

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Kingdom of God is like . . .
Pastor Dave Scherrer - November 23, 2014

We are about to study a portion of the gospel account of Mark's rendering of the life of Christ by looking at a passage of teaching by Christ. It is strategically placed in the 4th chapter to engage the reader toward a specific purpose or conclusion. Mark places the teaching here and again in chapter 13 in blocks. Other than these two portions of Mark, his account of Jesus' life really doesn't focus on *what Jesus taught* except to solidify *who He was*. Mark here in Chapter 4 brings us face to face to a confrontation with the Kingdom of God and its King.

Let's back up just a bit and set up the circumstances of the book as we have come to know it so far. The setting of the teaching

- Chapter 1 John the Baptist pronounces the authority of King Jesus from the Scriptures and Jesus hears the voice of God telling Him He is His beloved Son. And we read that the Kingdom of God is open for business. That is authority!
- Chapter 2 Jesus the King heals the paralytic of his sins and his disease and becomes the friend of sinners and the enemy of the religious law-keepers. More authority yet.
- Chapter 3 The King has shown His authority by declaring that the Sabbath is defined by the creator of the Sabbath not the other way around. And we read ⁶ *then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.*

The resistance to his rule and reign are starting to gather and to plot the King's death.

Mark 4:1-9

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." ⁹ And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Let's stop here for now:

Parables come from two Greek words *para* meaning *beside* and *ballo* meaning *to cast or throw*. A "parable" is an illustrative story, by which *a familiar idea is cast beside an unfamiliar idea* in such a way that the comparison helps people to better understand and grasp the unfamiliar idea. Parables are not used at all to hide but more as word pictures to bring meaning to difficult concepts or unfamiliar ideas.

So what could this parable be about?

- It could be a parable about hearing – "He who has ears to hear let him hear."
- It could be a parable about hard hearts as we will discover as we keep reading.
- It could be a parable about the lost finding God, and about their rewards in heaven.

We know that all of these things are important to Jesus. We read in Matthew 7:14, "The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Which is why Jesus said, in Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." This parable seems to prove this out. Three quarters of those who hear the word do not receive and so miss the rewards of the Kingdom. Apparently when the Word is preached and the way to life is shown, we have to strive to enter.

The parable has a couple of names, the "parable of the soils" is the most famous one but it is also known as "the parable of the sower." I think the best rendering is this second one – "the parable of the sower." This is a story about a King who has come to sow and cause growth and to then harvest and culminate

His work. I believe that this story was told by Mark right here in his account to draw attention to the King and His eternal Kingdom of God. Kingdom is a big deal to Jesus.

"Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1)
"Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." (Luke 17)
"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6)

You often hear Jesus use the words 'the Kingdom of God is like . . .' as an introduction to a certain set of parables:

The Kingdom of God is like . . .

This is difficult subject material. It is the deep stuff of eternity. Trying to understand the Kingdom of God is like a physicist trying to explain the string theory of elementary particles to a child. In fact, most of us are lost in trying to understand string theory, this advanced science and math attempt to understand a microscopic theory of gravity. Wikipedia tells us that string theory *"attempts to provide a complete, unified, and consistent description of the fundamental structure of our universe."* It is sometimes called the 'Theory of Everything'. That just might be hard to understand.

This is the same dilemma for Christ. As the King of an eternal Kingdom that has truths and values and realities that we cannot even guess at, Jesus' challenge is to make that known to humankind. This is not easy. When John experiences his revelation and tries to describe what he sees and hears, he uses 1st century human terms to try and explain the eternal Kingdom and my guess is it lacks something in capturing the grandeur and majesty of what he actually saw in the heavenlies. So rather than confuse us with the infinite details of infinity that finite minds cannot fathom, he tells us stories . . . word pictures that capture our imagination and our passions. He tells us what theologians call "Kingdom Parables."

Faithful and Unfaithful Servants in Matthew 20
Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20
Stewards and Talents in Matthew 25
Lost Things (lost coin, lost sheep) in Luke 15
The Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18

What Jesus is trying to tell his followers and listeners is that the Kingdom of God has broken out, has invaded the world so to speak with the advent of Jesus into the world as the Son of God, born to Mary and whose birth we will celebrate in just a couple of weeks. The Kingdom of Light has come into the kingdom of darkness and is beginning to change it one enlightened person at a time. Remember when Jesus said - "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17)? He was talking to the Pharisees in that moment, religious leaders whose hearts were hard. So hard that they could not even see the truth of whom Jesus was. It was as if Satan was plucking away the seed before it could take root in their lives.

With Jesus breaking into the world and the Holy Spirit coming to indwell believers this represented the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end. The King has come. The word of His arrival is being spread to the entire world. The Holy Spirit is causing growth and soon He will return to Harvest all who are His own unto Himself and to Judge the hard hearted who have refused to believe and receive His rule and reign. The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of Christ in it has already started – it is *now*– and it will culminate fully in the future and so it is also *not yet*.

The Rule and Reign of Christ – 'Now and Not Yet'

This time we are in is the NOW. We are waiting for the NOT YET.

It was George Eldon Ladd that coined this term that love and light had entered our world of apathy and darkness and someday all will recognize His authority. He wrote;

“Love is that gift of the spirit, above all others, which will characterize our perfected fellowship in the age to come. This love we now enjoy, and the church on earth will be a colony of heaven, enjoying in advance the life of the age to come.” *The Kingdom of God*, George Eldon Ladd

You may be asking, “What does Jesus refer to when he says, “This gospel of the kingdom”? The term “gospel of the kingdom” is used only two other times in the New Testament, namely, in two summary statements of Matthew about the ministry of Jesus:

1. And he went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people (Matthew 4:23).
2. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM, and healing every disease and every infirmity (Matthew 9:35).

The term “gospel of the kingdom” is a summary phrase of what Jesus preached as he did his ministry throughout the towns and villages of Palestine.

The reason this is important is plain from Matthew 24:14. Jesus said, ***“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”***

The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that in Jesus, God's kingly power and authority is breaking into the world like never before: he is ruling in a new way to save his people from their sins and deliver them from their enemies and reveal his glory and establish peace and righteousness in the earth. This “gospel of the kingdom” will be preached until all the nations of the world have heard it as a testimony. This means that until all the unreached nations (= peoples, not countries) have a bona fide testimony called “the gospel of the kingdom,” it is the duty of every generation of Christians to press on with proclaiming it to the world. That means us, because there are still today thousands of unreached nations or peoples. Paul said it well when he wrote in his letter to the Romans;

Romans 14:17

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

If we read on in our text we will see a prediction of what will happen when we sow the seeds of light and life into the a world of darkness and lies;

Mark 4:14-20

¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

I don't want to take away from the soils part of this passage. This passage is famously used to teach about evangelism and doing the work of an evangelist;

Doing the work of an evangelist:

- Scaring away birds,
- Clearing rocks,
- Putting up shade,
- Yanking up thorns.

But one of the reasons that I think this parable is more about the sower not the soil is based on what we know of first century farming. They often didn't plow until after the sowing of the seeds. The seeds were sown and then they plowed the seeds under in swaths of land, leaving paths between the plowed portions so that they could come and pull the weeds and tares from the crop without destroying the crop by walking through it. When Jesus told this parable everyone understood. Just like in that day we don't know what kind of soil it is till we cast the seeds.

We don't know what kind of soil it is till we cast the seeds!

So once again this is a story is about a sower who loves everyone and His seeds are not reserved for only the good person. Hoping against hope that the hard hearted will repent, Jesus came to sick not the healthy. He called Levi the tax gatherer to be a follower, not because he was good, but because he was good hearted!

What Jesus meant when he said, "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom is at hand" is that God is about to exert his rule or his kingly authority in a new way to save his people and defeat their enemies and reveal his glory in the world. That is our reality too. Paul talks of this battle between two kingdoms, the kingdoms of truth and lie, of light and darkness;

You believer were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them (Galatians 5:9-11). In doing this we endure and we participate in God's harvest, maybe 30 or 60 or even 100 fold.

Seeds in Good Soil – 30, 60, even 100 Fold!

Nine years ago, early in my ministry here, I made mention often of my desire that we be a 100 fold church. This was not arrogance that we were somehow better than other churches. No, in fact this was a declaration of a desperate dependence upon God and a deep desire to know the fullness of Christ and to participate in the greatest degree of blessing possible by our prayerful obedience to His will and way, his rule and reign.

This gospel of the kingdom is the good news that, at the coming of Jesus, God moved into this world in an unprecedented way. Since Jesus has come, God is exerting his right to rule in new and powerful ways. He is attacking his enemy the devil in new ways. He has dealt with sin in a new way. He is gathering a people in a new way. He is empowering his representatives in new ways. And in all this he is reigning as king. This is the coming and the advancement of his kingdom. And this is good news. It is the gospel of the kingdom.

So what does this mean to us? It means hope and purpose and thanksgiving. We have the grand purpose of sowing the seeds of the fruit of the Spirit – seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Therefore let every one of us turn from every other claim on our allegiance and surrender to the King of kings. Let's repent of all rebellion and treason, accept the terms of his amnesty, and let's put our trust in the King of glory and we will overflow with joy as we see the harvest 30, 60, even 100 fold!

Discussion Questions

We are headed into the traditional time of thanksgiving. Can you think of any verse that encourages our thanks giving? Here are a few:

- And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17
- Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Psalm 136:1

- Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. Psalm 100:4
- With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: "He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. Ezra 3:11
- Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:11

What are you thankful for?

The passage Dave taught from this week was from Mark 4. Read the first 9 verses and see if you agree with him that it is about a sower. Maybe you think soils or the seeds or the harvest is more important? What are your thoughts? Is there anything in this passage that makes you go 'hmmmm?'

What do you think of when you hear Dave speak of the Kingdom of God? Is that phrase a regular part of your upbringing in Christ? There are over 60 verses that speak to God as King and refer to His Kingdom. Here are some:

- "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." Matthew 24:14
- Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him. Luke 8:1
- For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! Acts 28:30-30
- From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4:17
- "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 10:7

What kind of heart (soil) do you think you have a tendency toward?

- The kind of heart where Satan can steal away your joy and peace and hope?
- The kind of heart that has doubts and perhaps starts well in faith but then kind of struggles because of lack of spiritual depth and rootedness?
- The kind of heart that is distracted by things of the world and maybe the desire for security here and now?
- The kind of heart that is usually 'good soil' and ready to hear the word of the Lord and to apply it to your life?

What kind of blessing would you like to participate in? How will you know if it is a 30 or 60 or 100 fold blessing?

The Bible says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Is this the 100 fold fruit harvest blessing?