial note, though it stands on its own fix, drawing all who hood here to continue to listen, to continue to pay attention, a message is only ever as substantial as the authority or credentials of the one who is bringing it.

If you get pulled over, but the police officer doesn't produce a badge or doesn't have the requisite requirements, you're not gonna believe that he has anything that he's able to issue you. If you go up and talk to somebody at Trader Joe's but they don't have the Trader Joe's badge, you're not gonna believe that they're gonna be able to help you out in any particular way at all.

And yet what we see in the latter half of our text here is that we're called to trust in the authority of the messenger. Trust in the authority of the messenger.

And that's our final hope, trust in the authority of the messenger. Jesus finishes up, he closes down his teaching, he pushes away, he says, let's go to the other side.

[22 : 16] They need to receive the light, they need to receive the kingdom and the message there as well. And yet even along the way, leaving the crowd, he took him just as he was in the boat and there was a great, verse 37 says, a windstorm that arose and the waves were breaking onto the boat so that the boat was already beginning to fill.

But you'd think that these would be the ones that wouldn't be scared of this particular happenstance. These trained and seasoned fishermen! Who have grown up on these same seas, these ones that have been using their skills to navigate these waters their entire lives and yet they're terrified.

they're afraid as they can begin to feel even the winds and the waves and the water filling the boat hitting their feet. They look and they turn to Jesus and they see him, you see it yourselves in verse 38, asleep on the cushion.

And they woke him and they said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? I want to point out here, I don't think in this question they're asking him to do anything about it.

And the reason why I think that is because of how surprised they are when he does do something about it in the end. Because Jesus, standing on his feet, he says, peace be still and the wind ceases.

[23 : 51] There was a great calm. He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? If the disciples hadn't been paying attention to what Jesus had been saying, it wouldn't have mattered the trial, the circumstance, the thing that was going on in their lives because there's still a kingdom coming.

But this causes them to then ask the right question, the question that Mark has been hinting at this whole time in his book. Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

This is the better question. Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? You better be sure that no matter what reason there was for them to ask, why do you not care that we are perishing?

It was the wrong question. But now that they're asking, who is this? That is the right question. It's interesting that they ask in the particular way that they ask, do you not care that we are perishing? Do you not care? Do you not give us any hope in the midst of our perishing by being up with us, by seeing it with us, by staying out with us?

[25 : 17] What a silly question to ask. And yet that's the same question that we ask internally in ourselves when we see the circumstances of our life floating and the winds raging and the storm going all around us.

We ask, does he not care? Does he not care that we are perishing? What I want to encourage you with, he does care.

Why else would he be speaking? Why else would he have come? Why else would he have been preaching about the light or the kingdom to come by bolstering us with all of this ideals and understanding to pay attention?

He cares that we are perishing. Not only does he care that we are perishing, but he has the authority to do something about it. He has the authority to change our circumstances, to bring us into something new.

He cares. Even the first verse that you probably learned, you remember, that God so loved the world that he sent his only son, that he whoever would believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[26 : 24] He cares that we are perishing and he has sent his son to do something about it. We're tempted to be people, that we are told to be people of hope.

We are tempted to be people that forget hope. Hope and the rewards of the kingdom that is coming. Hope and the authority of the messenger who's able to do something about it because he cares.

Let me pray. Father, you are a mighty and good father. Father who's revealed himself not only in the bountiful message of your word and the light of your kingdom to come, but you're a God who's revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

You have offered to us even still salvation through Jesus Christ, Lord. I pray that we would pay attention not only to this message of this text but to the life of Christ, to his death that he died for our sake and for the resurrection hope that you've given us in the person of Jesus Christ.

I pray that we would pay attention, Father. I pray that we would hope and trust that you care. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.