

## The Coming Kingdom

Westview Church | Mark 4:21-34 | Pastor Brett Toney | October 11, 2020

### Serve You in the Word

Before we get into this morning's passage, I want to take a moment to speak to a gift of our present size and dynamics. Our past four Sundays focusing on the doctrine of sin have been heavy. I know it's been weighty for me. But unlike churches many of us have previously been a part of, there aren't hundreds or thousands of people here. And your pastors—we are charged to shepherd the flock of God that is among us (1 Peter 5:2). As we give ourselves to the ministry of word and prayer, we do that *for you*. We are aiming to serve *you*, not Christians generally, not another church, but *you*. So, if you have questions or reactions to our times together in worship, we want to talk with you.

I especially would be helped hearing from you when things aren't clear or you disagree or something was particularly helpful or was unsettling in some way. That will help me specifically, and the pastors generally, in bringing the Word to bear on our life together as a church. We are eager to hear from you to inform our prayers privately and give shape to our public exhortations, singing, praying, and sermons. Now let's pray as get back into the Gospel of Mark.

[PRAY]

### Anticipation of the Kingdom

From the beginning, God has been establishing his kingly reign on earth. This is why he commissioned Adam and Eve to have dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). That's a function of a king and queen, of a kingdom. After the fall

into sin, God moves to establish his kingdom through Abraham, promising to make a great nation, a great kingdom, of his descendants (Genesis 12:2), from whom would come kings (Genesis 17:6). God specifically told of a king to come through Abraham's great-grandson Judah (Genesis 49:10). It looked like there would be no kingdom as God's people were enslaved in Egypt, yet he delivered them and told them he would make them into a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). To this people God gave a king, namely David, to whom he promised a son who would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12). It is this son, this king, who was referred to as a lamp (2 Chronicles 21:7). This king was anticipated by the prophets, notably Isaiah 9:

To us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

So, as we come to Mark's recording of these parables, we come with the backstory of the anticipated kingdom of God. Through the recorded teaching and miracles of Jesus in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has made it clear that he claims to be God, to be the Promised One.

If you compare this collection of parables to the other Gospels, you'll find them scattered about. So, Mark is trying to convey an intentional message by stringing these four parables together. And remember that they are coming right on the coattails of what Jesus indicates being a key parable for understanding all of his parables (4:13). It was a month ago when we looked at

the first half of Mark 4, the parable of the soils. In explaining that parable, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6 to help convey that understanding the kingdom of God and turning from idolatry and sin will come about by God's sovereign initiative. God is sovereign in salvation. Just as it is he who gives the exponentially abundant harvest in the parable, so it is he who is the one who gives understanding by faith of the kingdom of God. So, Mark adds these four parables to build on our understanding of the kingdom of God.

### **A Lamp (v.21-23)**

Looking at the first parable, v.21-23—kids, any of you know the song, "This Little Light of Mine"? Know how it goes? "This little light of mine / I'm gonna \_\_\_\_ / Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine." Who is the lamp? Followers of Jesus are who make him known. That's the emphasis of the parable as recorded in Matthew. But before followers of Jesus can be or have little lights, *the* Lamp must come. And that's how Mark has worded this. It does not come across as well in English, but he is pointing to a definitive Lamp who comes. Jesus is saying that he comes in fulfillment of the expectations of the Messiah, of King David's promised Son.<sup>1</sup> And his coming kingdom, his coming rule and reign is ultimately not to be hidden. In v.22, Jesus acknowledges that it is hidden for the time being, but all surprises that are hidden will be revealed. And so it is with the kingdom of God. It doesn't look like Jesus is the king, but just you wait.

### **A Measure (v.23-25)**

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 Sam 22:29; 1 Kgs. 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kgs. 8:19; 2 Chr. 21:7; Ps. 132:1

Flowing right from this point, Mark goes straight into another brief parable about receiving the message of the kingdom, hearing about the surprise of Jesus' kingly reign. The point Mark is trying to get across is that if you have ears to hear, if you are given the secret of the kingdom, if you submit to King Jesus by faith, the reward will be far greater. The degree to which you receive the message of the gospel of the kingdom, that is the degree to which more will be added. But if you reject the message, if you consider King Jesus as foolish and not worthy of your allegiance, even the little, common grace you have been given will be taken away.

### **A Seed of Grain (v.26-28)**

And in the third parable, we return to the gardening-farming imagery. Seed is planted, and it grows unbeknownst to the planter. Botanists know that the proper environmental conditions trigger enzymes to start the seed's growth. But to the average person, we don't think about it. The plant just grows. The point Jesus is making is that the kingdom of God starts small and grows by God's sovereign initiative. People don't make plants grow. We also are not the *determining* factor in seeing the reign of King Jesus extend.

### **A Seed of Mustard (v.29-32)**

Now, the fourth parable builds further on this seed-growing theme. Looking at the tiny mustard seed, don't get caught up on Jesus' statement about it being the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Jesus isn't making a scientific statement; this is a parable. The mustard seed is an exceptionally small

seed, especially when compared to the size of plant that grows from it. That's Jesus' point. The kingdom of God starts in insignificant obscurity but grows to be the greatest kingdom with far reaching impact.

### **Which Kingdom?**

As we get a better idea of what the kingdom of God is actually like, we see why these parables are needed. This does not sound like how we would expect a kingdom to come. This doesn't sound like how a king would reign. And so we must reflect on how the kingdom of God compares to the kingdoms of this world, starting with our own. That's right, we're all after expanding our kingdoms. Just look at a toddler—they think they're the king of the universe. We just get more subtle and clever about it as we get older. Will the kingdom where your allegiance is deliver? Will that kingdom make good on what it holds out as the good life?

And as Christians, we can see the allure of another kingdom besides that of King Jesus. It's been two-thousand years! It sure seems like Jesus' reign should be plainer in this world—maybe not the full-blown mustard bush yet but at least looking more like it. And so we can be wooed to the kingdom of candidates and appointments, of pundits and experts. You can shrug it off, but what will your demeanor be come November 4? Will you be undone or exceedingly jubilant ... or will you be steadied by the ongoing and expanding reign of King Jesus, come what may?

Maybe looking at the broader movements in society doesn't jar you from abiding faith in the unexpected form of the kingdom of God. But maybe your experience closer to home does. You've been faithfully laboring to share Jesus with your neighbors and friends and children and calling them to faith and repentance, but you aren't seeing it happen. Or closer still, in your own struggle against sin—as a citizen of the coming kingdom you expect to not still be struggling with the same bent towards shame-producing excess. “Why hasn't the kingdom come to sanctify my own desires yet?”

In the perceived slowness of your witness and sanctification, take heart. Don't be discouraged. Consider the nature of the kingdom. It *will* be revealed. God *will* see to it that the mystery of the kingdom is received. God's purposes *will not* be thwarted, and Jesus' reign *will* extend. This is what the promise is for. Jesus told us that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him—that's kingship, his kingdom. And behold, he will be with you always, to the end of the age—the promise. So when it seems that his kingdom is hidden, is shrinking, is ineffective—don't lose sight of the nature of the kingdom and the promise of the king.

### **Parables to the Table (v.33-34)**

Jesus taught most often in these kinds of parables. He did so in order that there would be a revealing of the idolatry and hardness of heart of the majority of his hearers. We don't want a king like this. We want a king that the world loves. But that is not what Jesus taught. He taught about the relative absurdity

and obscurity that would mark the beginning of the kingdom. No greater absurdity is to be found than in a crucified King. Who would plan for messianic fulfillment and a conquering king to come by way of his death? Who would give thought to a preacher from an obscure Roman province who died with thieves? This is foolishness to the world but is the very wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18ff). This is the way of his kingdom. And Jesus rose from the dead to prove it. To all who have ears to hear, truly, the kingdom of God is near: repent and believe this good news.