

Kingdom Parables

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[0 : 00] And so this morning, I want us to consider this question. How can we, who belong to Christ, continue to press on faithfully! In the midst of all of the discouragement, in the midst of all of the bad news and the difficulties that we see in the church generally, and that we sometimes experience in our personal lives.

How can we press on faithfully and in faith in the midst of all of that? I believe that the passage that we have come to this morning in the Gospel of Mark as we continue our sermon series does give us some perspective, does give us some answers as to how we can do that.

So if you have not yet done so, please turn in your Bible to Mark chapter 4, and this morning we'll be reading verses 26 through 34. Mark 4, 26 through 34.

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 grain, the full grain in the ear.

[1 : 43] 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?

Or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when 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.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word this morning. And Lord, we thank you that your word is sufficient.

[2 : 54] We thank you that you did not leave us helpless in this world, but you have given us your Holy Spirit, and you have given us your eternal word.

I pray this morning that you would speak to us from your word. I pray you would give us the perspective that we need to continue to persevere and press on in faith, knowing and believing that you are advancing your purposes in the earth.

I pray, Lord, that not only will it encourage us in our corporate endeavors, but I pray that it would encourage us in our personal lives as well as we hear the truths of the parables that we are considering this morning.

I ask for your grace, Lord, to be faithful to your word and to care for your people through the preaching of your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Gospel of Mark was written about 25 to 30 years after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. For three years, Jesus taught and ministered in the regions of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria.

[4 : 13] And without question, he was the greatest teacher and the greatest miracle worker. And before he ascended to heaven, he commissioned eleven disciples and had them to go forth to continue his work.

And at the time that Mark is writing his Gospel, the Church is marginalized, the Church is persecuted, the Church is looked down upon, it is frowned upon, they were called the way, they were not a group that people eagerly joined themselves to.

On the religious front, they were being persecuted by legalistic Jews. On the political front, they were being persecuted by the Romans. And in many ways, little had changed.

Since Jesus began his ministry and he announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. And in some ways, some of the followers of Jesus could have thought that things were worse because of all of the persecution that they were facing, that they really didn't face as much during the ministry of Jesus.

And sometimes when we don't get the results that we expected, the results that we want, the temptation is to resort to other means. The temptation is to say, well, we need to just do something else.

[5 : 53] But instead of just turning to do something else, we oftentimes need to just simply reevaluate the basis upon which our expectations are founded.

Sometimes we just have a wrong expectation. with a wrong expectation about what was promised and how it would be achieved.

And so, for example, when Jesus announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, his disciples, like many others, had a view of an earthly kingdom. A kingdom that would be like the Romans, a kingdom that would actually push back against Roman rule.

And Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate in John chapter 18 and Pilate asked him if he was a king, Jesus said to him in verse 36, my kingdom is not of this world.

If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews, but my kingdom is not of this world.

[7 : 03] Here are these two parables that we have come to this morning. We're being reminded of the truth of what Jesus taught about the kingdom of God.

We considered about a month ago the parable of the soul, which is the foundational parable of all the parables, and it is why we see Jesus asking the disciples in that parable parable.

In verse 13, he says to them, this is chapter 4, verse 13, he says to them, do you not understand this parable, the parable of the sower?

How then will you understand all the parables? It is as if Jesus was saying to them, the parable of the sower is the gateway parable that you need to understand.

if you're going to understand the other parables of the kingdom. We see in verses 33 and 34, Mark tells us that with many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to bear it, to hear it, sorry.

[8 : 16] He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. And so Jesus sought to help his disciples to understand the kingdom of God by using parables to teach them about it.

In the parable of the sower, one of the things he said, he said, the kingdom of God, he explained this parable. There are some parables, although we read that he explained all the parables to his disciples, in scripture we don't have all the parables explained.

There are just a few of them that Jesus actually goes through and he says, this is what the seed means, this is who the sower is, this is what the weeds are, for example. He goes through and he does that, and so we have the benefit of it.

And what he tells us in this primary parable, that the kingdom of God is like a man who sows seed. And his seed is going to fall on four kinds of hearts, four kinds of people.

And there's only one group of them who will receive it and they will be a fruitfulness, kingdom fruitfulness, to different levels and to different degrees.

[9 : 38] And in these two parables that we have come to this morning, Mark seems to be assuring his hearers of the future prospects of the kingdom. kingdom, he seems to be assuring them that despite what things look like, despite what it looks like, God has something that is amazing that he has planned and will bring to pass for his kingdom.

In these two parables, the parable of the seed growing and the mustard seed, Mark seems to be saying the growth of God's kingdom is both mysterious and surprising.

The growth of God's kingdom is both mysterious and surprising. So, this morning we have two short parables and I have two simple points.

The first one is this, the kingdom's growth is mysterious. That's the point of the parable of the seed growing.

verse 26, Jesus says, the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. And here Jesus is drawing upon the parable of the sower and he's giving this picture of a farmer, something that his audience would have more readily understood than most of us this morning.

[11 : 09] He says, this farmer, he confidently goes out and he confidently sows seed. He sleeps and he rises and the seed sprouts and grows and he doesn't understand how the seed grows.

In verse 28, he tells us the earth produces by itself first the blade, then the air, then the full grain in the air.

I think we all know this much about farming, that a farmer minimum has to plant seed. We know that much about farming. The farmer doesn't plant that seed, then he would be a lunatic to expect that he's going to have a harvest.

But what we see is the farmer goes and he confidently plants seed. That's all the farmer really is required to do in the whole process.

The growth of the seed is not dependent on the farmer. He goes to sleep and even while he's asleep, the seed is sprouting, it is growing, it is working, it is producing.

[12 : 35] And to him it's a mystery. It's a mystery to the farmer as to how that actually happens. Now when the farmer gets up, I'm sure the farmer doesn't sleep all day, he gets up and he no doubt goes to work and he does different things in his farm.

But the point is that if the farmer is not doing anything to cause the seed to grow when he is asleep, if the seed can grow when he is asleep, we can rest assured that the seed is not in need of his efforts even in the day when he is awake and he is doing whatever he does on the farm.

And Jesus tells us in the end, he says, and that seed that is sown, and obviously seed is for plural seed, there are many seeds that are sown, is going to result in a harvest.

Now from the very outset of this parable, Jesus tells us that he is not just giving us a lesson on farming. He tells us in verse 26, the kingdom of God is like this.

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. I think we could pretty much, as we try to make sense of the parable, though we could see that Jesus is the sower in the parable of the sower, I think we could easily conclude that he is not pointing to himself as the sower in this parable, because Jesus knows.

[14 : 19] He knows, if there's anybody who knows how the seed grows, he knows. He created the seed. He created the seed to do what it does, so he doesn't have himself in view.

what he seems to have in view is just an ordinary person who's going about the business of farming.

And what Jesus is talking about is he's talking about the mystery of the kingdom of God and its growth and its progress. And what he's really saying to us is we don't understand how that actually happens, but what we can know is that it does happen and the kingdom of God is advancing.

In Matthew 13, Jesus told a parable of the weeds and the wheat. And it's another of the parables that we have an explanation from Jesus about.

He tells us what it actually means. And in Matthew 13, you'll find eight parables that Jesus tells that are to give us insight into the kingdom of God.

[15 : 31] Here's how Jesus explains the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13, starting in verse 36. It says, then he left the crowds.

Can we dim the lights on the stage for me? Thank you. Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him saying, explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.

He answered, the one who sows the good seed is the son of man, the field is the world, and the good seed is the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the clothes of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so would it be at the close of the age.

I think this explanation that Jesus gives us of the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13 gives us some insight into understanding this parable of the seed sowing, though it only focuses on the good seed.

[16 : 49] It only focuses on the good seed that is sown, and in the end will result in a harvest.

And I think the encouragement for us this morning is that we need to be sowing the seed of the gospel, being reminded that the growth of the seed of the gospel in the lives of people who hear it is not dependent upon us.

what God calls us to do is like that farmer to faithfully sow that seed. Sow it in all the opportunities that we have. The varied relationships that we have, just faithfully sow the seed, because the power is in that.

It's not in our ability, it is not in anything that we do, it's not in our persuasiveness. we don't need to spend enormous effort in being persuasive.

Instead, we need to just spend that effort in being faithful to convey the truth of the gospel to those who would hear us.

[17 : 58] And so that's the encouragement of this parable, for us to sow the seed knowing that it's not dependent upon us in terms of the fruit that it produces, it is dependent upon God.

The kingdom growing is a mystery to us, but it is no mystery to God because he ordained it to be in that way. And the seeds that are sown and the seeds that are accepted in the hearts of those who hear it, what Jesus is saying to us is there is going to be a harvest of souls, and the clear point in time is when Christ returns.

When Christ returns, there will be a harvest of souls who have received the seed of the gospel, and who have borne fruit, and they will be harvested into the kingdom of God.

And so we need to remember that although it's a privilege for us to be involved in the great commission to sow the seed of the gospel, the growth of that seed ultimately is dependent upon God and not upon us.

We are simply those who sow, but God is the one who makes it real. This should encourage us. Sometimes you may think you want to feel the person is listening, or you want to feel some kind of response.

[19 : 26] That's not our job. God is the one who will watch over that seed once we would have planted it, and he is the one who will cause that seed to bring a harvest as he chooses.

God will have a harvest at the end of the world. That's the parable of the seed growing. In the second parable, the parable of the mustard seed, the point is this.

The kingdom's growth is surprising. The kingdom's growth is surprising. In verse 30, Jesus asks the question, with what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall be used for it?

And then he goes on to liken the kingdom of God to a grain of mustard seed, which he tells us is the smallest seed of the earth, but when it is grown, it is the largest of all the garden plants.

Now, again, this is foreign to us, but this would not have been foreign to the hearers of Jesus. And I believe that Mark's point as he is sharing this, if you could just think about it, when Jesus would have announced this parable, crowds of people would have been flocking to him, he would have been performing miracles, casting out demons, he would have been preaching and teaching, but things were still the same.

[21 : 05] Romans were still ruling and occupying, Pharisees were still controlling religious life, and again, to the natural eye, nothing had changed, and nothing was ever going to change.

And so Jesus teaches this parable about how the kingdom begins and how the kingdom grows. And he draws from culture.

It would have been very typical for Jewish families in that day to be cultivating a garden from which they would get food. It was also typical that one of the plants that they would have in their garden was the mustard, the mustard plant.

And although it was the smallest of all their seeds, it was going to become the tallest of all the plants that they would be planting in their garden.

In his book, *The Parables*, Simon Kistemaker, he said this, he said that because the mustard tree took up so much space, and would dominate the garden, that what Jews typically did was they would plant it off away from the garden, bordering the plot that they would be using, and it could grow up to 10 to 15 feet, and it can also grow very wide.

[22 : 35] What's the point of this parable? parable? The point of the parable that Jesus was saying to those who were hearing him is, the kingdom of God is different.

The kingdom of God is different. The kingdom of God does not begin in pomp and pageantry, and in loudness, and in bravado.

He says it begins very, very small. It begins in a very insignificant way, but when it is grown, it becomes the largest of the plants.

In other words, it is the largest of all the kingdoms. Though it doesn't look like much when it starts, it will be the largest kingdom in the world.

In essence, Jesus was really saying to them, think about it, here's how the kingdom begins. It begins with this carpenter, who was born in a manger, who walked the dusty streets of Galilee, announcing the kingdom of God is at hand in the midst of Roman domination, and he's sitting in a boat telling parables.

[24 : 00] And Jesus is saying to them, surely, this same kingdom that begins like that mustard seed, it will grow. And its growth will be phenomenal, its growth will be nothing short of surprising.

The mustard seed, the power of this mustard seed was to encourage disciples of Christ not to despise the days of small beginnings, and not to compare the kingdom to the kingdoms around it.

It's different. And brothers and sisters, this is instructive for us. It should be instructive for us. Because so many times we make false and wrong comparisons.

The things of the kingdom are very different from this world. And we will always go astray when we try to make the comparison. person. Because it's different.

It's not designed to be as the kingdoms of this world. The kingdoms of this world seek to impress by show and by might.

[25 : 14] And if one kingdom is going to try to overcome another kingdom, it's going to flaunt every single thing that it had. But this kingdom that will overcome all the kingdoms of the world doesn't begin that way.

It begins small. It begins insignificant. It grows slowly but surely. And it will be the greatest of all the kingdoms.

In verse 32, Jesus says that the birds of the air would come and make its nests in the shade of its branches. What does that mean?

A number of years ago I heard a particular pastor on the island saying that that is about demons. The demons are coming in to pollute this thing, the kingdom of God and all the other kinds of stuff.

And that's just not the case at all. What does it mean that this mustard tree that is representing the kingdom of God, that birds will come and nest in it.

[26 : 27] In this book, The Parables of Jesus and Matthew, J.D. Kinsbury says that the rabbis used to call the Gentiles birds of the air.

and it was not a compliment. It was actually a very degrading statement. It was a statement that was rooted in prejudice.

And the prejudice of the Jews was widespread and Jesus' disciples would have been no different. They would have held very similar views of the Jews. And Jesus says, essentially, this mustard tree that represents the kingdom of God is not going to be exclusively Jewish.

But the birds of the air will come and they will nest in it and they will find rest in it. They will find refuge in it. They will find shelter in it.

They will receive nourishment from it. Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God will reach out and embrace. the Gentiles and the outcasts and those who are generally considered to be excluded.

[27 : 46] In Revelation 5, well, first of all, what Jesus is saying is not in a vacuum. When you go back to the Old Testament, you will see the picture and the imagery of all that is being expressed in this growing kingdom, this kingdom that is going to be inclusive of all other nations.

This starts even with Abraham. The Lord never called Abraham to be the father of the Jews. He called Abraham to be the father of many nations. From the very outset, it was always God's plan. Gentiles are not included in Christ because Jews rejected Christ as dispensationists teach.

That's not what the Bible teaches. From day one, it was God's plan that he would have every nation and every kindred and every tribe, kingdom. And this is what we see him getting in the end.

This is what he gets at the very end. And so we see in the book of Revelation, the book that reveals to us how things are going to end and wrap up.

And what we see in verses 9 and 10, this is John having a vision of the elders before the throne singing a song. And we read in verse 9, And they sang a new song saying, Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

[29 : 25] and you have made them a kingdom of priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth.

These are the nations that are going to come in from every nation, every tribe, every town.

There will be no group that God will not have a people from in the entire earth. You have a representation of them.

And the inclusion is in the kingdom of God. There are people who actually think, and this is something we need to get really straight in our head, the church is not the kingdom of God.

The church is not the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not the church. the church is a part of the kingdom of God.

[30 : 25] The kingdom of God is much greater than the church. The kingdom of God includes the church. But God has people from every kindred, every tongue, every tribe that would come through churches, but he engraves them into his kingdom.

They become citizens of his kingdom. When a person gets saved, and we just saw the wonderful experience of Bradley Johnson as he came to Christ, as God sovereignly worked on his heart, granted him repentance, returned from sin and trusted in Christ.

He's in a local church, but he's not just in a local church. God has translated him out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his own son. And so what we have in common with those in churches elsewhere that are not a part of this church, on this island, around the world, that belong to the Lord, we have this mutual citizenship in the kingdom of God.

He grasps us into his kingdom as his sons and as his daughters. In the book of Daniel, Daniel chapter 2, there's this dream that Nebuchadnezzar had, and Daniel interprets, and Daniel gives the fulfillment of that prophecy.

And what Daniel says is, he talks about their coming, well first of all he talks about all the kingdoms, the four kingdoms that successively defeat one another, and he says that there's coming a kingdom that will crush those other kingdoms, and they will not be left to another people, and that kingdom, he said, it will fill the whole earth.

[32 : 16] It will fill the whole earth. In the same way this garden plant, this mustard seed dominates the garden, it's the same way this kingdom will fill the entire earth.

when you read the gospel of Luke, in Luke chapter two, verses one through seven, Luke identifies the time when Jesus was born.

He says it was in the days of Caesar Augustus, it was in the days of the Roman rule, the Roman empire. That was the beginning of the planting of that mustard seed in a real sense in the earth with the coming of Jesus.

And though it looked weak, and though it looked like it was not going anywhere, and though it looked like they would be destroyed as they were being persecuted, as they were being killed, the kingdom has advanced.

It has advanced beyond Palestine, and it is indeed advancing to the ends of the earth, and whether we live to see it or not, we have the promise in God's word, that he will have a harvest in the end, and that harvest will be of all people, every kindred, every tongue, every tribe, every nation.

[33 : 42] Again, we see the fulfillment of this in the book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 11, and verse 15. In the book of Revelation, you'd find that there are seven trumpets that are referred to.

Seven angels blowing seven trumpets. And we find in verse 15, it says, Then the seventh angel, or the last angel, blew his trumpet. And there were loud voices in heaven saying, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever forever and ever.

This is the kingdom that began in the preaching of Jesus, saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And he goes and he recruits misfits, twelve misfits who nobody would be taking seriously.

And he gives his life for three years, pouring out to them, and he leaves the earth, and for all intents and purposes, people thought, as Gamaliel said, he says that this thing is not of God.

When he dies, it will all dry up. And many thought that that would be the case. But they didn't understand that that was not a worldly kingdom. That was not a kingdom that was dependent on man and man's effort.

[35 : 07] That was God's kingdom. And God was the one who was going to ensure that that kingdom would grow, and that kingdom would fulfill all that he has called it to be.

And indeed, it is doing that. And indeed, it will do that. Thank God this morning, we're seeing more of this kingdom than Mark's original audience who would have been reading his gospel.

As he would have been encouraging them, reminding them, don't be discouraged. don't grow weary. Don't wonder. The kingdom of heaven is not like that. It's not like the Romans.

It's not like the Greeks. It's different. It's different. It begins differently, and it grows differently. It's not dependent on human effort.

We may not understand it, but this kingdom is advancing. This kingdom is growing. And so he's saying, be patient. This seed, it seems weak.

[36 : 21] This growth, it seems slow. It's certain. It will grow to dominate the garden of the earth. It will grow to dominate all the kingdoms of this world.

Brothers and sisters, if we would embrace this attitude and this mindset that we see being taught in these two parables, it would encourage us to be patient.

Patient with God's work in his church and patient with God's work in our lives. Trusting God's promises that what he has said, he will bring to pass.

again, notice the conclusion in verses 33 and 34. It says, 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. Here's the good news. The good news is that though we may not have every single detail of all the parables explained, Mark tells us Jesus told them all of it.

[37 : 46] And we can believe that these apostles were faithful to communicate the truths, even though they may not have matched it in the way that we may want it for each parable, we can believe that the truths that Jesus was teaching in these parables have come to us.

in the pages of scripture. There are people who actually believe that what the church really needs right now is we need more miracles, we need more signs and wonders in order for people to see them and be saved and for the kingdom of God to advance in the earth.

That's the misguided view. That's not a biblical view. As a matter of fact, when you read the parable of Lazarus and the rich man and the rich man was asking Lazarus to just let someone from the dead go back and witness to his brothers so that they don't come to this wicked place, Abraham told him, he said, if someone rose from the dead and go to them, they won't believe.

And we see this evidence even in the ministry of Jesus. Greatest miracle worker, greatest teacher, father. And when he dies, only 120 could be found in the upper room, waiting on the promise from the father.

And Jesus knows what we need. Do you realize that every single miracle that Jesus performed was not a lasting miracle in a true sense?

[39 : 38] even the people he raised from the dead, they died again. The people he healed, they eventually died. The demons he cast out, he didn't destroy.

And he said, when they leave one place, they will go searching for another. But here's what he did do for us. And this is what we need, brothers and sisters.

Let us not fall forth the line that we need something other than God has given to us. What he's given to us is the sowing of this seed. This is what we need.

We need to be faithful to sow the seed of the gospel. That is the way men, women, boys and girls have their eyes open and God brings them from spiritual death to spiritual life.

That is the way the harvest is going to come. It is the gospel. It is the seed of the gospel that is sown.

[40 : 41] When sown in the hearts of those with good soil and received by them, we have this promise that there's going to be fruitfulness. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold.

And this problem of the seed growing in the midst of all the adversity that that seed faces, birds trying to eat it and all the other kinds of things. There is one over that harvest who watches over it and who would ensure that there is a harvest in the end.

And that harvest comes about in one way, brothers and sisters. It comes away through the gospel. And I pray we get encouraged this morning. I pray that we draw faith from these parables.

To call us to be faithful to plant the seed. It doesn't matter. Just plant it. Share the gospel. And let's trust the one who makes it grow, to cause it to grow in the hearts and the lives of those who hear it.

And no matter what we see, it doesn't matter what we go to our graves saying, it doesn't matter what kind of reversal the church seems to have in the world, we can hold on to God's word that in the end, the kingdom of this world, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

[42 : 11] And God is going to have a rich harvest, a harvest of souls, not because they saw miracles, not because they saw signs and wonders, but because someone faithfully shared the gospel with them.

The Bible tells us, don't be ignorant of Satan's devices. He has all kinds of devices, all kinds of schemes. And he can get us into all kinds of games and get us distracted in all kinds of ways.

And we should be able to know enough from the word of God that the primary thing that Satan wants to get us away from is the word of God. It's the primary thing.

And brothers and sisters, when we move away from the word of God, Satan will entertain us. What we need is to hold on to this word, proclaim the gospel as we have opportunities, and trust the Lord to cause it to grow.

And trust the Lord to build his kingdom mysteriously. We don't understand it. And in the end, it'll be surprising to us all to see what the Lord builds.

[43 : 37] So I encourage us to hear the words of the parable of the seed growing and of the mustard seed. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word this morning.

And I do pray, Lord, that you would cause us to grow in our conviction that it is the seed of the word that you use to bring men, women, boys, and girls out of darkness into light.

It is the seed of the word preached that will bring a harvest in the end. in the kingdom of God. Lord, help us to steward the many relationships that you've given to us.

Help us to plant the seed of the gospel. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.