

## Mark 4:1-34 (NLT)

### The Gospel of Mark Sowing the Seeds of the Kingdom

**Introduction:** This section of Mark begins with large crowds flocking to Jesus once again. Jesus takes this opportunity to tell the multitude a story and it starts with him giving a call to “Listen” and finishes similarly - **“Anyone with ears should listen and understand.”** The irony is, no one gets it. But that’s really what the parable is about - how different people will listen and respond to Jesus and his message...

Later Jesus’ disciples come and ask him about the meaning of the teaching and he says to them - to you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God - but for everyone else I use parables.

Jesus is saying that his teaching is cryptic on purpose IN ORDER to get people to search and seek him - As demonstrated after the parable of the sower - He ends by saying - **“Anyone with ears should listen and understand.”** Is he being funny? No he’s being cryptic and aloof on purpose. Mark’s Jesus doesn’t stick around and do a Q and A - you want answers - Mull it over, don’t dismiss it and write it off, don’t have dishonest doubts - Instead, seek the Rabbi Jesus, and more shall be revealed to you! For those who write Jesus off - they will not only miss out on the revelation of God and the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, but on the true story of the world!

For those, who will doubt their doubts, and suspend their judgments and press into Jesus in order to truly hear - more will be revealed.

Jesus says by speaking in parables he is fulfilling what was spoken by Isaiah and the prophets - **The Insiders:** those who should have seen and heard and known and recognized the kingdom of God when he came - the authorities, the religious leaders, high priest family, the scribes - will in fact be blinded to it, offended by it, dismiss it, and even fight against it; while those who are considered **The outsiders:** Galileans, Gentiles, Sinners, the

blind, the lame, the demon possessed and even a Roman centurion (The great outsider and enemy of the Jews) truly see, truly hear and have a revelation of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Mark uses this Insider/ Outsider motif again and again.

Doesn't God want people to repent and believe? This sounds wrong and out of character. The answer is yes, God does want people to repent and believe - the problem really lies with us - how we perceive God, how we think about power, and authority. What if as I said last week God is actually way more liberal, patient, humble, gracious and loving than you think he is? What if God is actually way more conservative - holy, truthful, righteous, pure and faithful than you think he is? The religious leaders and the crowd miss Jesus' message because it's not the kingdom they are looking for or that they want...So they dismiss it and write it off - powerless, insignificant, absurd...

So a poignant question is - Who are we? Are we insiders or outsiders? To answer that we must ask - Are we really listening to Jesus??

## **1. The Inevitability of the Kingdom of God... the seed parables**

- a. Jesus goes on to further explain to his disciples how the kingdom of God works. Both the seed parables (vs. 26-34) speak of the inevitability of the Kingdom of God. Though we may judge it to be small, insignificant, even powerless or ineffective in light of the world's needs at the moment, or it may seem to be weak compared to the power structures of the world - God's kingdom is coming into this world - Like a great harvest or a mustard tree (In the book of Daniel, the great and powerful king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great statue of all different metals, these represented the world rulers present and coming to power, and then suddenly a stone made without hands struck the image crushing it to powder, the wind blows the dust of it away and not a trace of it is found, but the stone became a mountain that filled the whole earth.)

- i. The whole cosmos is headed for that moment where the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea - when He who is seated on the throne says, Behold, I make all things new! This is unstoppable and nothing can thwart the promises of God getting to the world that he loves so deeply - Not the subversive work of Satan, not the unbelief of Israel, not the rejection of the religious leaders, not the apparent tragedy of the cross, not the persecution of the church, not world wars, not nuclear fallout, not even Covid -19. Nothing can stop the kingdom of God
- b. Jesus speaks to the fact that the earth itself and its ability to reproduce is a mystery - We sow seed into the ground and by and large the earth knows exactly what to do or as we say - we let nature run its course. Likewise, the Kingdom is inevitable. We sow the seeds of the kingdom - but we leave the mystery of how and when into the hands of the King.
- c. This passage really couldn't come at a more poignant moment. The world is in a state of emergency. Everyday there seems to be some new development that threatens life as we know it - China dissolved it's one country two systems policy, murder hornets in the US, the Sahara dust cloud blowing over the atlantic ocean to the US, Russian bounty on US soldiers, Covid 19 spiking all over the nation, protests and riots, social and political upheavel, unemployment sky rocketing, business and the economy tanking - the government releasing photos of UFO's!!!! Maybe at this moment the Bible, Jesus, the Gospel and the kingdom of God seem to have no effect or real bearing on our current situation to you - Like the people of Jesus day we say - Jesus establish the kingdom, overthrow Rome and the powers that be! And Jesus says... **“Listen, A sower went out to sow.....The kingdom is like a mustard seed..”**  
WHAT???
- d. The crowds dismissal of Jesus and his teaching based on the seeming insignificance of the kingdom is exactly what Mark

wants to get at with us - especially in a time when the issues of the world and the culture seem so desperate around us - We want an immediate answer, we want a silver bullet, we want a revolution, we want change RIGHT NOW! *And Jesus says, What shall we liken the powerful, justice bringing, righteousness reigning, Shalom bringing, eternal, kingdom of God to? - It's like a seed - in time it will grow and eventually it will fill the earth!*

- i. If we are disillusioned with the way God is working in the world it might have more to do with our own agendas and perspectives that we bring upon scripture - Trying to mold Jesus and the kingdom into our image - How we think the kingdom does come or should come. If that is the case, then we need to lean all the more into Jesus, the gospel and scripture to see how God is at work in ways we might miss.
- ii. And this is vitally important to disciples because as Jesus says - To us disciples, has been given the secret or mystery of the kingdom of God.

**2. The Secret or Mystery of the Kingdom has been given to you -**

That the kingdom of God, the new creation that we were made for, that we truly long for, that all of history is headed for - the healing of the cosmos, the reconciliation of all tribes, nations and peoples, a healed creation is here and is coming..through the life death and resurrection of Jesus - **This Secret has been revealed to us!**

Followers of Jesus hold in our very hearts and lives the hope and destiny of all the world. (Do we know this; do we believe this?)

**3. We have been brought into Jesus' secret plan and council, but not in order that we would keep it to ourselves but that we would make it known to all - As Jesus says, the lamp is not brought to be put under a basket - but displayed to give light to all!**

- a. *"The Gospel is the truth, and therefore it is true for all people. It is the unveiling of the face of Him who makes all things, from whom every person comes, and to whom every person goes. It is the revealing of the meaning of human history, of the origin*

*and destiny of mankind. Jesus is not only my savior, He is Lord of all things, the cause and cornerstone of the universe. If I believe that, then to bear witness to that is the very stuff of existence. If I think I can (Or should) keep it to myself, then I do not in any real sense believe it.” - Leslie Newbigin, Mission of the Church to All Nations*

- b. *Newbigin in another book puts it like this - “The true meaning of the human story has been disclosed. Because it is the truth, it must be shared universally. It cannot be a private opinion. When we share it with all Peoples, we give them the opportunity to know the truth about themselves, to know who they are because they can know the true story of which their lives are a part.” -Leslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*
4. As those that have been given the secret of the kingdom of God our task is to make it known - to spread and sow the seeds of the kingdom!
5. **The Seeds of the Kingdom**
- a. Jesus asks, with what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It’s like a mustard seed...
  - b. The Jews of the first century were not ignorant of the concept of the kingdom of God or the messianic kingdom but in their minds it came through a violent overthrow of the Gentile nations. It looked more like the Davidic kingdom - fighting the pagan philistines and idol worshippers, it came through an act of war and judgment. This is why Jesus' message and way was so counter cultural then as it is now - he is teaching about seed - we could probably list 100 things more dynamic and powerful than seed! Even in Daniel - the kingdom of heaven, is like a stone made without hands crushing the massive image representing the kingdoms of earth... nope. Seed.
  - c. Seed takes time, it must grow, it needs care - sun, water, and cultivation. It’s not sudden, sometimes it feels so mundane and insignificant, it’s just slow and steady, it’s day by day, season after season of faithfully planting, watering and sowing. That’s

what the kingdom of God is like. Living out following Jesus and bearing witness to the Gospel and the kingdom in life long faithfulness. The Christian walk and work is a long obedience in the same direction.

6. We are called to sow the seeds of the Kingdom leaving the harvest up to God.
  - a. What does it look like to sow the seeds of the kingdom?
    - i. As a community of God's people there is our collective work of sowing seeds - being an alternative community, a counter formational people..
    - ii. being a community of praise and worship in a world of doubt and skepticism.
    - iii. being a community of truth in a pluralistic society that overwhelms and produces relativism.
    - iv. being a selfless community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood in a selfish world.
    - v. being a community prepared to live out the gospel in public life in a world that privatizes all religious claims.
    - vi. being a community of mutual responsibility in a world of individualism.
    - vii. being a community of hope in a world of pessimism about the future.
      1. It's being salt and light in the midst of a corroding and dark world..
  - b. But individually it is each of us bringing the character and demonstration of God's kingdom to bear upon our spheres of influence. To our families, our neighbors, our co-workers, our unique opportunities. It may not be obviously dynamic, flashy work that we think should accompany the Gospel and the kingdom of God - it usually isn't. But think of Jesus' own ministry - it was with nobody's that he gave his time and attention - it was in the back hills of Galilee and not in the cultural hubs that he gave his most powerful sermons, it was outside of Jerusalem hanging on a cross that the son of God

did his greatest and most effective work - like a seed, his body was planted in the ground only to rise as the new creation and make the way possible for the rest of creation. Never underestimate the significance of planting seeds of the kingdom.. They will become a tree that will fill the whole earth!!

i. Leslie Newbigin, who was a missionary in Madras, India back in the early part of the 20th century wrote of a time when he invited a group of converts to share their stories of coming to Christ. They all said that it took place through a series of events, over a period of time... (Sounds a lot like sowing seed)

ii. For some it might have been a conversation with a friend on the factory floor, a visit from a Christian during an illness, the reading of a tract or scripture, an act of kindness. For others it was a sermon, a prayer, a dream or a vision. This and a hundred other little seeds were planted but it was the Lord who brought about the increase and the harvest... Newbigin remarked, "No one could have programmed all this. The strategy was not in any human hands.."

1. **In Closing:** Church - the secret or mystery of the kingdom of God has been entrusted to Jesus' disciples. Many people are blind to it because it's neither what they want or what they expect. The work is not flashy, it's hard, costly work, it's slow and steady, it's farming and seed planting. It's a long obedience in the same direction. But God has promised to build, grow and establish his kingdom - it is inevitable. So in the words of Paul the Apostle- **"My dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless."**

