

The Unstoppable Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Hello and welcome to the next in our series on the parables of Jesus. When you look around you at the world today, I wonder what you think of Christianity. Is Christianity busy winning or busy losing? Let's ask those big questions.

Is it gaining ground or is it losing it? Do the events of the world rock your faith in God and what He's doing? Are you able to see past the events of the world based on what God has said and have faith that God is busy doing what He says He's going to be doing?

Well, in our parables today, they have a lot to say about how God is busy in the world. They talk about kingdoms and growth and power and authority.

But like all parables, they carry a sting in the tail and they've got some surprising challenges to us about our notions of Christianity and God and His kingdom. And they tell us a little bit about what we should expect from Him and what He's doing.

Now, the great things about the parables we're looking at today is that they kind of tell us what they're about. In Mark chapter 4, Jesus says, This is what the kingdom of God is like. And the same with the parable of the mustard seed.

[1 : 1 1] They actually tell us they're about the kingdom of God. And that shouldn't surprise us because the gospel of Mark is about the kingdom of God. It starts off like that. And so we must expect the gospel to be speaking about the kingdoms.

We must expect Jesus to be talking about the kingdom. Mark chapter 1 says, The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So immediately, Jesus is the Christ.

He's the Messiah. He's the King of God's kingdom. And still in chapter 1 of Mark, Jesus Himself summarizes His message as this. The time has come, He says. The kingdom of God is near.

Repent and believe the good news. So everything that follows in the gospel of Mark is about Jesus and about Him being the Messiah. It's about kings and kingdoms.

Well, specifically about God's kingdom. Now in Jesus' mind, something then is decisive is about to happen. With His arrival into the world and the arrival as He begins His preaching ministry, He's saying that God's kingdom has arrived.

[2 : 1 1] Something is going to change. And for Jesus' Jewish hearers, this was explosive news. Because the biggest problem for the Jews is that they wanted to have a kingdom, but they didn't have it.

The kingdom of God simply wasn't there for them. They'd been waiting for it for about 500 years. They weren't being ruled by their Davidic king, but instead they were being ruled over by Rome and its puppet kings.

They'd never really recovered from the blow they'd received by their defeat and being sent into exile in Assyria and Babylon. And so they'd been waiting all those centuries for God to finally arrive and do something.

Set up His king. Sweep away their enemies and establish the Jews as the top nation on the planet. They were waiting for God to make Israel great again. And there were all these groups trying to vie for their own ideas of what God was going to do, what they thought God was going to do.

There was a group called the Essenes. They're kind of like monks. They withdrew from society. They were out living in the desert. You know, they were going to purify themselves by withdrawing. There were the Pharisees and the priests who wanted everyone to obey the law to its nth degree.

[3 : 24] And everyone would have to do that before God would come and establish His kingdom. And then there was this group called the Zealots. They're sort of like freedom fighters. They just wanted to pick a fight.

They wanted to build an army and throw off the Omenroke in a cataclysm of blood and warfare. And into this sort of volatile mix walks the son of a carpenter from the backwater area of Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth as He's known, saying that the kingdom of God has actually arrived and that He, Jesus, is the one that will make it happen.

It was electrifying for the Jews. Which side would He take? Would He call people to purify themselves and live a life of poverty in the desert? Would He call people to purify themselves and keep the law and join the Pharisees?

Or would He call for the purification of the land by killing as many Romans as they could? And call for violent revolution and join the Zealots? Well, Jesus' answer is none of the above.

The kingdom of God is not going to be established by human means and according to human plans and by human timetables. God's kingdom is going to be different.

[4 : 42] And the parables help us see that. So let's have a closer look at the parables that were read for us earlier. Let's read them again quickly. So Mark chapter 4, the parable of the growing seed.

He also said, This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground, night and day. Whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

All by itself the soil produces corn, first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts a sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

Now, it's a very simple but in yet profound parable. Now, you know, if you were going to make a big statement about the arrival of the kingdom of God, I don't know if you were going to use, Hey, everyone, come and join me.

The kingdom is going to look like seed growing in the ground. You know, that's not the kind of PR you want to get with someone establishing their kingdom. Normally when someone has a kingdom and they want everyone to join them, they want to show you how big and strong and mighty it is, not how small and mundane and everyday it is.

[5 : 54] God's kingdom will almost be plain, normal, kind of hidden in plain sight almost. God's kingdom is not going to look like the kingdoms of the world. In fact, the parable, the next parable, makes that plain to us.

The kingdom is going to be spectacular. It will be big, but it's going to start off really small and insignificant almost. So much so that people will treat it with contempt.

After all, who was Jesus in the eyes of a Jew? A nobody. The son of a carpenter. Someone from the backwater area of Galilee. How can he be claiming to be the one that's going to bring in the kingdom?

But do you remember that's what the Old Testament said the Messiah was going to be like? Isaiah 53 says this, The ordinary, mundane, everyday event of farming.

Jesus is already telling his heroes that the kingdom of God is subversive. It's not going to be the same as the kingdoms that they want, and it's not going to grow and arrive in the same way.

[7 : 24] Jesus is already shifting expectations just by using the analogy of the seed and farming and growth. Now we've come across the idea of seeds already, and so we know that seeds stands for the word of God.

But what's important here is not the person who sows, but the emphasis in this parable is on the seed itself, and the ability and the power of what's inside the seed to make it grow.

The person sows, and then all he does is he falls asleep, as we saw in the video earlier. You know, you can't make a seed grow. Yes, you can put it in the ground. And even in the modern world with all the genetics and biology that we know, we can't make these things happen.

It's not like you can take blocks of Lego and put them together. It's not the same. You can't take blocks of plants and cobble them together, and then there you'll have a plant that produces fruit. Just about all plants start with a seed.

If you want a plant, you still have to throw a seed into the ground at some point. You know, we can build rocket ships, etc. But we can't build a tree or a plant. All we can do is what Jesus says is sow it, put it into the ground.

[8 : 33] There's something inbuilt into the seed that generates its own growth. Yes, it needs the soil, but the farmer has no power to make it grow. The seed grows all by itself.

The Greek word is automata, automatic. It's got an automatic inbuilt design that makes it grow. Now, boys and girls, I'm sure you remember the first bean that you got at some point that you made grow and you stuck it in the tissue paper.

And lo and behold, a few days later, a plant would start growing. Now, you didn't do that. It's not like taking pieces of Lego and building something and putting pieces together. You can't order plants from a shop and get roots and branches and trees and leaves and stems.

You can't build a plant like that. You just need a seed. And when you're seeing it grow, when you see it grow, it's almost like watching a miracle unfold in front of your eyes. You know, it's actually quite humbling that something so small and seemingly so simple is beyond our ability to make happen.

And that's the point of the seed in the story. It can grow apart from our input. It has its own power given to it by God to grow.

[9 : 46] Even the great apostle Paul knew this truth, that all the success that he saw when he went on his missionary journeys was not due to him, but to God. This is what he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 3.

What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe. As the Lord has assigned to each his task, I planted the seed.

Apollos watered it. But God made it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything. But only God who makes things grow.

So what Jesus is saying here is that for God's kingdom to come into existence, all it takes is something as simple as a person speaking the word of God.

Actually, in this context, it's the words of Jesus himself. In other words, telling people about what Jesus did and said is what it takes to make the kingdom grow.

[10 : 47] It's really quite that simple. And what God will do is take the seeds that you've planted, no matter how small, and he will water it and he will make it grow.

Now, there's another upset in the parable. And that is that the growth is not going to be a jack-in-the-bean stalk type of growth. You know, you just chuck the seed in the ground and whoosh!

Overnight, you've got this huge jack-in-the-bean stalk plant. You've got your brand new, shiny kingdom. You sow the seed and boom, next day there's the kingdom of God established.

Well, the growth is going to be slow. It's going to take time.

If a seed turning into a tree is a miracle, it's actually a miracle in slow motion. Anyone who has planted a seed will know what I'm talking about. You don't just go out and see the thing growing again the next day.

[11 : 47] It takes a very long time. There's great time-lapse photography of things that grow, but it does take time. Look what the parable says. Now, Jesus' audience didn't want to hear this.

They wanted God's kingdom to come in its fullness now. The Romans must go now. You can't have a slow motion revolution. So Jesus is here overthrowing their expectations and basically thwarting their plans.

God's kingdom will come. It is inevitable. Growth will happen. But it will be slow. It will be steady.

But it will be sure. The nature of seeds is to grow and sprout. All you have to do is put it in the ground. Just so would the word of God.

Just by sowing it, it will have an effect. But remember how powerful God's word is. To make the entire cosmos, all God had to do was speak.

[13 : 10] God's words create the reality they communicate. Isaiah says something about this in Isaiah chapter 5. For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return without watering the earth, making it bud and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, just so my word that proceeds from my mouth will not return to me empty.

But it will accomplish what I please. And it will prosper where I send it. But you know, modern audiences are no different from the Jewish audience.

We also want to see things happen immediately. Perhaps more so in the West than other cultures. We want results. And we want them now. And they must be big and impressive and everyone must see it and know.

God must save me now. He must change my situation now. He must answer my prayers now. He must give me all of His blessings now. But God's way of building His kingdom is not this way.

It's not a flash in the pan. God isn't interested in showing off for the sake of showing off. He is interested in real, deep down, foundational, life-changing growth.

[14 : 34] He wants things that will last, that will stand the test of time. And if that takes a bit more time, so be it. God's ways are not our ways.

He knows what will work. And He has a plan. And He will make it happen. There's another element. And this comes a little bit of a sting in the tail. The goal of putting seed in the ground is not to have grown, is not to have seeds in the ground.

Nor even to watch plants grow, as nice as that is. Now, if you're a farmer, you want a result. You want a crop. You want a harvest. There's an end goal.

You want to have a bunch of grapes or wheat or whatever. And so you can live and you can help others live. And that's why the parable ends with this idea of the harvest. As soon as the grain is ripe, He puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

Now, God's kingdom is not going to keep on growing with no end in sight. It's not purposeless or meaningless. Although the growth is slow and takes time, and in a sense it's unnoticed, there is an end goal in sight.

[15 : 45] Now, there's a bit of a sting in the tail here, because the imagery of the harvest is a little bit ambiguous. On the one hand, that there will be a harvest is very encouraging.

If God's word has been planted in my life, I can be assured that there will be growth to maturity, and that I too will be part of God's final kingdom, if I persevere in growing in Christ and His word.

Likewise, I can be assured of growth and maturity in my children. Likewise with evangelism. If I spread God's word, I can be sure that others will come into the kingdom. God's word will take hold and produce results.

There will be a harvest. People who share the gospel will come into the kingdom. It's a certainty. You know, the Bible often speaks of this kind of harvest. Paul in Galatians 5 says, Whoever sows to please the Spirit, the Spirit of God, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Let's not become weary, he says, in doing good. For at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. So not only is there hope for me individually, but I know that God has a goal for millions upon millions of other people to share in His kingdom as well.

[17 : 00] As the parable of the mustard seed reminds us, yes, it starts off small, but it grows up into this huge tree, the biggest tree in the garden, and all the birds of the air, that meaning all the other kingdoms, all the other peoples of the world coming in to nest in it.

The book of Revelation gives us a picture of what that final kingdom would look like. It says this, The promise of God is that His kingdom will come to a final fulfillment, and it will be glorious for those who belong to it.

But as I mentioned, the imagery of harvest is ambiguous. There is a harvest, but it comes by means of a sickle. So the sickle in Scripture is a picture of judgment.

Here's the sting in the tail. The idea of the sickle in judgment is picked up again in Revelation. It says this, And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and the blood that flowed from it rose as high as the bridles of a horse for a distance of 300 kilometers.

So Jesus' parable actually ends on a cliffhanger. There will be a harvest, but the sickle of God will cut through time and space. Our lives do have an end. There will be a time of reckoning.

[19 : 03] God's kingdom will be established on earth. There will be a final consummation, and it will mean life and blessing to those who are part of it, but it will bring death and destruction to those who do not think it was worth their time or energy or effort to investigate who Jesus was and to live up to those claims.

In conclusion, then, there's three lessons for us to take away from this parable. First of all, let's take courage from God's promise of kingdom growth.

Let's take courage from God's promise of kingdom growth. We should be encouraged and not discouraged about the state of affairs in the world. God is building His kingdom.

God's Word is strong and powerful. It will save. It will take root. It will grow. Yes, it will take time. We may sow and not see it grow.

It may not look like much to us or to the outside world, but God says He will make it happen. The Word we sow will grow up to be the biggest tree in the world, and it will produce a mighty, large harvest for the Lord.

[20 : 18] In fact, all we have to do is look back in history to see how hugely Christianity has grown and taken root in all the world. There's hardly a nation in the world where Christianity is not present.

Then, let's be constant in kingdom sowing. If we know that God is at work, we know that there's going to be a harvest, that should give us emphasis, impetus, and an emphasis to share God's Word.

Sharing, talking about Jesus and the Gospel. If Jesus is the key to the kingdom, then talking about Him is the thing that unlocks it, unlocks the door. God will bring growth.

God will bring growth, but He needs us to sow. So let's be constant in sowing His Word into people's lives. Lastly, the sting in the tail.

You need to take care if you're outside the kingdom. If you're listening to this and you find yourself outside the kingdom, please, come to Christ.

[21 : 19] Save yourself from judgment. Come to Jesus. And you too can start experiencing the process of change and growth that leads to blessing and life.

Let's pray to God together. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word and Your promise that Your kingdom will grow. that Your Word has a power in and of itself to make Your kingdom come.

That all that's needed is for us to point people to Jesus and to talk about Him and tell them about Him. And that You will make a miraculous thing happen and bring the kingdoms into the hearts and minds of the people that we speak to.

Lord, help us to grow in the kingdom and help us to share this Word with others so that others can come in the kingdom and share in Your blessings. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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