

Sermon Guide

Speaker : Pastor Robert Greene

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Sermon Series: The Drama of Redemption

Jesus Explains the Kingdom with Parables

Mark 4:1-34

Matthew 13:10-17 “Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.” But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

“Thereby the things of God were made more plain and easy to those willing to be taught, and at the same time more difficult and obscure to those who were willingly ignorant.” – Matthew Henry

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Mark 4:30 “30 And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?”

The Kingdom of God that Jesus was beginning to reveal in His ministry on earth bared no resemblance to the conception that the Israelites of the day had in mind. Their expectations involved a king and a kingdom that would come in great power overthrowing the Roman Empire by force and setting the people free from the reign of Caesar. Yet, the Romans continued to roam the streets, John the Baptist was imprisoned and Jesus was opposed by the Jewish leadership. The question, despite all His miracles, that had to nag in the minds of the Jews was “how could this be the promised Messiah”. This Savior did not meet any of the expectations the Israelites held about freedom on earth; why wasn’t this king and His kingdom *Bigger?* And therein lay the rub, for Jesus did not come to meet the Israelites expectations of freedom, but rather to define what real freedom was, which is completely antipodal to human notions. He came to establish a kingdom whose citizens were truly liberated from the bondage of sin and the wrath of God.

“The nature of the kingdom is so unexpected, so paradoxical, so opposed to human reason that it takes divine revelation for people to be able to grasp it.” - R.T. France

Mark 4:31-32 “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.”

The kingdom of God is in similitude to what happens to the mustard seed. What initially appears insignificant, given its diminutive size, grows beyond expectation and becomes a tree so massive that birds perch on it and nest in its shade. Analogously, the kingdom arrived on earth, in the form of the God-

man Jesus, in a small and inconsequential fashion, in the backwater town of Capernaum (Nazareth). However, the day will come when this kingdom's glory will be seen and recognized (by all) that it surpasses even the mightiest kingdoms on the earth. The advancement of this kingdom was not (and has not) been according to the prototypical rise and domination of powerful human kingdoms such as the Roman Empire. The kingdom of God does not use physical force and subjugation to add otherwise unwilling adherents but rather creates voluntary disciples who genuinely desire to serve the King and His kingdom because of the inward transformation He initiates. This kingdom functions as a seed in that it reorients the hearts and desires for those in whom it is implanted. Unlike human kingdoms, who function in likeness to large stones that when cast upon anything smaller, can only crush from the outside bringing compliance through destruction, God's kingdom works from the inside out bringing devotion through internal change by grace.

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Mark 3:4 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow."

Mark 4:10 "The sower sows the word."

The message of the gospel, granting entrance to the Kingdom of God for those who hear, repent and believe, being preached by Jesus at that time (and ultimately by apostles/teachers of that day or pastors/teachers of the present age), are here represented by a sower sowing seed to soil. The parable represents the same sower, casting forth the same seed (the Word of God), to different types of soil which represent the hearts of men.

The Hard Heart

Mark 4:4 "And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it."

Mark 4:15 "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."

"The word of the gospel lies upon the surface of such a heart, but never enters it. Like the snow, which sometimes falls upon our streets, drops upon the wet pavement, melts, and is gone at once, so is it with this man. The word has not time to quicken in his soul: it lies there an instant, but it never strikes root, or takes the slightest effect." – C.H. Spurgeon

It is possible to have come into contact or have regular contact with the Word of God and have had no root take hold. This group of people may come to church frequently, read their Bible or other good Christian books and yet walk away unchanged and unconcerned with the things of God. It remains little more than an entertaining notion to consider for a moment until the next idea comes along to capture their attention. Jesus, and His glorious message of free entrance for men into His Kingdom, has taken no root in their heart so that they treasure Him and His truths.

Application

"they come hither that they may flatter themselves with the notion that they are religious. Oh! My hearers, your case is one that might make an angel weep! How sad to have the sun of the gospel shining on your faces, and yet to have blind eyes that never see the light. The music of heaven is lost upon you, for you have no ears to hear. You can catch the turn of a phrase, you can appreciate the poetry of an illustration, but the hidden meaning, the divine life you do not perceive. You sit at the marriage-feast, but you eat not of the dainties; the bells of heaven ring with joy over ransomed spirits, but you live unransomed, without God, and without Christ. Though we plead with you, and pray for you, and weep over you, you still remain

as hardened, as careless, and as thoughtless as ever you were. May God have mercy on you, and break up your hard hearts, that his word may abide in you.” – C.H. Spurgeon

Application Questions

Has the Word of God taken root in you?

Has the message that Jesus came to ransom sinners so that they might be reconciled to God moved beyond theory for you?

The Shallow Heart

Mark 4:5 “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.”

Mark 4:16-17 “And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 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.”

This group of people receive the Word of God with joy and immediately spring up. They are excited about and even zealous for Christ having moved beyond an academic consideration of Him. Perhaps a proclamation could be heard from this class that “Christ has changed my life!” Yet, their faith is wholly without depth and largely contingent on perpetually happy circumstances. They are likened to shallow ground for the roots of their *faith* are not deep enough to take the heat of a scorching sun, a strong wind, a cold frost or a heavy rain. The moment that trouble and suffering come upon them the very weak faith they had immediately dies away and they will question the value of the Jesus that they earlier claimed changed their life. Their primary belief about themselves in relation to God is that they are a sufferer in need of an earthly solution instead of a sinner in need of a heavenly savior.

“they thought they were entering Christ’s kingdom, but really what was happening was they were trying to get Christ to enter their kingdom, and they were trying to get Christ really to fulfill their agenda. They wanted a blesser, not a Savior. They wanted a sugar daddy, not a King. They wanted help and relief, not salvation. They saw Jesus Christ as a service provider. As long as they had services provided, they had joy. As soon as he no longer was helping them meet their goals, they had it with him, which showed the things they really worshiped were the things they had lost in the heat.” – Tim Keller

Application

"Here lies a shoot which never became an ear, a man in whom grace struggled but never reigned, who gave some hopeful spasms of life and then subsided into eternal death"? God save you! Oh! May the Spirit deal with you effectually, and may you, even you, yet bring forth fruit unto God, that Jesus may have a reward for his sufferings.” – C.H. Spurgeon

The Divided Heart

Mark 4:6 “And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.”

Mark 4:18-19 “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 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.”

This group of people would seem to have depth and a real faith. They have heard the word of truth and allowed the roots, from all appearances, to take hold. Yet, they fail to bear much fruit for the seed was sown among thorns. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches are too alluring and consuming so their spiritual life is choked. This group produces little, if any, of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23 "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...") that a life that has been captured by Christ will produce abundantly. Time will tell if their end will be that of Demas: 2 Timothy 4:10 "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.."

Application Questions

Do you see change (sanctification) and fruitfulness in your life? How are you defining fruitfulness?

Are you consumed with the things (money, things, social status, the latest ideological fad, etc.) of this world rather than God?

Are your priorities centered around yourself and your agenda or Christ's agenda?

Are others impacted and changed, in Godly ways, by their interaction with you?

The Fruitful Heart

Mark 4:8 "And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

Mark 4:20 "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."

Here is the group of people who produce fruit. The text does not suggest that this ground is without any stones or thorns but simply that it was good and so brought forth fruit. God's word doesn't take up residence in hearts that were good apart from Him nor will hearts be sinlessly perfected in this life and then begin to produce good fruit. What is assured is that fruit will be born, by some clear measure, when Christ takes hold of a heart by grace. Moreover, there is no requirement to produce equal harvests of fruit, for some will yield thirtyfold and another hundredfold. The only constant among this class is that they will produce measurable fruitfulness. God ensures these hearts are faithful and He gives the return.

Application

"The ground is described as "good": not that it was good by nature, but it had been made good by grace. God had ploughed it; he had stirred it up with the plough of conviction, and there it lay in ridge and furrow as it should lie. When the gospel was preached, the heart received it, for the man said, "That is just the blessing I want. Mercy is what a needy sinner requires." So that the preaching of the gospel was THE thing to give comfort to this disturbed and ploughed soil. Down fell the seed to take good root. In some cases it produced fervency of love, largeness of heart, devotedness of purpose of a noble kind, like seed which produces a hundredfold. The man became a mighty servant for God, he spent himself and was spent. He took his place in the vanguard of Christ's army, stood in the hottest of the battle, and did deeds of daring which few could accomplish—the seed produced a hundredfold. It fell into another heart of like character;—the man could not do the most, but still he did much. He gave himself to God, and in his business he had a word to say for his Lord; in his daily walk he quietly adorned the doctrine of God his Saviour,—he brought forth sixty-fold. Then it fell on another, whose abilities and talents were but small; he could not be a star, but he would be a glow-worm; he could not do as the greatest, but he was content to do something, however humble. The seed had brought forth in him tenfold, perhaps twentyfold. How many are there of this sort here? Is there one who prays within himself, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? The seed has fallen in the right spot. Soul, thy prayer shall be heard. God never sets a man longing for mercy without intending to give it." C.H. Spurgeon

Application Questions

What kind of heart do you believe you have (hard, shallow, divided or fruitful)?

Did you make a decision or pray a prayer years ago that has no real meaning in your life today?
Since then there has been no evidence, beyond the religious motions of a new heart within you?

Has your heart been divided; consumed with the cares and pursuits and possessions of this world
such that you have resisted submitting to the rule and reign of God in Christ?

Is your heart receiving the Word, understanding it, and are you bearing fruit for the kingdom of
Christ?

Are you rejecting the message of the kingdom or has your heart been changed by the Word of God's
grace?

Sermon Link : [Jesus Explains the Kingdom with Parables](#)

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