

The Unstoppable Movement of God

Jesus helps us understand the nature of His kingdom by using parables. The parables of Mark 4 compare the kingdom of God to a growing seed. The kingdom is not static, but a dynamic, growing movement that will soon fill the whole earth. Each of the three parables, really one group of sayings followed by two parables, emphasizes an aspect of the perpetually growing and expanding kingdom of God.

Mark 4:1-20

21 And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? **22** For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. **23** If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” **24** And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. **25** 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.”

26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. **27** He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. **28** The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. **29** But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

30 And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? **31** It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, **32** yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. **34** He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

The kingdom of God is rooted in the background of Daniel 2:31-3-45, which describes a vision of a huge statue and a small stone. The statue, with a head of gold, arms of silver, legs of bronze, and feet of iron and clay, represent the kingdoms of this world that oppress the people of God. The stone, cut not by human hands, smashes the base of the statue and causes it to collapse. This small stone then grows to become a mountain that fills the whole earth. We live in an age when we still see both kingdoms, both the glistening tower of the kingdom of man and the small, yet growing mountain of the kingdom of God. So we first of all must consider carefully how we view and think about these kingdoms.

I. Jesus' kingship will be revealed to the world. (Mark 4:21-25)

In Mark, the lamp represents the secret that Jesus is the king of God's kingdom. This is the “secret,” the thing that is hidden, which will one day be revealed. Jesus is the measure that when used as the standard for life, actually gives more value to our lives. Unfortunately, we often fail to make use of the light of the Gospel, and instead stumble around in the dark. Jesus makes clear that his identity as King will not always remain hidden, but will shine in full clarity one day. Therefore, we should learn to make judicious use of the revelation God has given us.

II. The Kingdom of God grows independently of human effort. Mark 4:26-29

In the parable of the growing seed, the emphasis is on the fact that the seed grows independently of human effort. While the farmer plays a role in sowing, watering, and tending the seed, the seed itself grows and produces fruit entirely of its own accord. The most important work of the seed is invisible to the farmer, as it occurs underground and inside the plant. This humbles mankind, and can even make us angry that we can't bring about that which is most important. Nevertheless, we can rejoice and celebrate the work that God does, and we can enjoy participating in His work at His invitation.

III. The Kingdom of God has a small start, but a great finish. Mark 4:30-32

In the final parable Jesus shows that the Kingdom of God has a small start but a tremendous finish. Jesus Himself was born in obscurity, ministered among the poor and sick, and gathered a group of politically insignificant disciples. Yet they eventually spread throughout the Roman world, testifying before kings about Jesus and seeing communities of disciples formed in major cities of Asia Minor and Europe. Jesus alludes to Daniel 4:20-22, where the tree is actually the king, and his branches the kingdom. Jesus is the King of the Kingdom that will spread and fill the whole earth. Therefore, even though the appearance of Jesus' reign may seem small at the moment, it will eventually fill the whole earth and displace every other kingdom.

Since the reign of God is an unstoppable movement, let us with faith fully engage in His kingdom. And get ready for the ride of our lives.

Discussion Questions

1. How is God's work in the world static and unchanging? In what way is God's work in the world dynamic and always changing? Do you think the Kingdom of God is always growing?
2. In what ways do we neglect making use of the revelation God has given us? When do we think the Bible doesn't speak to our situation or that Jesus isn't a qualified expert to address our situation?
3. The Kingdom of God grows independently of human effort. Does the give you confidence or make you say, "Then why should I make any effort?" Explain why you feel that way.
4. The Kingdom of God starts small, but has a big finish. In what way have you experienced something small in your life that turned out to be God doing something major in your life?
5. How can you engage in the movement of God's kingdom in a practical way today? Where do you see signs of His activity, and how can you participate in what He is doing around you?