

What Do We Learn About Jesus And His Kingdom From A Lamp, A Bunch of Seeds And One Small Seed?

Mark 4:21-34

- Introduction:** 1) Sometimes the work of the Lord can become frustrating. It can be disappointing. We work hard but see little fruit from our efforts. We shine the light of the gospel and sow the seed of the Word but not much happens. It seems almost futile. Why even continue?
- 2) William Carey (1761-1834), the father of the modern missionary movement, labored in India 7 years before seeing his 1st Indian convert. He shared the gospel faithfully for more than 40 years but the fruit of his labor was minimal in his lifetime. Still, he could say in the midst of it all, “the future is as bright as the promise of God” and “expect great things [from God], attempt great things [for God].”
- 3) Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), the father of American Baptist missions, labored in Burma also for 7 years before seeing his 1st convert. He would bury 2 wives, a number of children, and die disappointed his labors for the gospel yielded so little fruit. Yet like Carey, he was faithful to the end, and could voice these words, “In spite of sorrow, loss, and pain, our course be onward still; we sow on Burma’s barren plain, we reap on Zion’s hill.”
- 4) I cannot help but believe these men, as well as many others, were inspired to press on and stay with it by a little lamp, a bunch of seeds, and one small mustard seed!

Translation: Why do I say that? Our text provides the answer.

I. The Light of Jesus Will Not Be Hid 4:21-25

- Chapter 4:1-34 consist of 4 parables. Verses 21-34 consist of the final 3.

- The theme is how God's kingdom comes and grows with the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah who came to give His life as a ransom for many (10:45).
- Jesus, like any good teacher, used these parables at different times and different places. Mark puts them together here to reinforce the main parable of the soils (4:1-20).
- The need for a proper response of faith in God's revealed word is repeatedly driven home (vs. 23-25, 34).
- He begins with a common sense illustration about a lamp. However, there is more to it than meets the eye!
- A literal translation of the key phrase in vs. 21 is, "Comes the lamp..." Note: 1) it is "the Lamp" and 2) "The Lamp comes." This is a reference to Jesus Himself.
- The Lamp is Jesus, the "Light of the World" (John 8:12), the One who is "the light of men" (John 1:4), and the One who is "the true light" (John 1:9). This is no ordinary lamp! How then do we respond to this Lamp?

1) **If you hide it you misuse it** **4:21-23**

- The Lamp, and for that matter any lamp, does not come to be put under a basket or under a bed! The very idea is ridiculous. It is silly.
- No, you put the lamp up high and out in the open ("on a stand").
- God has sent this Lamp to bring light to a dark world. He has come to reveal truth, enlighten minds and conquer the darkness!

- Vs. 22 indicates it may be, for the most part, hidden at the moment. However, there is coming a day when everything will be made clear. Eventually the whole world will see the glory of this light.
 - That which is hidden will be manifest (revealed).
 - That which is now a secret will come to light.
- The resurrection of the crucified King assures it. The 2nd coming of the glorified King will establish it. The world may try and hide Jesus but it will fail miserably in its attempts.
- Vs. 23 issues the challenge to listen carefully once again. I like *The Message* paraphrase, “Are you listening to this? Really listening?”
- This call to listen is found in vs. 3, 9, 13, 23-23.
- Hearing the Word and acting on it is of tremendous importance. A new set of ears is absolutely essential! Why?

2) **If you hide it you will lose it** **4:24-25**

- Verse 24 repeats the call to have listening ears. “Pay attention” is a pre. imp. What follows is a critically important theological principle.
- Jesus uses a popular Jewish proverb (read). A similar one said, “In the pot in which you cook for others, you’ll be cooked” (Edwards, 140).
- Here the means of measuring is “hearing.” If the measure of your hearing is good, rich, receptive to the Word, you will receive it back and even more. Indeed, “the one who has (v. 25), more, will be given.” Note the repetition in vs. 24 and 25.
 - “still more will be added” (v. 24)
 - “still more will be given” (v. 25)

- Respond to God’s truth and more truth will follow. Embrace the Kingdom now when it is small and you will share in it when it is worldwide!
- In radical contrast, the one who rejects the Word, even what he has will be taken away (lost).
- Love Jesus and the Word and you get more of Jesus and the Word. Refuse Jesus and the Word and you lose the little you may once have had. This is a critical spiritual principle we must give careful and close attention. Our spiritual health, our spiritual eternity is at stake.
- Ill. The value of exercising and the immediate loss when you stop.
- Proverbs 9:9 says, “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”
- How we respond to Jesus day by day is of the utmost seriousness. Do not take for granted the relationship you have today. It could all be lost tomorrow.

II. God Will See To It That His Kingdom Grows

4:26-29

- For a 2nd time Jesus crafts a parable about sowing seed. In the parable of the soils the focus was on the necessity of sowing and the receptivity of the soils (4:3-8).
- Here, the emphasis falls on the innate and internal power of the seed!
- This parable is found only in Mark’s gospel. It is Mark’s only unique parable. It points to the truth that the Word of God has within it the power of its own success and triumph. Let the Word loose and watch it do its own work.
- Thus it is very instructive concerning the nature of the kingdom in a comprehensive sense. It notes: 1) the kingdom’s sowing (v. 26), 2) growing (vs. 27-28), and harvesting (v. 29).

- From beginning to end, the sovereignty of Christ and the power of the Word stand forth in authority.

1) **There is a mystery to the growth of the kingdom** **4:26-27**

- The man in the parable is not identified (v. 26) because he is not important. The seed is.
- He scatters it (v. 26) and then goes on with life as usual (sleeping and rising day after day).
- Without his knowledge or full understanding the seed sprouts and grows.
- He is not active because the power for the seed to sprout and grow is not in him. It is in the seed.
- The seed has within itself the power of its own generation.
- Perhaps James, the half brother of Jesus, was reflecting on this very parable when he wrote in James 1:21, “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” Plant the word in a receptive soul and off it goes!
- The coming of the kingdom of God is not contingent or dependent on human activity.
- The seed of the gospel prospers and grows of itself in a very real sense. Once it is sown, a process is set in motion that cannot and will not be stopped.
- This is a good mystery without question!

2) **There is a certainty to the growth of the kingdom** **4:28-29**

- V. 28 says, “the earth produces by itself.” Literally the text reads “automatically” (Gr. *automatē*, fronted for emphasis) the earth bears fruit.” There is no stopping it.
- Process begun/process destined to be completed!

Blade → ear → full grain → harvest!

- The process that brings about the fullness of the kingdom of God is not spectacular but it is certain. Even now it is present and it is growing even if you may not see it.
- God did not design His kingdom to come like a tidal wave or a bolt of lightning, both of which come quickly and disappear quickly.
- No, God planted it in the coming of a Galilean peasant, a homeless man from Nazareth who gathered about Him a bunch of nobodies. The ways of God are mysterious indeed, but the ways of God will succeed.
- And the end: a harvest of celebration and judgment. “Putting the sickle in” is often a symbol of the arrival of the kingdom of God and the judgment that will accompany it. Rev. 14:15 makes this clear when it says, “And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.”
- Who would have imagined that starting with only a group of 12 men, Christianity would grow to where it is today, and continue to grow until every people group on the planet is found in the Kingdom. God will see to it that His kingdom grows.

III. God’s Kingdom May Begin Small But It Will Grow Large

4:30-34

- The final parable in this chapter is also about seeds. Actually, it is about a single seed, a tiny little mustard seed.
- For the 3rd time in chapter 4 we find the phrase “Kingdom of God” (vs. 11, 26, 30), indicating clearly what is the unifying theme of the 4 parables in Mark 4:1-34.
- Jesus begins this parable with a 2-fold question in v. 30:
 - 1) With what can we compare the kingdom of God?
 - 2) What parable shall we use for it?

- He has exactly the right one to help us see where the kingdom is headed.

1) **God's kingdom program will experience incredible results** **4:30-32**

- Jesus answers his 2-fold question by utilizing a tiny seed, a mustard seed.
- The “mustard seed” was proverbial for its smallness in Palestine because it was the smallest of all the seeds sown. Matthew 17:20 records Jesus saying, “For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to the mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”
- Jesus wants to draw an analogy between the mustard bush’s microscopic beginning and its large growth and mature state.
- The small seed is sown (v. 31).
- The small seed explodes in growth (v. 32). It produces something all out of proportion to itself. In a very short time it could grow to a height of 10-12 feet with large leaves. In fact, it is large enough for birds to nest and find shade.
- From small and meager beginnings, God’s kingdom will expand and grow for all to see. What began as the smallest becomes the greatest! When Christ returns (unlike His first coming) all the world will see as it surpasses all the earth’s kingdoms in power, glory and mystery. What an encouraging word for those who think they labor in vain, who endure rejection and persecution, who may seal their faith in martyrdom.
- The birds of the air: 1) Satan (4:4); 2) shelter for kingdom citizens, 3) the nations coming into the kingdom; 4) nothing. I like #3, the nations! Ps. 104:12; Ezek 17:23; 31:6 and Dan 4:9-21 would support this. That the birds “nest in its shade” settles it for me. All the peoples of the world are going to be there.

- Yes there is surprising growth to God’s kingdom and all the nations will enter and enjoy it! This is a parable of growth and of grace, of joy and celebration.

2) **God’s kingdom program requires careful explanation** **4:33-34**

- This section of Mark ends with an explanatory word from Mark about the importance of parables in Jesus’ teaching. It recalls 4:10-12.
- He used parables a lot! At least 39 are found in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.
- He spoke in parables so they would understand the nature of the kingdom and the central role He and the Word plays. For the 10th time in chapter 4 the importance of “hearing” is noted.
- “As they were able to hear,” at least implies, the parables enlighten or obscure depending on one’s ability to hear and how they respond.
- He purposely chose this method knowing what would happen (v. 34).
- Those who drew close to Jesus as His disciple, He explained everything. Only in close communion and connection to Jesus can one understand “the language about God” (Edwards, 146).
- Draw close to Jesus and you get more of Him and God. Draw back from Jesus and you lose both Him and the Father. 2 John 9-10 makes this crystal clear: “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

Conclusion: 1) By the way, what has happened in India and Burma since the seeds of the gospel were planted there by Carey and Judson?

2) India: Christian population 71, 011, 000 5.8%

	Eva.	26, 290, 283	2%
Burma:	Christian population	4, 534, 511	9%
	Eva.	2, 517, 184	5%

- 3) Yes, the kingdom starts small but it will grow large. And, the biggest and best is yet to come! You doubt that? Listen to Rev. 7:9-10!