

“God’s Surprising Kingdom” Mark 4:21-34

Introduction: Pg. _____

It’s not so much about what we know, but about how we respond to what we know.

In Mark 4:21-34, Jesus is teaching and he’s dropping lyrical gold about the kingdom of God. We’re going to hear him communicate some surprising truths about the nature of his kingdom and how we can receive it and participate in it. Why? Because it’s not enough to know about his kingdom if we don’t act on what we know.

It’s the difference in secondhand knowledge and firsthand knowledge. It’s NOT, oh, I read about that in book or saw a couple of TikToks about it. It’s I wrote the book. I made the videos. I have accepted the truth about God’s kingdom in Jesus and I am living in the power of God’s surprising kingdom.

That’s the invitation of the text to us today...

The Point: Accept and live in the power of God’s surprising kingdom.

Redemption Hill, this is what God wants for you personally and for us collectively. This is why Jesus tells these revolutionary truths in the form of parabolic lessons and stories! Parables teach spiritual truth by way of comparison to elicit a response. Ask God to help you respond as you hear his words today.

Mark 4:21-34 (text displayed)

I’m going to share 5 surprising truths about God’s kingdom from Jesus’ words.

1. Jesus is the message of God’s kingdom (4:21-23).

Verses 21-34 build on what Jesus just communicated in the parable of the sower (or soils) in vv. 1-20. As Pastor Jon explained last week, the parables had a dual effect based on the heart of the hearer. To the receptive, they reveal the kingdom. To the resistant, they conceal the kingdom, as the sun both hardens the clay and melts the wax.

To help them understand how much he wants his kingdom message known, he begins in verse 21: “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not a stand?”

- This is clearly a rhetorical question. Everyone knows the purpose of a lamp is not to be hidden, but to be placed where it can provide maximum light.
- Jesus says: this is what the kingdom of God is like, a message so important the whole world must hear it!
- But while Jesus is clearly referring to the word of God, the message going forth through the metaphor of a lamp shining, there is more going on in these words.
- A literal reading of the Greek text in Mark would read: “Does the lamp come in order that it might be placed under the bowl or under the bed?”
 - Did you hear that: “Does the lamp come...?”

- Lamps don't come. Inanimate objects don't move. They are carried, which is why most translations use the word "brought."
- People come. People arrive. People show up, and this points us to a specific light and a specific person. It's not "Do lamps come..." but "Does *the* lamp come...?"
- In other words, Jesus is saying, "I am the lamp of God who illuminates and reveals who God is and how people can enjoy a relationship with him!"
- Once again, this is a clue to his divine nature, as the OT often used the metaphor of light for God and his coming Messiah (2 Samuel 22:29, 2 Kings 8:19, Ps. 132:17; Isaiah 42:6, 49:6).
- Jesus is explicit about this identification in John 8:12...

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

T: Jesus further explains his intention to be made known in *verse 22*.

- "For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light."
- Whatever is said off-air, will be broadcast on every station. Whatever is said offline, will be displayed on every web address on the planet.
- Microphone (take it off... keep talking. Jesus says, get mic'ed up and stack up the speakers. I want everyone to know!
- In other words, people may not understand my parables right now. They may not see God's glory shining in everything I say and do. After all, no one expected God's Messiah to come in the unimpressive form of Jesus of Nazareth, no political figure, but a humble servant, but Jesus knows his glory will be revealed!
- When? For some it happened then, as he taught and performed signs and wonders as the Son of God and promised Messiah. For thousands, and then millions and billions of others, his light was known after his crucifixion and resurrection, but a day coming, when Jesus will return again, when he will come as C.S. Lewis said: "as God without disguise."

Jesus says once again in *verse 23*, just as he said earlier in *verse 9*: "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus is saying: "Are you listening to this? Really listening?" (The Message). Are you ready to respond to what you hear?

T: Then he emphasizes this call to listen in *verse 24*, which leads us to the second truth I want you to see about God's surprising kingdom.

2. There is always more of Jesus to receive (4:24-25).

- *Verse 24*: "Pay attention (the Greek word - behold, look) to what you hear." He literally says, "See what you hear!" (βλέπετε τί ἀκούετε - Strauss)
- The combination of sensory language calling for people's complete and undivided attention could not be stronger! Then Jesus echoes a well-known proverb from the marketplace: "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
 - MEASURE: Measuring instruments were used to maintain the integrity of sales and trades in the marketplace. A bushel of grain, for a half a bushel of barley, but we're using the same scale.
 - Jesus is saying, "What you give or invest, you will receive." He used this same statement in different ways throughout the gospels. In Matthew 7:2, he uses it in regards to judgment

(In you the same way you judge others, you will be judged,” and Luke 6:38 referring to receiving an equal measure of judgment or forgiveness, or giving.

- Here in Mark, he is saying, when we invest time and energy in hearing *AND* responding to his teaching, we will receive a return on our investment.
 - Don't miss the *AND* there. It's not just *HEARING*, but hearing *AND RESPONDING*.
 - Grant Osborne says, “In both Hebrew and Greek to hear means to obey. When one listens, by the nature of the process one must act on what is heard.” (See Deut. 28:58; 29:29; Josh. 1:8; Psalm 119:2, 8, 17, 34, 40, and James 1:22-25)
- But don't miss this next line, and I absolutely love this. “And *STILL MORE* will be added to you.”
 - God always tips the scales.
 - He always gives more.
 - He is the God of abundance!
 - Give God your time, your ears, your heart, your obedience, he will *always, always, ALWAYS* out give you!!
- This is a continual surprise: just when you think you've received all that you can in your walk with God, you discover: *THERE'S MORE!* There's always *MORE!*
 - God is an infinite fountain of living water! He's not like the fountain drink machines that run out of carbonation.
 - He keeps giving and giving and giving, which motivates us to keep listening and living!
- Experience the generosity of God. I pray you are, as you not only spend focused, face to face time with God daily, but then you go out and put into practice what you've heard from his voice. Make daily investments (bigger and better than Robin Hood app to invest in the stock market)
- This is a promise to claim: “still more will be added to you” (and he says the same thing in the first part of verse 25) “For to the one who has, more will be given.” (In case you missed it the first time, I'll say it again. I will be crystal clear.”

Sadly, for those who reject the word of Jesus, their spiritual blindness will only increase. “... and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

T: Jesus then moves to help us understand the nature of his kingdom, and he does so with two more parables. The first tells us...

3. The message of God's kingdom possesses inherit power (4:26-29).

In verse 26, Jesus tells the Parable of the Seed Growing (Mark's only unique parable by the way), and he says the kingdom is like someone scattering seed on the ground. We know from the parable of the sower (or soils) that the seed is the message of God, and we just learned from the lamp that the message centers on Jesus.

What's the point of sowing seed? To see it come alive, grow and give life to others. But how does it happen? Look at 27-29.

Did you see that?

- The man sows the seed and then sets his sleep number goes to sleep. Day after day he goes on about his business... He does not go look at the dirt each day. He does not deliver inspiring speeches to the seeds: “Today is the day you're gonna grow!” (By the way, I've tried that before. It doesn't work. I mean it was heard for me to listen to Pastor Jon's sermon last week: “Look at my yard. It's sooo green! See my thumbs....”).
- The sower simply waits. He sows and sleeps, sows and sleeps.

- Then all of the sudden, it comes to LIFE!

What's the point of the parable? There is inherent power in the word of God. We don't make the truth powerful. It is powerful.

- The key phrase is found at the beginning of verse 28: "The earth produces *by itself...*" The text literally reads: "Automatically (the Greek word *automate* is fronted for emphasis, which means it is positioned first in the sentence), automatically, the earth bears fruit."
- What do we do? Share the message and get out of the way. We sow and sleep. Sure, we may sow dozens of seeds in the heart of the same person, but that's our only responsibility.
- God gives the growth! He makes his life-giving word come alive sovereignly as it collides with a receptive heart, adding to his harvest of people coming into his kingdom.

Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 3:1-6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (1 Corinthians 3:6)

The pressure is off! Just talk about Jesus. Just testify and share your God encounters. Just put the word of God in people's hands, in front of their eyes, in their ears, and watch God work.

When I gave my friend Josh a little booklet that contains the Gospel of John (Hold it up), the next time I saw him, he told me: "I was in tears before I finished the first paragraph. 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:5)."

WOW!

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

T: The message of God's kingdom possesses inherent power, and #4...

4. God's kingdom may seem insignificant, but will grow to reach every nation (4:30-32).

- Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God for the 3rd time in chapter 4 (v. 11, 26, 30).
- Again, he uses a common proverbial symbol, that of a mustard seed, super small and seemingly insignificant. Jesus speaks hyperbolically, exaggerating to make his point.
- The mustard seed (though barely visible in the palm of your hand) is not the smallest seed, but it is the smallest that produces such a large bush growing to a height of 10-12 feet, and this contrast unlocks the meaning of the parable.
- Jesus' new kingdom community may seem small and insignificant, but it will rapidly expand after his death and grow to touch every corner on earth.

Then Jesus adds this line in verse 32: "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."

- Why does Jesus mention birds of air nesting in its shade?
 - This not only gives a sense of scale, completely disproportionate to its tiny beginnings.
 - It also seems to be an intentional allusion to OT texts that speak of the nations being drawn to God's presence and shelter.
 - On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell *every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.*" (Ezekiel 17:23)

- **“All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young, and under its shadow lived all great nations.” (Ezekiel 31:6)**
- Jesus kingdom may begin with an upstart group of men and women, but it will culminate with people from every people group finding salvation through his life, death and resurrection.

This is what Multiply March is all about. This is why we pray, give and go. This is why we love supporting people like Kevin and Bridget, James and Abby and their team in Montreal. This is why we will send out teams from Redemption Hill to start new churches in Boston and all over the world. This is why we will invite our friends to join our Easter services in-person or online.

T: Jesus' kingdom may seem insignificant, but it will be seen in its global glory. The last truth I want you to see from this entire chapter is this...

5. We are God's plan to accomplish his kingdom plan (4:1-34).

Yes, the seed must first fall on our hearts. We first need to experience the life-giving power of God's word as we receive it from Jesus, but to truly receive it from is to be eager to give it away to others.

Jesus told these parables to help his followers understand: this is what my kingdom is like...

- When you share my message, that I am the light of the world, that my light brings life through my death and resurrection, just know that some of the seeds you sow will fall on receptive hearts and others will fall on resistant hearts.
- **BUT DON'T BE DISCOURAGED:** Your job is to sow. My job is to save, so sow the seed and go to sleep. Trust that I am working (4:26-29), and these beginnings that seem insignificant are not insignificant at all. One day, the whole world will hear and respond to this message.

This is how my kingdom will grow, and **YOU ARE MY PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THE PLAN OF THE KINGDOM.**

This may be the most surprising truth of them all!

Jesus is saying... He is inviting each one of us to...

Conclusion:

The Point: Accept and live in the power of God's surprising kingdom.

Don't discount or underestimate your role in helping other people experiencing what I came to freely give!