

"The Growing Kingdom" - Mark 4:21-34

The Book of Mark has been called a gospel of action. It fits. Most of the time, Mark focuses on what Jesus did during His earthly ministry. He emphasizes our Lord's ministry of service, how He healed the sick, and cast out demons, how He was always on the move doing the work His Father laid out for Him.

There aren't nearly as many didactic sections as we find in the other Gospels. A didactic is a teaching. What I'm saying is that Mark focuses less on the teachings of Jesus than does Matthew, Luke or John. So, when we encounter a didactic section in Mark, we ought to pay close attention because if Mark, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thought a teaching was important enough to include in this Gospel of action, it must be especially important.

We're right in the middle of one of those rare Markan didactic sections right now. Jesus is teaching about the nature of the Kingdom. Last week, we looked at the parable of the soils. Jesus is using parables to teach.

And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples. (Mark 4:33-34)

Last week, we saw how Jesus used parables to both illuminate and to obfuscate the truth. The parables helped make things clear to those who had ears to hear, but the parables hid the truth from those who were unwilling to accept the truth so that '*SEEING THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND HEARING THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND; LEST THEY SHOULD TURN, AND THEIR SINS BE FORGIVEN THEM.*' " (Mark 4:12)

I've been praying that we would all have ears to hear because with the parables in our text this morning, Jesus is teaching us about the nature of His kingdom. It is so important that we understand. If you are a Christian, you are a citizen of His kingdom, which has no end. Christianity is not primarily about how to live your best life right now. If you are a true disciple, you are being prepared for eternity and you need to know how to be a good citizen of the heavenly kingdom. You need to know the truth. You need to practice the truth.

Jesus said ... "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

Let's go to God's truth right now in Mark, Chapter 4.

Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark 4:21-23)

The first question we should ask is, "Who Jesus is speaking to?" I think it is pretty obvious that He is speaking to the same group of true believers He addressed in verses 10-20. These are folks to whom *it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; (Mark 4:11)* Jesus carefully explained the parable of the soils to these people who really wanted to know what it means. He explained it so they would get it. And in constructing the next parable, He again uses elements that would have been familiar to even the poorest of them. A household lamp was a little terra cotta device with a wick, oil reservoir and a handle. Every household would have at least one lamp, one basket, at

least one bed. And Jesus presents them with an absurd scenario. The whole purpose of a lamp is to give light. Why would anyone light a lamp and then hide the light? Of course, one would place it on a lampstand to reap all the benefits of illumination.

The truth was hidden from the unbelievers and yet-to-believers because it was delivered by parable, but make no mistake; if you really want to know the truth about Jesus and the Gospel, it will be revealed to you. In fact, it can't be hidden from you.

For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.

God intended that the gospel delivered to His children should be disclosed. We are not a secret society. Let me take you back to a verse in John, chapter 8 that I shared a little earlier:

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. **And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**" (John 8:31-32)*

You have no excuse for your ignorance of the truth. If you are ignorant, it's because you are willfully ignorant.

The Bible makes the gospel so abundantly clear: You are a sinner. Your sins require that the death penalty be administered. Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins. He was raised from the dead to prove that His sacrifice was accepted. Because He lives, we can have a living relationship with Him. All you have to do is confess your sinful state and turn, in faith, to Jesus. Pray, "Jesus, You are my Lord and my God! Thank You for dying for my sins. I believe that you were raised from the dead and will live forevermore."

.... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

It's really not that hard to understand, is it? At least it's not hard if you have ears to hear!

The truth has been revealed and it is written down for us in this Bible. How do you treat the truth God has revealed to you? Do you value it? Do you immerse yourself in it? Do you praise God daily for this incredible gift? Or are you one of those of whom Charles Spurgeon said: "There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write 'Damnation' with Your fingers."

Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (Mark 4:24-25)

This is a great promise, and a great warning. What you get out of God's word is directly related to the effort you put into it. God is not hiding Himself. Jesus is not hiding Himself. This Book (The Bible) gives us everything we need to know about the Almighty, about His kingdom. You need to take it seriously.

Take heed what you hear. Be careful how you hear. Take the word of God seriously. He will reward you richly if you do. If you don't, what little you had will quickly go away.

In the next parable, Jesus returns to comparing the Word of God to a seed that is sown in a field, but the emphasis here is different. He assumes that the seed has landed on good soil, not on the path, or on rocky ground, or among thorns.

And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29)

This parable reveals three important things about the kingdom. First of all, the growth of the kingdom is outside of human control. We Christians are called to scatter the seed on the ground. The seed is the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, so, we need to be faithful in scattering the seed. And we can water the crop by reminding folks of what the Bible says. But how the seed grows is out of our control.

So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:7)

The second thing this parable reveals is how potent the word of God is. Like a seed that is scattered in the field, God's Word contains all the genetic information required to produce spiritual life. We are incapable of understanding how that works. In fact, often times, we aren't even sure if the seed we scattered has taken root. It may take years, with no appreciable growth. In the meantime, all we can see is a barren field. But then, as if by magic, shoots appear. And then, the plant begins to mature. And before you know it, the plant is actually bearing fruit!

Finally, this parable reveals that there is a harvest coming. At exactly the right time, God will send forth His reapers.

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Revelation 14:14-16)

Jesus is going to gather His elect to Himself. The chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire. My friends, we want to be found fruitful when He comes!

We Christians have been given the Great Commission and it is our duty to spread the Word of God indiscriminately, but the Kingdom will grow organically. It is God who gives the increase. It is God who gets the glory. God's plan of redemption is right on schedule.

Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade." (Mark 4:30-32)

This is one of those parables that has been analyzed to death. Great theological debates have been waged over the significance of the birds, for example. Some say they are agents of Satan who infiltrate the Church. And then there are those who say, "Wait a minute, the

mustard seed is small, but there are smaller seeds than that.” I say, it is sometimes possible to become so concerned about the details that we miss the overarching truth.

The overarching truth here is that the Kingdom of God, though it may start out very small, is going to grow very large. While Jesus ministered on Earth, His true followers were very small in number. In fact, they were pretty insignificant compared to the population of the Roman Empire. But this little flock would grow to become the most significant spiritual force in human history. The Kingdom is exactly as Daniel described it as he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream:

You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:34-35)

This mountain is the Kingdom God establishes, a Kingdom that will endure forever, a Kingdom that will never be destroyed. (Dan 2:44) Jesus is building His kingdom as we speak. He has commanded us to spread the seed, but He is the One who gives the increase. We don’t need to engage in some sort of creative genetic engineering with the seed. It’s already the best seed possible. It is the story of Jesus, the eternal Son of God who left His place in glory to be born of a woman, to share our common lot, to live a perfect, sinless life and to sacrifice that life on the cross to pay for our sins. It is by His wounds we are healed. All we have to do is believe in Him. All we have to do is believe Him and we can be fellow heirs of His kingdom.

But you have to have ears to hear.

And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples. (Mark 4:33-34)

Are you Jesus’ disciple? If you are, He will explain all things to you because if you have accepted Christ, He has given you the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit will open His word to your understanding.

Jesus said:

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)

These are His words. Listen to His words and pray that God the Holy Spirit would guide you into all truth.