

The Kingdom

Mark 4:26-41

- Last week we went over the first half of Chapter 4 and talked about how Jesus comes to sow the Word of the Truth of His Gospel into our hearts.
 - And we discussed the various stages that the heart can be in whenever the Truth is given to us.
 - And in the next part of the chapter, Jesus continues to teach in parables, and the next two He uses specifically, to speak to the Kingdom of God
 - And remember a parable is a relatable story that Jesus uses to parallel a spiritual truth, and He continues to use the analogy of the Seed to explain the Kingdom of God.
- If you look in verse 26, “***And Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”***”
-Mark 4: 26-29 (ESV)
 - So remember, last week we talked about how the sower would scatter the seed by hand.
 - Some would fall along the road and birds would pick it up,
 - Some would fall into shallow soil and would spring up fast but wither quickly
 - Some would fall around weeds and thorns and get choked out
 - Others would fall on good soil and bear fruit

- But now, Jesus changes the perspective of the parable from the seed, to the perspective of the sower
- And the sower really only does two things in this parable. He scatters the seed, and he goes to sleep!
 - He puts the seed out there, but he really doesn't have any control over the growth of that seed.
 - He essentially just spreads the seeds and hopes for the best
- And what I believe that Jesus is conveying in this parable is that:
 - He is the One that grows the Word in an individual's life, not us.
- Paul addresses this to the Church at Corinth whenever he was dealing with people who were starting to make a competition out of who was following who.
 - They were almost choosing teams based on which Christian leader they were mainly following
 - Some people were saying, "Well I follow Paul!" Others were saying, "I follow Apollos!"
 - And Paul essentially says, "But aren't we all just human??"
- He says, in 1 Corinthians 3, ***"What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." -1 Corinthians 3:5-7 (ESV)***
- **THE KINGDOM IS GOD'S WORK**
 - Yes, God does allow us to be a part of this work, when He sows His Gospel in us, and we have a duty to sow it to others as well
 - But what we have to remember is that, at the end of the day, it is still His work, first and foremost

- Paul is saying, *“We are just doing what the Lord has called us to do! Yea I originally planted the seed of the Gospel here when I started this church, Apollos has been continuing to water the truth in you as your leader while I’m away....but we are not the ones that grow you spiritually!”*
- Only God can do that! This is His Work!
 - The Spiritual growth that you experience in your life can never be credited to me, any pastor or spiritual leader. It cannot be accredited to any human being at all!
 - Why? Because human beings will let you down. And if your spirituality and your relationship with God is tied to another human being, and that person lets you down, has a moral failure, stabs you in the back....well then what will happen to your relationship with God?
 - It will be non-existent. And then you’ll have to come to the realization that you never really had your own relationship with God, you just liked that person or that leader.
- On the flip side I get so encouraged by those who have really been let down and hurt by spiritual leaders, but they do not miss a beat in their spiritual life
 - Why? Because their spirituality is based first and foremost on their personal relationship with Jesus...not the performance of a human being
- Now this may seem like an obvious point, but it can be very difficult to live out. Especially with how involved we can become in each other’s lives and the way that we tend to go about discipleship
- It’s one of my biggest pet peeves whenever I hear Christians talking about who they’re disciplining as if they have their own disciples
 - But I hope to God that I never have any disciples of Kenny Hall. Paul didn’t want any disciples of Paul, Apollos didn’t want any disciples of Apollos

- No, the goal to help lead people to become disciples of Jesus Christ!
- What so many people fail to understand is that when Jesus said to Go into all of the World and make disciples...That term **“make disciples”** (**math-ayt-yoo’-o**) means: ***to become a pupil; enroll as scholar***
 - So we are to go into all of the world and invite people to enroll as students of Jesus with us! And He is the teacher! He is the leader! He sets the curriculum!
 - The most that I could ever do is just help tutor those who are newer to the class than I am!
- One of the best ways that I have ever heard it put is that ***“Discipleship is not one chair in front of another, it’s two chairs in front of the Cross”***
 - If we can keep in perspective Who and What this is all about, we can keep the pressure and the credit where it is due
- We’re called to scatter the seeds! We’re called share the truth of the Gospel that has changed our lives! But the results of the ultimate growth of those seeds is beyond our control.
- Here is something that we as Christians need to remember. It’s that: Success is never defined by another person’s response. Success is defined by how faithful you are to what God has called you to do, day in and day out.
 - This is the philosophy that Mother Teresa tried to live by, she said quote, ***“I do not pray for success. I ask for faithfulness.”***
-Mother Teresa
 - It can be very dangerous whenever we start trying to define what success looks like in our walk with Christ.
 - We’re called to be faithful, the results are up to Him
- There will be times, when God calls you to scatter some seeds. To share the Gospel and your testimony with someone...and you feel

like you're just talking to a brick wall. No response.

- Then there will be other times where God will call you to share the Gospel and your testimony with someone and they'll want to give their life to Christ! And it's awesome!
 - However, for you...one endeavor is not more successful than the other. Both were just as successful because you showed the same faithfulness in both cases.
 - And that's important for us because:
 - *1. We'll be so reluctant to share whenever we're getting caught up on how they may or may not respond to us*
 - *2. If they do respond, we'll start to think that we saved somebody.*
- But we can't save anyone. I can't save anyone, I can't change anyone's heart, or anyone's ways, only God and His Holy Spirit can do that
- It's one of the most frustrating and terrifying things about being a pastor is the fact that I

can't save anyone, I can't change anyone, but I can lead people astray...

- It's almost a lose-lose situation here!
- But one of the biggest things that we need to understand about the Kingdom is that it operates in, as Tim Keller put it... Organical Growth, not Mechanical Growth.
- This is one of the reasons why I believe that Jesus chose to use the analogy of the seed so much.
- Because seeds grow organically, not mechanically
 - Mechanical growth happens from the outside, but Organical Growth happens from the inside out.
- Now, we don't like that much because we are more comfortable with Mechanical Growth
 - We want to give a 7 step spiritual growth process where you go through this study, take this class, meet with these people and

then if you start to behave in this way...then you'll be good

- Or we'll go to the other extreme and say, "If you just say this prayer than you're good!"
- That's mechanical growth, that's why we love our systems and processes and structures....because we want measured success, because we want to look over our work and see what we did
- But that's where we must tread very carefully, because as the Lord says in Isaiah, He will not share His glory with another
- I cant help but wonder how many pastors and ministry leaders the Lord has had to knock down a peg, because they began to try and share His Glory in their people's lives.
- It is something that we have to be very aware and cautious of as we share the seed of the Truth of the Gospel with others
- Because we are prone to be very prideful individuals, and as soon as we think that we

are saving and changing people, God is going to have to remind us Who's work this really is

- I'm very thankful to have had this be one of the very first lessons that I had to learn whenever I began my time in ministry.
- Because as many of you know, I moved completely in faith to Shelby, NC after I graduated from North Greenville University to work a job that couldn't pay me in a city where I didn't know anybody
- I took the youth pastor position at a young portable church that was meeting in a middle school at the time
- And I started with 3 teenagers and I had to work a full time job as well just to be able to live there and do the youth ministry.
- And for the first two years I was putting together messages for the youth, rushing over after work to give the message in my scrubs still, setting up services in another building let us use, doing youth

softball, using by PTO for the year to take the youth to camp

- I'm doing all of this youth pastor stuff, and I look back over those years and I cant tell you how in the world that student ministry grew.
 - I can't tell you how we went from 3 to 80 in just a couple of years
 - I can't tell you how or when I put those messages together and planned all of those services, trips, lock ins, lake days, and everything of the like...I didn't have the time to do it! But it still happened!
 - I can't tell you how some of those original students grew up to be youth pastors themselves, some went on the mission field, some are incredibly godly wives mothers husbands and fathers
 - God did a work in the lives of those students and in my life that I cant explain!
- But it's probably the greatest lesson I ever could have learned in that season....and that is

that I'm just called to show up, and God does the rest

- It's His work! He just give us a front row seat to watch Him do His thing sometimes
- Very simply, we are called to invite people to follow Jesus with us, Love them the way that He loves us, and hope the seeds grow in their lives
 - And the amazing thing is, whenever we live out our faith that way, we'll finally get out of the way, let God do what only He can do in a persons life, and we'll realize He's a whole lot better about being God and changing Hearts than we could ever be.
 - And He can do so much more with a little, than we could do with a lot.
- Which brings us to the next Parable in verse ***"And He said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is***

the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 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.” -Mark 4:30-32 (ESV)

- Here's my big take-away: **THE KINGDOM IS PARADOXICAL**

- The Kingdom of God does not operate within what makes sense to us.
- Why do you think Paul says that the Gospel is foolishness to those who don't believe
- Because it sounds foolish!
- So God, in His rescue plan for humanity, decides to become a human, be hated by humans that He created, allows Himself to be brutally tortured and killed, so He could raise Himself from the dead...and because He did all of that, we now have a chance to go to Heaven
- It's all paradoxical

- The Creator became the created
- The King took the form of a servant
- He died so that we could live
- If the way He gives us life is so paradoxical what makes us think the way that He calls us to live our lives isn't?
- Jesus says in this parable, that He does the absolute most, with the absolute least
- Like we talked about the other week, Jesus is essentially taking the least qualified group of teenagers and allowing them to be the apostles that would be sent out to preach and would one day be the leaders of the New Testament Church
- When we get to the book of acts He would take 120 people and turn it into a church of over 5000 in just a few weeks
- And they made such an impact because they lived paradoxical lives due to the paradoxical teachings of Jesus, that still affects our lives today!

- Whether or not you believe in Jesus, there is not a single person that has not had their lives affected by Him.
 - You see, He was the originator of the idea that every single man woman and child, regardless of race, gender, or status, was created in the image of God, and therefore, every human being living and breathing on the planet has dignity and rights.
 - Furthermore, without Jesus' teaching and leading, there would never be cries for social justice or equality. There never would have been any pursuit of love and caring for all. That is also why those movements become so chaotic whenever Jesus is taken out of it. He is the foundation of those movements, and whenever you remove a foundation the structure comes crashing down.
- Even the "Golden Rule," that so many societies base their moral standards around, originated from His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.
 - "Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you," that simple teaching originated from Jesus, and is still so monumental because at one point even *that* was a radical and crazy thought.
 - Even in pre-Christian Europe when the monks attempted to incorporate the teachings of Jesus into society, the social elites thought it was a ludicrous idea to care for the poor, or to love your enemies.
 - They said society would fall apart because that's not the way the world works! "Only the strong survive, the strong are supposed to prey on the weak, the poor were born to suffer! That's just their place in the world!"
- In much of the Old Testament scripture, we see a description of what the world was like before the coming of Jesus.
 - The world was a place where only the first-born sons were successful and significant.
 - Only women who had a lot of children were honored and had rights.

- But God began to break down that system by choosing to use the younger siblings like Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and David.
- He chose the barren woman to honor like Sarah, Rebecca, and Hannah.
- And then Jesus, who Colossians says, is the Fullness of God in Bodily form, came caring for the outcasts.
 - He came teaching to love your neighbor as yourself, to love and pray for you enemies, to care for those who cannot care for themselves!
- His teaching always seemed to be so upside down:
 - *The way to gain life, is to lose your life*
 - *The way to freedom is through submission to Him*
 - *The way to become great is to make yourself the least*
- *The only way to truly find yourself, is to lose yourself in service to God and others*
- *The best way to take care of your needs is to take care of the needs of others*
- It's a paradoxical life but that's how God wants it to be. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, ***“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;” -1 Corinthians 1:27 (ESV)***
- So my question is, are we as Christians today, still living paradoxical lives in contrast to the rest of the world?
 - Do we still stick out like sore thumbs in the world like we once did?
 - Are we selfless in the midst of a self-centered world?
 - Are we generous in the midst of a greedy society?

- Do we walk by faith more than we walk by sight?
 - Are we overly more forgiving than we are vengeful?
 - Do we count other's more significant than ourselves?
- Paul describes how the Christian is supposed to live in the book of Romans and look at what he says: ***“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in***

your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” -Romans 12:9-21 (ESV)

- So essentially Paul says, this is how the Christian is supposed to live:
- Genuinely love people, and hate evil.
 - The main competition in your life should be who honors each other best
 - Don't be lazy with your life, but serve the Lord with passion

- When things get bad, just rejoice in hope, be patient and pray.
 - Be generous and hospitable
 - Live at harmony with people in good times, in bad times, whether they are friends or whether they are enemies
 - People can hate you, but you can't hate people
 - Never think you have it figured out
 - And when people come against you, leave it in God's hands...go out of your way to do good things for them. It'll drive them crazy.
- Tell me that is not a completely counter cultural, paradoxical life description even in today's day and age
 - And it's not this over the top dramatic spectacle of a life
 - Actually, it's quite the opposite: Paul tells the Thessalonians this: ***"...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your***

own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders."
-1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (ESV)

- Now this is paradoxical. Paul says, you know how you can get the attention and the respect of outsiders and nonbelievers??
 - Live a quiet life, mind your own business. Just live a consistent and content life day in and day out and people are going to realize that something is different about you.
- Just sow the little seeds
 - You sow a little seed of forgiveness here, a seed of kindness there
 - A seed of faith one day, a seed of patience on another
 - A seed of self-control today, and a seed of peace tomorrow
- When we live quiet, peaceful lives sowing the little seeds that God calls us to sow...one day, whether on this side of eternity or the next, we

will be able to look back on just how much God was able to use those little seeds to grow something great

- In the parable Jesus says the smallest seed grows up to the point where the birds can make nests in it's shade
 - What He's saying is that even the smallest seed sown into a persons heart, can grow to make such an impact that other people receive their blessing through them.
- The problem that we have most of the time, however, is that we want the tree before the seed.
 - We want to see the end result, or manufacture the end result, when those results are really something completely out of out control.
- Because again, it's His work, not ours. And we need to be reminded just how powerful and in control that He really is.

- Which is why I believe that the next passage is placed in the same chapter as these parables.
- Look in verse 35: ***“On that day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took Him with them in the boat, just as He was. And other boats were with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” -Mark 4:35-41 (ESV)***

- Here's the final point for us today. And that is that:

- THE KINGDOM HAS A KING

- This might seem like an obvious one as well, but I believe one of the biggest detriments to the modern western church today is that we forget to view Jesus as King
 - As Lord, as Master
- Jesus is not an elected official in our lives that is here to work for us and our benefit.
- He is the King of the Throne Who has ultimate power and authority over everything!
 - And most of the panic and confusion that comes in our lives is a direct result of us forgetting that that is exactly Who He is.
- Now, Jesus told His disciples that they were going to cross to the other side
 - So He gave them direction and a destination
 - And as they were following His instructions, a storm arises

- Now, it was not unusual for pop up storms to happen on the Sea of Galilee...

- The Sea of Galilee is actually the lowest freshwater lake on earth, it's surface is 700 feet below sea level
 - And it being situated on the bottom of the Jordan valley surrounded by hills and mountains, this terrain causes pretty violent winds and storms to happen
 - However, what was odd was that these storms typically took place during the day. This is why the fisherman would do most of their fishing at night in this area
 - So this storm popping up in the middle of the evening, would have caught everyone completely off guard
 - And this is not just any storm, this is a great storm! In the original language it is a MEGA storm! And people are starting to freak out!
- But not Jesus. He's chillin!

- He's fast asleep in the stern of the boat! We even get the detail that He has a pillow! Mark seems to be going out of His way to let us know just how comfortable Jesus was in the midst of this storm
- But the disciples are not comfortable they're terrified, and they're mad at Jesus!
- They go wake Him up and say, *"Don't you care Jesus?! Do you even care that we're all about to die?! Do you care about us and what we're going through at all??"*
- And Jesus gets up, and I imagine Him being pretty annoyed at this moment.
 - He just got disturbed from His much needed sleep. As a non-morning person myself, I like to think Jesus was a bit grumpy here to make me feel better about myself
 - So I imagine Jesus getting up from His comfortable stern, giving a glare to the disciples, then He looks out over the sea and yells "Peace! Be Still!" Can literally be translated, "BE QUIET, AND STAY QUIET!"
- And then all of the sudden everything stopped. It went from a great storm to a great calm. A MEGA storm to a MEGA calm.
 - The rain didn't just gradually stop, the storm didn't just subside.
 - Everything in that moment got quiet, and stayed quiet
 - Even the waves that should have continued to crash for a little while after the storm subsided also immediately stopped and even the waters became still.
- Jesus then asks them why they were afraid?? Have they not seen enough from Him to trust Him at His Word??
- Jesus said they were to go to the other side. He gave them directions where to go and how to go.
 - And yes the path got bumpy and scary, but Jesus is saying that you should still trust Me at My Word

- Yes, the storm is powerful, but He is wayyyy more powerful
- This is His world, His creation, His Work, His plan, because He is the King.
- Now, I believe that Jesus is very intentional about this show of Power, in the context of the Parables that He has been telling.
- Because as one commentator pointed out, His disciples needed this encouragement.
 - If you remember from chapter 3, He called them to Himself, so that they would be sent out to preach and have spiritual authority
 - So these guys are at this time, being sent out by Jesus to preach in certain areas...and they're not always received well.
 - These young, inexperienced, mostly teenagers, are dealing with rejection, more than we probably even know.
 - There are people that aren't taking them seriously, not taking the Kingdom seriously, some not even taking Jesus seriously.
- And Jesus is telling these parables as James A. Brooks said, to *"encouraged disciples who were experiencing rejection of their message and frustration at their lack of understanding of God's mysterious purposes that God's kingdom would surely come"*
- These guys don't have it all figured out, they can't see the whole picture, but they needed to be reminded that it's God's work, not theirs.
- It may seem paradoxical, but it's His Kingdom, so things work His way
 - And no matter what trouble or storms may come their way...He is in control and more powerful than any of it
- We can't afford to allow the storm to make us forget the power of the King
- And the reality we should fear Him so much more than the storm.
- Think about it. They find themselves in the middle of this great storm, Jesus turns it into a great calm, and I would assume that then the

disciples were filled with great peace...
because of what Jesus had done.

- But that's not what the Bible says: ***“And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” -Mark 4:41 (ESV)***
- The mega storm, turned to mega calm, resulted in the disciples mega-fear
 - It can literally be translated to Fear a Great Fear
 - In that moment they feared Jesus, more than they ever feared the storm...and that is a really good place to be.
- One of the greatest things missing from the spiritual lives of Christians today is the Fear of the Lord.
- Without it we will have no wisdom or spiritual insight because the book of Proverbs clearly and often says that the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

- One of the best definitions I've ever heard of the fear of the Lord is this: **“fear, dread inspired by something great and terrific; to strike with fear and reverence. To influence by fear, terror, or respect.”**
- I've heard it said that the fear we are to have toward the Lord is a “profound adoring awed respect.”
- Fearing the Lord means we are to have a reverence for His Kingship
 - We are to have a profound respect for His Power
 - We are to be awed by His Holiness
- Yes, we are to have a relationship with God as a loving Father, but this Father is no push over.
 - This Father demands your respect
 - You see all throughout scripture whenever anyone is confronted with the manifest presence of the Lord...they do greet him with a hug or a fist bump

- Abraham, Isaiah, and Ezekiel all fell face down before Him
 - Daniel was set trembling on his hands and knees
 - John in revelation said He became like a dead man
- There is a holy fear that comes upon those who truly Encounter the Presence of God when we get a glimpse of just how Glorious and Majestic that He is
- And when you learn to fear Him above all else, all of the sudden the storms don't seem so scary any more
- When the Prophet Isaiah was foretelling of the coming of the Assyrians He said:
- “The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread.” -Isaiah 8:13 (ESV)***
- Jesus very bluntly tells His disciples in Matthew chapter 10, ***“And do not fear those***

who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” -Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

- And yet in the same breath, He says: ***“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” -Matthew 10:29-31 (ESV)***
- Again the paradoxical truth of the matter is:
- *The more you fear God, the more you understand His love for you*
 - *The more you fear Him, the more secure you will feel*
 - *The strongest you will ever be in this life is when you tremble in His Presence*
- I can't help but wonder if Jesus teaches that we are to have the faith of a child so much because of this principle.

- Because in the eyes of a child, there is no greater force or power than their Dad
- He's the scariest, He's the strongest, He's the Greatest!
- One of my favorite stories that my Pastor from our sending church, Skip Allen used to share was from when His oldest son was only about 4 years old.
 - And one night, he was in the bed with his parents and in the middle of the night, he needed to go to the bathroom
 - And so he climbed over his dad, and it woke Skip up, but he didn't get up, he just laid there, kept his eyes squinted and watched his son.
 - And his son hopped down off the bed and then stopped in his tracks. And he was just staring at the dark abyss that was the open bathroom door.
- Just big, dark, and scary!

- But then skip watched his little boy, gather himself, psyche himself up, and he turned and looked at his father
- And he pointed and said, "Dad is right here. Dad. Is. Right. Here!"
- And then with that confidence, he walked into the darkness!
- That is the type of life that we can live if the fear of the Lord is prevalent in our lives.
 - We know that He is greater than the storms
 - He's greater than the darkness
 - He greater than the unknown
 - He's greater than the confusion
 - He's greater than any enemy that could ever come against us
- There is nothing more powerful or terrifying than our King.