

The Gospel According to Mark

Our Hope: The Certain Growth of the Kingdom of God

Mark 4:26-34

Sunday, July 5, 2020

Introduction

The Scriptures are replete with promises and prophecies of the future of the Kingdom of God. We are told that a day is coming when all things will be made new and the rule of God will be recognized by all. God has promised these things and His Word is sure (Isaiah 55:10-13).

However, for all of the promises of what it is to come, we may be tempted to look at the condition of our world and the state of the church and wonder how God intends to accomplish His plan. We may ask, *is the Kingdom of God still growing and expanding in the world today?*

Questions about the Kingdom of God were common among the first disciples of Jesus and in Mark 4 Jesus provides two parables that explain the nature of the Kingdom and the certainty of its' growth and success.

The Disciples and the Coming of the Kingdom

We can more fully understand the reason for these parables if we consider how the disciples and most Jews thought about the promises of the Kingdom. When Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:14-15) they anticipated a political upheaval and perhaps a militaristic campaign. But in these parables Jesus clarifies that the nature of the Kingdom is very different than expectations, yet its' success and growth are sure.

The Parable of the Growing Seed - The Kingdom of God Grows by the Power of God (4:26-29)

- **The spreading of seed** – Jesus returns to the imagery of sowing seeds. The seed is the Word of God, the ground is the world and the farmer represents the followers of Jesus. The farmer's role in this parable is minimal, but essential. As followers of Jesus we must be faithful in sharing and proclaiming the Word of God (spreading the seed) (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 10:14-15).
- **The farmer's contribution to the growth of the seed** – While the farmer must spread the seed, he makes no contribution to the growth of the seed. Jesus makes this point, that after spreading the seed the farmer contributes nothing. He goes to sleep and rises and continues on with his normal routine. The power of growth is in the seed.

- **The farmer's comprehension of the growth of the seed** – Not only does the farmer not contribute to the growth of the seed, he can't even comprehend how it happens; the means of growth are a mystery to him. Nevertheless, as the farmer waits the seed transforms and grows, seemingly automatically and all by itself.
- **The Kingdom grows by the power of God** – While we are called to faithfully share the Gospel, the power to change hearts and lives belongs to God alone (Rom. 1:16). We have a job to do, but God gives the growth (1 Cor 3:5-7). This is how the Kingdom grows and advances – not based on our skills or abilities, but through the power of God.
- **Martin Luther** – *I did nothing; the Word did everything.*

The Parable of the Mustard Seed - The Kingdom of God will Grow Beyond Expectation (4:30-32)

- **The extent of growth** – While the first parable describes the means of the growth of the Kingdom, the second parable is about the extent and certainty of the growth of the Kingdom.
- **A mustard seed – The seeming smallness of the Kingdom** – While the disciples may have expected Jesus to compare the Kingdom to something strong and mighty, Jesus instead compares it to something small and seemingly insignificant.
- **A great tree – The greatness of the Kingdom** – While the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds, it would grow into a large and magnificent tree. The fact that such a small seed would produce such a great tree is remarkable and beyond natural expectation.
- **Great in size and great in reach** – At the time of Jesus the Kingdom seemed small and weak compared to the Roman Empire, but the Kingdom will grow and expand beyond expectation. The birds nesting in the trees may represent the inclusion of all nations in the plan of God; the reach of the Kingdom will include all nations (Rev. 7:9-12).

The Use of Parables – Jesus explained the secrets of the Kingdom to those who were able to hear (4:33-34) – Throughout Mark 4 this theme has been recurring, that the Word of Jesus will only be heard and understood by those who truly believe.

Conclusion - *The Kingdom of God is a miracle. It is the act of God. It is supernatural. Men cannot build the Kingdom, they cannot erect it. The Kingdom is God's reign, God's rule. God has entrusted the Gospel of the Kingdom to men. It is our responsibility to proclaim the Good News about the Kingdom. But the actual working of the Kingdom is God's working. The fruitage is produced not by human effort or skill . . . It is God's deed (George E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1959).*