

Mark 4:21-34

Does Jesus want people to be saved?

An odd question, but if all we had from ch 4 were verses 11-12 we might wonder if he wanted people to hear and be saved.

Today we have a set of sayings that help explain the gospel and the kingdom.

21 And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? 22 For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." 24 And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25 For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."

v. 21-23 The Lamp and the kingdom

What is the lamp? The light of the kingdom of God as manifested by Christ. v.11, 26, 30.

The word "brought" is usually translated as "came" in the many uses in the NT. No one brought Jesus and the light into the world. HE CAME according to God's plan of redemption. The "lamp" is the subject, not the object. Jesus is the lamp who came into the world. He came out of Galilee to preach the good news of the Gospel.

He did not come to hide but to be made known so those who believe would receive the kingdom.

But aren't we the light? Matt 5 As we reflect the kingdom, we too are like light. The kingdom is known now through us his people.

The kingdom is like a lamp – to be noticed. It is not camouflaged and hidden.

Lamps only function when they are noticed, but they don't have an aggressive agenda. We are to be like that as we reflect God's glory.

v. 22 The kingdom is hidden to be made manifest. The 'hiding' is not like hiding in witness protection. This kingdom is like an Easter egg hunt. The eggs are hidden with the purpose of being found.

God's wants us to come to the knowledge of the truth but to do so, we must want to see it or find it. God reveals the secret. He is a lamp that is shining to give light so that truth will be revealed.

Paul refers to the gospel as being a mystery/ secret that is now revealed in Christ.

Col 2:3 In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Jesus, the Light of the World, came to shed the light of God

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

The secret has come to light. The audience got the secret in Christ in the flesh. Future audiences would get it because of the testimony of the disciples and those who follow them in taking Christ to the nations.

AND THE WORD

v. 24 image of a measure or standard

The typical use of this is "What you use for others will be used for you." EX: Matt 7 "judge not"

In this context it refers to the care we exercise in what we hear, and the care we exercise for understanding and responding to Jesus.

Remember that Christianity is a religion of the 'ear' i.e. hearing and responding to what you hear is crucial.

In the biblical context, "hearing" is not an evaluation of how well the components of your ear process sound. "Hearing" relates to taking what you hear into your mind, heart, and life.

EX: a conversation in which a spouse, parent, child, coach, boss or employee has said, “You having not been hearing a word I’ve said.”

They are not saying, “You are hearing impaired.” They are saying, “You are morally impaired. You’ve heard the words, know what needs to be done and can do it, But you WON’T.

In this context, Jesus is saying, “When it comes to me and the kingdom, if you hear and receive, you’ll get more. If not, what you have will be taken away.”

You’ll get out of it what you put into it.

EX: French neighbor, Didier, “Thomas, you just have faith and I don’t.”

I explained that I came to faith because I spent time reading the bible even when I wasn’t a believer. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the word of Christ.”

If you want to know more about God, then SEEK him. If you don’t seek Him, then don’t blame Him. If you don’t receive, want, and appreciate what God has given, then don’t expect Him to give you more.

This is true for your spiritual life. You get out of it what you put into it. It’s true of your experience in and with a church. Whether it’s a large or small church, people can and will fall through the cracks, even when the church tries to provide ways to connect. No church leadership team can stay on top of everything. We’re not perfect. No church leadership group is perfect. There is a corresponding reality to consider. If you want to fall through the cracks, you will find them.

YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE IS PERFECTLY DESIGNED TO GET THE RESULTS THAT YOU ARE GETTING.

(This also applies to Your marriage, work life, relational life, and most likely, financial life)

There is a fine line of tension in any church. While we want to care for folks no matter where they are, and we want to encourage and instruct the faint-hearted or unruly, you will never grow if others care more about your spiritual life than you do.

If you’re expecting to grow and have a connection without putting anything into it, then don’t be surprised if you don’t get anything out of it.

EX: spiritual growth is like the lottery in one aspect – You’ve got to play to win

80/20 rule. The 20% who are most engaged get 80% of the joy.

The Christian life is not to be a sponge that doesn’t get wrung out i.e.it will only sit, soak, and sour

v. 25, not money, but how people respond to the parables and the ministry of Jesus.

This parable is spoken in the face of opposition to Jesus.

When you already like and get Jesus and the kingdom, you’ll get more of him.

But if you come with a closed heart toward Jesus, you’ll find that your heart grows even smaller.

EX: the reverse of the Grinch- his heart grew, but if you are closed to Jesus, your heart will shrink.

Jesus’ point is that The spiritually rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

KDY...The longer you walk in faith, the better it gets.

The longer you ignore Jesus, the harder it gets to ever pay attention to him.

The kingdom is a secret, but a wide-open secret to those who have ears to HEAR. In all of the parables, that word is used 14 times in Mark 4.

Parable of the Seed

26 And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself, first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when

the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

This is the first of consecutive seed parables that follow the four soils parable earlier in the chapter. The surprising thing about these parables is the very low-key unimpressive way in which the kingdom of God is presented.

EX: rulers in the ancient world and the current age like to be presented with a certain flair. There is a song that is played for the President, “Hail to the Chief.” Ancient and modern kings, emperors, rulers, tyrants, and presidents have had their own way of being presented.

BUT here we see that the kingdom of God is presented as a SEED. Could Jesus give a less impressive image?

v. 26-27 This is NOT a story about Jack and the Magic beanstalk, but unless you are a studied and proficient botanist, there is a mystery to how the seed that is put into dirt grows into a large or small plant. Jesus is making the point that there is a mystery to spiritual life and spiritual growth. The mystery is on our end, not God’s. His ways are known to Him even when they may not be known to us. His timing is His, not ours.

EX JMH – single guy from previous church and has remained in contact for the past 8 years. At times it was frustrating for me... then seemingly out of nowhere God got a hold of his life and he is a changed man.

God will use different means and people in different ways, but the mystery remains.

1 Cor 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. **7** So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

v. 28 tells us that the ‘soil produces crops by itself’ -i.e. ‘automatically.’

The point is NOT that farmers should do nothing, but that it is NOT our activity that is primary. In the kingdom of God, it is primarily the work of God that CAUSES THE GROWTH.

** That is not an excuse for spiritual passivity or blaming God.

There are plenty of verses in the BOTH the OT AND NT that talk about our activity – memorize and meditate on the Word, seek wisdom, pursue righteousness, walk by faith, put off the old man and put on the new, etc, etc. BUT in all of those things, we can plant and water, but God causes the growth.

What this parable stresses is the process – the blade, the ear, the grain, the harvest of the ripe grain. That is perfectly normal for those who know anything about agriculture. But it WAS NOT what people expected for the kingdom of God. The people were looking for a big sudden display of Kingdom PRESENCE AND POWER.

Ironically, they got it through the life and ministry of Christ, but many doubted, and the religious leaders thought Jesus had a demon.

The apparent slow and unimpressive progress can be discouraging at times in the Christian life. If you’ve been a Christian for a while you know that there are seasons when growth seems evident and then some “dark winters of the soul” where you may feel stagnant. That is very normal.

EX: rose bushes have seasons of bloom and seasons where they need to be pruned...so that there will be more healthier growth. OUR ROSE BUSH IN FRANCE John 15

The call to believers is to abide and rest in Christ during seasons of growth and seasons of pruning. In the providence of God, that is how growth takes place. We must not be fooled by the apparent slow growth for when the final consummation of the ages arrives, the fruit will be plentiful and impressive.

The NT CHURCH had slow growth but reached the top of the Roman Empire and was embraced by Constantine.

Over the years of church history, the church in various parts of the world has seen seasons of growth and seasons where things seemed stagnant, but overall, we continue to see the kingdom progress. While the

growth may not be visible to us, God is at work.

Friends, let this parable encourage you to stay faithful in ministry or to get plugged into ministry in some way. It may not look like anything is happening but that's ok. We are called to plant and water. God will bring the growth in its season.

It can be easy in ministry with kids, youth or adults to think, "Is anything happening in their lives?" Don't lose heart or give up. We aren't able to see what God sees, nor do we have the ability to make happen what we think needs to happen. We're not even wise enough to know what needs to happen in OUJR own lives.

NEWSFLASH – we're not God.

Jesus then gives another parable about the growth of the kingdom...

Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 *It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.*"

33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples

This parable should also be a message of encouragement because it points to a fruitful consummation of the kingdom of God. the kingdom may look small at first, but it becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches to that the birds can nest under its shade.

This is a picture of SHALOM – rest and peace.

EX: Lewis Smedes(paraphrase)... **The hardest part for people who believe in the reign of Jesus Christ is in "living the sort of life that makes people say, 'Ah, so *that's* how people live when the kingdom of God takes over their world.'**

Jesus isn't simply telling farming stories. He is telling kingdom stories about how the kingdom of God works.

The smallest word, the smallest service you give can be used of God to produce a fruitful harvest. You might teach SS, lead a bible study, only attend a bible study, sing in worship, read your bible at home, etc, etc and not even remember what you said or what you heard a few hours later, but the Word was sown. A seed was planted, and God will use it.

There will be times in your life that you'll need every verse and every gospel truth and every sermon you've ever heard. And when that time comes, God can take those seeds and cause growth in your life.

But there's one thing that God can't do. He can't grow the seed that has never been planted.

EX: packet of seeds that are not planted don't grow.

You may think, "I'm not great at going to church or SS or bible study or community group or serving with kids or youth, etc so why do it? No one will miss me, and I won't miss anything." NOT TRUE. You will miss the word that was sown and the gift of sowing seed

I've said it before, but it's been a while. One of the best pieces of spiritual advice I've ever heard is this...

If it's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly.

What encourages me is that so many of you are doing it WELL, not poorly.

Sowing seed into your own life or into the life of others IS WORTH DOING. You and I won't always or ever be great at it, but it's worth doing, so it's worth doing poorly.

God takes our poor efforts and brings about fruit because the seed, the Word, is the power of God for salvation.

COME TO THE TABLE

--	--