

Lessons on the Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Mark's Gospel, the section that we've entitled Lessons on the Kingdom. Lessons on the Kingdom, because if you've been with us these last few Sunday evenings, you'll see, you'll know that we've been going through Mark's Gospel and you'll have seen a trust what Jesus has been teaching. He's been teaching about the Kingdom of God. He's been teaching what that Kingdom is. He's been saying and showing who the King is in that Kingdom and who are those within the Kingdom that, well, who are those who are within that Kingdom that can never be overthrown. What does it mean to live in the Kingdom? What does it mean to have the Lord Jesus as King in your heart? What does it mean to have Him reign over you?

What does it mean to live and to speak and to think and to do as the King requires of his citizens in the Kingdom of God? Because you see, this expression, Kingdom of God, it's not just something that, you know, sounds very, you know, theological without an application.

It's not just a, you know, something that a minister speaks about and has no application. No, the Kingdom of God is absolutely central to the life of every Christian. And if you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, you must know Him as your King. And you must know all that that kingship means in your life. For it means, as we said, to have His reign over you, to have His reign, to have Him reign over your mind, to have Him reign over your heart, to have Him reign over your will so you can say, not my will, but your will be done. He and He alone must have that rule and that reign over your life. And so each and every day we have to, you know, ask ourselves in the sincerity of our hearts. Ask yourself this, am I bowing to King Jesus in every area of my life?

Or is He just a part-time ruler for a Sunday morning and evening and just to be shelved for the rest of the week? Because I think we have to be honest and say this, that far too often it appears that Christians, and I include myself in what I'm saying, that we're far too occupied with the kingdom of the world rather than with the kingdom of Christ Jesus. Because you know, you know ourselves, you know myself, we can be all too quick and all too easily allow the world and its values to predominate in our thinking and our actions and live as if it's the kingdom of the world to whom we're owing duty and allegiance. Of course we're in the world, but you're not off it if you bear the name of the Lord Jesus. Well, show it. Surrender to Him as King in every area of your life. Let Him have full reign in your heart and show it. Show it by an obedience that delights first to seek first the kingdom of God. And as God's Word tells us, seek first the kingdom of God and all other things will be added unto you. Well, here in this next set of parables, these short parables from verse 21 to verse 34, these four little parables, well, what's Jesus doing? He's continuing to highlight the kingdom of God and to show our response to that kingdom, to show what our response to the king of kings should be, how it should impact your faith, how it should impact your obedience.

So these four short parables that Jesus teaches, of course, as we know, following on from the more well-known parable of the sower and the seed, as I said, I don't want to go over that particular parable detail by detail. We looked at it last year, but we have to mention it because in the parable of the sower and the seed, again, you can even glance through that just now, remember what Jesus was doing there?

[4 : 15] He was illustrating four responses to the Word, to the Gospel. Four responses to the Gospel proclamation. But only one response that bore fruit. Only one response that revealed the life of God and the heart of the one who gave his life and the Savior to the King. Only one person had the kingdom of God in his heart.

The one who received that Word with faith and the one who produced fruitfulness in keeping with salvation. And that parable of the sower that revealed the whole question of response to Jesus.

Either, on the one hand, rejecting the Lord Jesus as Savior, rejecting the Lord Jesus as King and rejecting his eternal kingdom. Why? Because another kingdom was more important than the kingdom of God.

And yet, on the other hand, we see that one response, the response of faith in receiving the Lord Jesus as Savior and Savior and King. And the result of that receiving the Lord Jesus as King has been seen in action.

The kingdom of God revealed in that parable in relation to the response of the heart. Receiving the Lord Jesus. Becoming a servant in the kingdom.

[5 : 46] The greatest blessing. It's the greatest blessing. It's the greatest blessing that comes from the seed of truth having been sown in a person's heart and that person responding by faith and showing the faith in the action.

And there's no greater blessing. There's no greater privilege. And there's no greater responsibility than to show your citizenship in Christ's kingdom than by doing that which bears fruit in the kingdom and for the kingdom.

The fruit, we might say, of gospel effectiveness, gospel living. We might even say gospel loving. Loving God and our neighbor. But when we come to the parables of verse 21, we'll see that Jesus has a lot more to say about the kingdom of God.

Because Jesus is drawing our attention, well, to himself. We see this in the first of his four short parables. Verse 21, It's a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed and not in 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. Now, perhaps when you read that at first, you were thinking, oh, well, Jesus must be, well, first of all, speaking about our witness, about shining our lights in a dark world.

[7 : 14] You know, as we've been seeing in the Sermon on the Mount. The more that you look at this parable, the more that you look at this parable in the context of this parable as a word picture, the more that you see that Jesus is speaking about himself.

He is that light. He is that lamp. He's the lamp that's been brought. He's the lamp that's come to give light to the world. He's the lamp that's come to shine God's kingdom into the hearts of undeserving sinners such as me and such as you.

And you see in verse 11 there, when Jesus speaks of that, you might say that, the secret of the kingdom. Well, the secret's been revealed.

It's been revealed to men, to people, in the person of the Lord Jesus. In his person, the Lord Jesus. Jesus, yes, Jesus' kingship when he came was hidden to many.

What do we sing in the carol? Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see? But of course, when Jesus began his ministry, his earthly ministry, by his words, by his works, by making himself known, by his preaching and teaching, and his healing and his miracles, and his perfect life of obedience, and of course by his death and resurrection, then Jesus' kingship is hidden no more.

[8 : 42] Hidden no more. And being king, Jesus being king, has been revealed, yes, there in what he's revealed in his earthly ministry.

And of course, will be revealed in all its fullness. And Jesus returns. And every eye will see him. And every knee confess that he's Lord.

And surely that's the message we find in this first of these four parables. You know, look at the detail. You know, no one takes a lamp. Now, of course, in these days, a lamp was the clay lamp.

You know, the light was put in the clay lamp itself. The wick put in the clay lamp. Nobody took that kind of clay lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed.

No, they put it on a stand. So if Jesus is the lamp, if he's the light, then yes, he's been hidden and been king, but now revealed, revealed as king.

[9 : 46] He's come to bring his kingdom into this dark, dark world. He has come to shine his truth and light into this dark world. So the secret of the kingdom, that secret hidden for many years, now revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus.

Now, of course, some will reject Jesus as king. But you know, in that day, as we said, when Jesus returns, all earth, all everyone, all will acknowledge that Jesus is king.

And just, you know, it's in the parable of the sower. Well, the mission of Jesus, seen in all its comprehensive aspects. In other words, no one's able to escape from responding to Jesus.

So Jesus, in this first of the four parables, again, reveals a comprehensive aspect. No one will be able to hide from the Savior, from the revealed Savior.

No one can hide from the Lord Jesus, who's made himself known as king, as Lord. So, there has to be a response, and even a response now.

[10 : 58] That's what Jesus tells us here. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. Well, you've got ears to hear. You're listening to this word of truth. And you're hearing, and you're seeing that Jesus came to bring his light into this world.

He's come to make known what was hidden for centuries. He's now made that known, and has been king and coming to earth. So, what's your response?

You've given your life to him. And your response is to live as a citizen of his kingdom. For you, for me, to have done with lesser things.

It's for us to serve our Lord and Savior, our King, with gladness, because he is our King. So, don't be ashamed. Don't be ashamed of his rule in your life.

This is a rule that demands loyalty. It demands devotion. But it's not the kind of, you know, service like an unwilling slave. Not at all. But you who know the Lord Jesus as King, be that willing servant.

[12 : 06] Delight to do the will of your Master. But if you have not recognized Jesus as King in all his glory, don't remain outside his reign. You come to him.

He's come. He's come to bring his eternal light into this dark world. He's come to bring you eternal life. To bring you into his eternal kingdom.

Lord, you see him. See him in all his glory. Don't hold back from looking to the Lord Jesus and recognizing him as King. Serve him.

Because if you're not serving him, you're serving something else. Because if you're not serving Jesus, you're serving something or someone that can give no eternal satisfaction.

And give you no eternal security in a kingdom that will be destroyed. Only in Jesus, as we're thinking this morning, only in him is true satisfaction found.

[13 : 07] Only Jesus. Because only the kingdom, the kingdom of God, lasts eternally. Don't be found outside that kingdom. Don't be condemned to everlasting punishment.

I say that with urgency. Because there surely is that urgency to listen to Jesus' words that he's speaking here about the kingdom. And that's really the emphasis in the second little parable from verse 24.

To pay attention to what Jesus is saying. To pay attention to what you're hearing. Verse 24. Pay attention to what you hear with the measure you use that 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. If you remember, those of you who are probably my age and maybe a wee bit older, remember studying William Shakespeare's plays at school.

And of course, remember, there was a play that Shakespeare wrote called Measure for Measure. And Churchill, Shakespeare used that title deliberately because he actually used the words of Jesus to express the plot in that particular play.

[14 : 26] This whole idea of balance. You know, this whole sense of equivalent. In other words, the idea of the punishment fitting the crime. Now, in Jesus' day, this phrase, this phrase in verse 24, with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Apparently, this was a well-known Jewish saying. So, you know, when Jesus spoke these words, it would be clearly understood what Jesus was saying. But what about our own understanding?

What's Jesus saying here in relation to the kingdom of God? Well, let's take it bit by bit. What's Jesus saying? Well, he's speaking about hearing.

I mean, he's already spoken of the kingdom revealed in his coming to earth. He's expressed that urgency for people to come to him, to come into his light now.

To listen to Jesus' words when he tells us, when he commands us, when he calls us to come to him, to the one who's come from heaven to earth for us. He's expressed that urgency.

[15 : 32] And are coming into the kingdom. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. And then notice, immediately he says these words, he follows these words with a statement, pay attention to what you hear.

It's the hearing that we've got to focus on here. How do you hear? How do you listen? How do you hear his words of truth? In other words, how do you respond to what you hear?

Well, Jesus says that has an equivalent. That has an equivalent consequence. Because those who hear Jesus' words and respond in faith and obedience will have your faith strengthened.

Will have your joy increased. Will have, as Jesus says, will have your blessings multiplied. Measure for measure. Jesus says, for the one who has, more will be given.

In other words, the measure of your faith will be rewarded by God who gives generously. So, in fact, we've seen the parable of the sower. See the parable of the sower, remember.

[16 : 39] It's seen that was sown in good soil. What do you notice? There was that multiplication. It produced a multiple harvest. And showing that, you know, the person that received salvation by faith and he acted in obedience to the word.

Well, the multiplication, the blessing upon blessing, the abundant blessing of Christ in his heart or her heart. Knowing the joy of the Lord now. And knowing the joy of the Lord in all its abundance and the glory of heaven.

So, hearing, hear what Jesus speaks to us through his word. And continue to hear that word and listen with focus. Listen with intention.

You know, fully apply your listening, your hearing to what is being said to you through his word. And with that intention to put into practice what you hear God speaking to you through his word.

So, we're thinking on Wednesday evening that we're not just to be a hearer of the word but a doer of the word. And of course, the blessing, the reward of that doing and result of our hearing.

[17 : 58] Well, it's the blessing, the blessing of God and the Lord Jesus. But, you know, the measure for measure, that measure for measure and the measure for measure. Well, we've got to apply that too to the person, yes, who doesn't hear the voice of Jesus speak with a desire to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Yes, he'll hear but he's not applied what he hears to to grind his faith in the Savior. And Jesus says for that person there'll be a measure for measure.

The one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. In other words, the person who hasn't given his or her life to Jesus, who hasn't responded to the call to enter the kingdom of God by faith, what's the consequence?

What's the measure for measure? It's that losing of one's life eternally. Are you hearing the voice of Jesus speak to you through his word?

Are you putting that word into practice? Are you living as a citizen of the kingdom of God? Are you living as a citizen of the kingdom? Are you doing his will?

[19 : 13] Are you loving him? Are you loving your neighbor as yourself? Listen to the words of Paul. As Paul addressed this urgency when he wrote to the church in Colossae, Colossians 3 verse 2, set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth?

And for you who know the Lord Jesus as a saviour, you who've been, as Paul later goes on to say, you who've been raised with Christ in that resurrection power of God, you've been raised, well you've been raised with him to enter into the kingdom.

And ask yourself, as I have to ask myself continually, are the things of above, in other words, the things of heaven, are the things of glory that are uppermost in your heart?

Or is it the things of the world which are lodging in your heart, the things of the world that are of no lasting worth and value? Because again, measure for measure.

Because the more you set your heart on the things above and live with that heavenly focus, the more you will know the blessing of God in your life as you serve him daily.

[20 : 26] But if there's no heavenly focus, if there's no heeding the voice of Jesus, well there is only that loss of blessing that none of us surely can even desire.

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Fix your ears on the word of Jesus. So what is, what are your ears focused on, as it were?

Is it the voice of Jesus or is it the voice of the world? A world without Christ. Are you kingdom orientated, kingdom of God orientated, or orientated towards the kingdom of the world?

There is no neutral ground. You see, that's why we said at the beginning the kingdom of God is so utterly necessary to focus in on our hearing and our doing.

and therefore, you know, Jesus gives us encouragement to do these things, especially when the seed of the gospel is sown in your heart and you hear the word proclaimed and you act upon that word.

[21 : 36] As you see here in the third or the fourth short parables, as we see in verse 26, here's encouragement for us in the work of the kingdom. Let's read again verse 26, 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, but once he puts in the fickle because the harvest has come.

What's Jesus teaching here? Surely he's bringing us to see the wonder, the wonder of our salvation, through the sovereign work of God.

And, you know, again we're seeing here, we're able to understand more the mystery of the kingdom, the secret work of God in the heart of a sinner.

You see how Jesus brings out the wonder of that work of salvation, the work of salvation, the heart of a person. Notice how he does it.

[22 : 46] He uses another illustration from farming. Of course, the parable of the sower was the first illustration from farming. And these first twenty verses of Mark 4, what you see, you see, as we said, the different responses to the sowing of the seed, the gospel seed.

Some rejecting the gospel, the seed not lodging in their hearts, but others receiving the word with joy and bearing fruit as a result, the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of faith, the fruit of obedience to God, living as servants to the king.

But now Jesus wants us to see the wonder of that sowing, the wonder of the work of God when that word's proclaimed. And you see how he does it, you know, like the seed sown in the field.

Well, if you know what happens, you don't see what happens under the soil. You know, when the seed germinates and then sprouts. But you know that the work of the seed that is happening, you know it's going to become a crop for the harvest.

The farmer just, you know, he doesn't see the germination process happening outside of his vision. And so, you know, you can see how this illustration works, whether we're a farmer or not a farmer.

[24 : 05] You can see what this illustration is pointing to, because we see that the work of the gospel, you see what happens when the gospel penetrates the heart of an individual through the power of God's kingdom.

Just like the seed scattered, going under the soil, the works unseen, the power of germination unseen, so the preaching of the word is like the sowing of the seed.

And the word's proclaimed. It might seem as if nothing's happening. It might appear as if the seed's been, the seed of gospel truth has been sown and no impact.

But the unseen work of the Holy Spirit of power is happening. Men and women, boys and girls, are being changed and harked through the sowing of the seed accompanied by the unseen power of the Holy Spirit.

And just as the earth, again back to the illustration, just as the earth, as we say here, produces by itself the blade, then the ear, then the full grain of the ear.

[25 : 13] So the evidence of the power of the work of God is seen in the transformed life of a person who's entered the kingdom of God. That has to be an encouragement.

It has to be an encouragement to all who sow the seed of the gospel. Listen to the words of Isaiah in the Old Testament, Isaiah 55, verse 10 and 11.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. The words proclaim.

the one who proclaims the word, it doesn't see the impact of the word, certainly not in the giving of the word. It might even be some time before the evidence of saving faith revealed in the life of a person changed by the unseen power of God.

[26 : 21] The power is working, the power is working in the hearts of many. And we pray that work is happening, whether it be in our own congregation, whether it be in the work that's done elsewhere, even as we're hearing this morning, whether it be amongst our people here, whether it be amongst our little jewels, whether it be in the work in Benin, whether it be wherever the name of the Lord Jesus is proclaimed, we pray that there will truly be a harvest, a harvest unto righteousness.

Because that's what this parable speaks of here, the harvest, the full bringing in of the ripe corn. And of course that surely speaks of that bringing in the sheaves of saved individuals, all of God's children being brought into the kingdom.

And that of course will be fully revealed when Jesus returns. Is that your prospect, the eternal prospect, to be amongst that harvest? Well there's encouragement there in that third of the fourth parables, the unseen work, of God in making known his kingdom, the power of God in the sowing of the seed.

But there's more encouragement in the fourth of the four parables, the parable of the mustard seed, verse 30 to 32. And he said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it?

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

[28 : 11] The kingdom of God is, well, we know the kingdom of God is worldwide. Every nation, every tribe, every language will be found within the kingdom of God, the kingdom that will last eternally.

And yet, and yet when Jesus came to bring in his kingdom, the kingdom personified by Jesus himself, the eternal kingdom appeared weak. It appeared small, it appeared insignificant.

Back to Isaiah, when speaking of Jesus, prophetically speaking of Jesus, he had no former majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire from. The one who was despised and rejected of men, just like that tiny mustard seed, appeared of little worth, little consequence.

But just as the parable showing us here, just as the mustard seed becomes that large plant in which even the birds can make their nest and the branches, so the kingdom of God grows.

It grows. It truly is the glorious kingdom of infinite more worth and power than even the mightiest kingdoms of the earth.

[29 : 27] We know it, we see it, we've seen it in even the pages of history. We could take any empire that sought to destroy the kingdom of God, to destroy the Christian faith, to persecute believers.

Every empire that's done that has gone. Maybe some of you, I don't know, are doing history, have done history at school, think of the Russian communist Bolshevik state, 1917.

It's proud boast that it destroyed God. It's proud boast that it destroyed the Christian religion. It's boast that it imposed atheism throughout the Russian empire, the Bolshevik empire.

Where's the Bolshevik empire now? Gone. Every empire that sought to remove the kingdom of God from its borders. It will not triumph over the kingdom of God.

And if that's the case in history, it's surely the case in the fullness of time. No one, no thing, no empire, no power will destroy the kingdom of God much as it tries to do so.

[30 : 36] And that should give you and I, that should give us hope. Hope even in the present. Even when we see the kingdoms of the world combined to seek to try and silence the voice of Jesus from every land.

But the kingdom that Jesus came to bring in, that kingdom will never be overthrown. Why? Because he's the victor. He's established a kingdom that can never be conquered.

And surely then, that should cause you and cause me to be strengthened in that hope of the victory of Jesus over all who would seek to remove the gospel's influence from our land even now.

Why? Well, we're going to sing in a moment, the Lord reigns, the Lord is sovereign. His kingdom is a kingdom of might and of power and of glory, ruled by one, the one who is full of might and power and glory.

to rejoice. So, rejoice if you are within the kingdom of God. I know that the ramparts of that kingdom are secure forever.

[31 : 52] And if you're within that kingdom, you can never be lost because you have that promise, that assurance of everlasting life within the everlasting kingdom through the everlasting grace of God.

But if you're still outside of the kingdom, you know that's the most isolated place to be, to be in all eternity. But enter through the door, enter through the door of the Lord Jesus, come into that kingdom, believe in Him, believe in Him as your Lord and Savior.

And you'll know the true blessings that are found, yes, within the kingdom that Jesus has won for you and bringing sinners into His glorious kingdom.

This is a kingdom that shall never end. And we give praise and thanks to God for that kingdom that He's brought in, that kingdom that He promises to all.

You come to Him in faith. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, what a joy it is to know the kingdom. Your kingdom is a kingdom that has no end.

[33 : 05] For You are the God who is eternal. And we thank You, Lord, that though undeserving, though we are of being found in Your kingdom, You bring us in through the work of the Lord Jesus, through His life and through His death.

Lord, help us to live as those who are in the kingdom, to have done with lesser things and truly to set our minds, our hearts on things above and not on things below.

Bless then the proclamation of Your Word both here and elsewhere. Bless the Word that is yet to be proclaimed even in our own land this evening. Bless those who preach it.

They will be full of grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Lord, bless. We pray this day and all that has been done in Your name, even in places such as this.

May Your kingdom come, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we were mentioned the psalm.

[34 : 13] We're going to sing Psalm 93. Psalm 93 and sing psalms on page 123. The psalm that speaks of the Lord who reigned, the Lord who's king.

The Lord is king. His throne endures, majestic in His height. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength and might. The whole of Psalm 93 to God's praise.

God is Eloise, through glory and Christ.

Holy healing. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[36 : 17] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.