

Word and Kingdom

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Date: 14 March 2012

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 4 beginning in verse 21. And He said to them, Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed and not on a stand?

! For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest, nor is anything secret except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. And He said to them, Pay attention to what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

And He said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how.

The earth produces by itself first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once He puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.

[0 : 59] And He said, With what can you compare the kingdom of God, or what parables shall we use for it? 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. With many such parables, He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.

He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to His own disciples He explained everything. Father, by Your Spirit, take Your word this morning.

Apply it to our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Y'all can be seated. You guys realize that it's really easy to counterfeit just about anything in today's world?

I mean, you can fake just about anything so that if you find any high-end item, whether it's a purse or a pair of shoes or an iPhone or an iPad or anything, any kind of high-end item, if you go to the right places or you go to the right websites, you can find counterfeits.

[2 : 07] You can find fake versions of it. There are millions of dollars, probably billions of dollars, worth of counterfeit money that circulates in our economic system. It's easy to fake things.

It doesn't take much difficulty at all. In fact, one of the things that sometimes I do with my boys as we're watching, particularly like an action movie or something, is they will try to guess which parts are real people and which parts were made by a computer.

Because they know if it looks impossible, if a guy just can't jump that high or just can't do those kinds of things, that must have been made on a computer. That's not real. They didn't really do that.

I mean, we live in a world that sometimes it's very difficult to discern the real from the fake. And that's true in regards to faith in Christ as well.

We looked last week at the first 20 verses in Mark chapter 4, and we saw Jesus describe how His Word, which He uses the metaphor of seed, how His Word, how it affects different people.

[3 : 11] And He describes three different ways in which people who don't believe the Gospel, who don't believe the Word, He describes three different ways in which they respond. Some just outright reject it, and that's pretty simple to understand.

You tell them the truth, you tell them what the Bible says, and they just say, I don't believe that. But then He describes two groups of people who at least initially when they hear the Gospel, when they hear the good news about Jesus, initially they appear to believe it.

They appear to agree with it and receive it. In fact, He says that some of them receive it with joy.

But then as life comes at them, sometimes He says it's just sheer temptation.

It's love for the things of the world, love for nice things, love for money, love for anything in the world. He says just leaves no room for genuine love for Christ.

In fact, Jesus tells you, you can't love money and God. You can't be devoted to both of them. It just is not possible. You can be wealthy and trust in Christ, but you can't love your wealth and trust in Christ.

[4 : 21] And Jesus says, for some people who appear to believe in the Gospel, He says that love for other things comes in and leaves no more room for the Gospel.

And in the end, you see that their faith was not real. It was not genuine. And then He says, for other people who appear to believe, who receive the truth and agree with the truth initially, when trouble comes, when persecution comes, when life gets difficult, they abandoned the Gospel in which they appeared to believe.

So that what we see all around us today in church after church, all across America, and there's not a church that's immune from. There's not a small church. There's not a big church. There's not a church anywhere that's immune from the reality of false believers.

People who appear initially to believe in Christ, but in the end, they don't. In fact, one of the scariest verses, I think, in all of the New Testament is found in 1 Corinthians where Paul commands the Corinthians.

He says, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. The prospect of not being in the faith when you think that you are, of being the kind of person who initially receives the good news with joy, but then turns out to not be real.

[5 : 38] The prospect of that being me, that being you, that's a scary, frightening thing. And so, when you come to a passage like we looked at last week, you begin to ask the question, well, how can I know?

How do I know that I'm not one of them? Because surely, there are people who fool even themselves into thinking that they're real, that they really believe, and then they don't. In the end, they turn away. How do I know that I'm real?

How do I know that my faith is real and genuine? And Jesus gives a simple answer. The good soil, the hearts in which the Word of God takes root, the good soil produces fruit, He says.

In fact, I want you to look there in chapter 4, where He's explaining the parable that He's given above. He says, verse 20, those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the Word, because they hear the Word, and they accept it, and here's the key difference between them and the others.

They bear fruit. That's the key difference. And He says that they bear fruit, some 30-fold, some 60-fold, some of them 100-fold.

[6 : 48] And I think the point of that is to say that not every believer produces the same amount of spiritual fruit in their lives. Now, He doesn't say, if you notice, He doesn't say, well, you're going to have some Christians who are just fruitful and who do great things for Christ, and then there are going to be other Christians that if you look really, really hard, you can find a little bit of fruit there.

He doesn't say that. He says, some produce 30-fold, some 60, some 100. 30-fold's a lot. If you were a farmer and you had a crop that yielded 30-fold, that's pretty good.

We'd all say, that's a lot of fruit. So Jesus is not saying, well, there are some followers of Christ who don't produce hardly any fruit, but if you look hard enough, you can find some fruit there in their lives, and there's others who produce a lot.

He's saying, no, believers in Christ, they all have fruit. They all grow spiritually. They all mature. The change happens inside of them as the Holy Spirit works upon them.

But in some people, that change is astronomical. In others, it's still amazing. It's still impressive, but it's not as big as this person over here. But the key thing to recognize is that despite that there are different levels of spiritual growth in people's lives, in all those who are genuine followers of Christ, there is growth.

[8 : 07] There is fruit that is produced. And so the question that we have to ask, I think, coming out of that passage is, well, what does He mean by fruit?

What kind of fruit does Jesus have in mind? What gets produced in the life of a person who has been genuinely impacted by the gospel?

What is produced in the life of a person in whom the Holy Spirit actually lives and dwells and works?

What does He mean when He says produce fruit? Well, I said last week that I think that the primary fruit that Jesus has in mind and that we see throughout the New Testament is the fruit of love.

So that when you read, when Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit, the first that he lists is love. And it almost stands like a heading over the rest of the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, and so on. Love is at the beginning. It's first and foremost. The Apostle Paul also says that the only thing that counts is faith that works through love.

[9 : 16] Genuine faith produces love and works through love. Jesus says, if you love me, you will obey my commandments. Love. Jesus tells us that the greatest, the most important commandment is to love God.

And the second He says is like it, to love your neighbor. So if you want to look at your life and say, am I producing the kind of fruit that confirms that I'm a genuine follower of Christ?

You just say, do I love God? Do I love Jesus? And do I love other people? That's the kind of fruit that I think Jesus has in mind.

And, now that we're moving forward in Mark chapter 4, we can add another layer to that. And we can say that not only is love the kind, the primary fruit that's produced in the life of a believer, but that love is demonstrated mainly by the fact that we go and tell the gospel to other people.

telling other people the gospel or trying to bring people to a point where they can hear the gospel. Maybe you're inviting them to church. Maybe you're giving them a book that's full of the gospel.

[10 : 30] But getting the gospel to people demonstrates that you love the God of the gospel because you want more people to come to Him. You want more people to worship Him.

Getting the gospel to people demonstrates that you love those people because you want them rescued. You don't want them to spend eternity in hell. You want them to trust in Jesus and their sins to be covered by His blood.

And so you demonstrate your love for them by telling them the gospel, the good news of Jesus.

That's what this passage that we're looking at this morning is about.

It breaks down pretty easily. You have a parable at the beginning which is basically a command to go out and share the gospel and then you get a warning about not sharing the gospel and then you get two more parables.

And those other two parables give you motivation to share the gospel. So it doesn't do a lot of good for me to say, hey guys, go out and tell people about Jesus. And Jesus doesn't just do that.

[11 : 31] He says go out and tell people the good news but then He gives us reason. He gives us motives. So here's what we're going to do in our time this morning. We're going to look at the command which is in verses 21, 22, and 23 and then we're going to move to these two parables that are going to motivate us to get out there and share the gospel and then at the end we'll come back up to verses 24 through 25 and we'll get the warning.

Alright? So that if the motivators that Jesus gives in the parables aren't enough maybe the warning will do it. Alright? So let's just take a look at the first parable which is, as I said, it's essentially a command for us to bear fruit by telling people the gospel.

Verse 21 He said to them Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed and not on a stand? For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest nor is anything secret except to come to life.

If anyone has ears to hear He says let him hear. So now He's switching up His metaphor. In the parable that He tells in the first 20 verses of this chapter the metaphor is seed and He's going to come back to that.

There the Word of God the Gospel of Christ is a seed that you scatter. You throw it out there. That's what the Word is. Here He's switching it up. Now He says the Word is like a lamp.

[12 : 54] It gives light. And that's a common metaphor throughout the Scriptures for the Word of God. It's very common. And so Jesus here says it's like a lamp that gives light and exposes things.

The kind of lamp that Jesus is talking about is the kind of typical lamp that you would have found in somebody's home in the first century in Palestine. And in most of those homes most of them were one room homes with a flat roof and so in that one room somewhere when the sun went down you'd want to light at least a lamp or two to give light.

And so in some of them if you had a wall made out of stone sometimes they would just sort of cut into the stone a place to set a lamp on. And you light the lamp and you put it on the wall and it lights up the house.

In others there would be a large beam in the middle of the room and they'd just add a little shelf to the beam put the lamp on it right in the middle of the room gives light to everybody. And Jesus says

the gospel is like the good news is like that.

It's like a lamp and it gives light and it helps people to see things the way that they are. And nobody lights one of those lamps and then sticks it under a basket.

[14:01] It kind of defeats the purpose. Nobody slides it under their bed. I mean you're going to cause a fire for one thing but you won't be able to see the light at all. The whole point of lighting a lamp is to give light to people.

So if you have the light Jesus says if you know the truth which he describes here as that which is hidden and has been made known that which is secret and has come to light that's the good news. He says if you have that you don't hide it. You share it. You expose the darkness with it. So the primary fruit that he describes in verse 20 we find out in verses 21 through 23 is to shine the light of the gospel.

That's what Christians do. We shine the light of the gospel. But that's sometimes a frightening thing to do. I mean I don't know about you but I don't consider myself to be a very gifted evangelist. I'm fine to stand up here and open the Bible and teach it to you and preach it to you but I'm really I've never stood on a street corner and just kind of yelled at passerbys believe in Jesus and I've never I don't consider myself to be like this amazing evangelist and I know very few people who are who are just naturally sort of or supernaturally gifted at sharing the gospel with people.

[15:27] There are people like that. I've known a few who they can just turn any conversation into an opportunity to share the gospel. So I do have certain friends of mine that I know if I go eat lunch with them they're going to share the gospel with our waiter or waitress.

It's going to happen. And after I eat lunch with them I think man I wish I were that good. I wish I could turn any conversation to the gospel. But it's scary sometimes. It's frightening.

There's probably nothing more frightening than sharing the gospel with your brother or your dad or your son who hasn't believed in the gospel or your best friend that you've known forever and yet you've just never found a way to share and now you're faced with this reality but that's what I'm supposed to do.

That's scary. I know that if I preach a sermon and I say to you you need to go out and share the gospel with your friends and your family members who don't believe I know that there's a knot that builds up in most of us and we think I don't know if I can do that.

I'm supposed He said I mean Jesus said and Chris said we're supposed to do that. I know but there is if we're honest there is a knot that builds up in us and we're afraid of the next time we see that person that God has laid on our hearts.

[16:38] I know I'm not the only one who thinks that way and feels that way and so I I need desperately I need Jesus to come and encourage me.

I need Him to motivate me. I need Him to take the fear away for me and that's exactly what He does in these next two parables that He tells. I want you to look at the first parable in verses 26 through 29.

He's going back to the seed metaphor so now okay now He's going to use seed to refer to the gospel again. The word is the seed again alright. So He says in verse 26 the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

Spread the word. He sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows He knows not how. The earth produces by itself first the blade then the ear then the full grain in the ear but when the grain is ripe at once He puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.

In other words the guy who scatters the seed He doesn't make the plant grow. Now I realize that today we may have a certain degree and level of scientific understanding that the people living in Jesus' time did not have so that we can find a professor at A&M; I'm sure who can explain to us exactly how these processes take place and the energy is converted and the seed produces a sprout.

[18:03] I realize that but I don't know what it is and I doubt that any of you can really describe that process completely and nobody in Jesus' day could have described it in those kinds of terms because the reality is we don't really have anything to do with it.

We don't really know why a seed produces a little sprout and why that grows into a plant and produces fruit eventually. We don't cause that. We don't do that.

And Jesus says that's how it works with the gospel. You just spread the seed. You just tell the people that I told you to tell and that's it. You don't have to ensure that it produces anything.

You're not responsible in other words for making the soil of their hearts the good soil that he describes earlier in this chapter. You're not responsible to take rocky ground in someone's heart and till it up until it becomes nice soft ground ready to receive the word.

That's not your job he says. That's the sovereign work of God in the heart of someone. God causes plants to grow. God takes a seed and transforms it into a plant.

[19 : 12] He does that work. He does the same thing with his word. The spirit comes and the spirit takes the word and the spirit works the word into a heart and he transforms a hardened dead heart into a living heart ready to receive the gospel and he sovereignly makes them to come alive and they believe and then a plant grows and we don't do any of that at all.

It's the same way that Jesus described being born again to Nicodemus. You guys familiar with the passage where Jesus speaks to Nicodemus and he tells Nicodemus the famous words that we like to quote you must be born again he says to Nicodemus.

But when you continue to read in the passage one of the things that you realize pretty quickly is we can't make ourselves be born again and we can't make anyone else be born again. Jesus says that the new birth is the work of the spirit in the new birth is like the wind.

We can't see the wind. We don't know where it's coming from. We don't know where it's going. We just see the effects of the wind blowing on things and that's how the spirit works. We see the effects of the work of the spirit as he uses the word because people believe.

Because they come to life. 1 John chapter 5 verse 1 says that you believe because you have been born again. The spirit comes and he gives life and he causes people to believe and follow after Christ and love the gospel.

[20 : 39] We don't do that. Which means the burden for saving people doesn't rest on you. You don't have to save your dad. You don't have to save your brother or your best friend.

You don't have to do that. And if they reject the gospel that's not your fault. That's not your doing. You're not responsible for how they respond to the gospel. You're responsible.

Just scatter seed. That's not hard. That's not difficult. God is sovereign. And he will come and he will use his word and he will prepare hearts and he will cause growth.

All we have to do is faithfully scatter the seed. And so if you're afraid of rejection and if you're afraid that those whom you love may not believe because you're not you're not adequately equipped to share or you feel like you can't answer all their objections and you can't answer all of their questions, don't worry about that.

You don't have to answer all their questions. You don't have to answer all their objections. You have to tell them the truth. You have to spread the seed of the word. This word that we that we carry around and that we sit on bookshelves and that we have in electronic forms on our phones and computers this word it is it's not ink and paper.

[22 : 09] This word is power. And all you have to do is make it known. That's it. You need not fear that you will fail because you cannot fail if all you have to do is make this known.

In fact you may be so terrible at evangelism that you have to carry a Bible in your pocket and bookmark it and open it and read it and that's okay because that word that you read awkwardly and with stuttering that word comes with power.

It's not in you. It's not supposed to be in you. If people were converted by the power of our persuasive abilities we would get honor and glory from that.

It would belong to us. Joe believed because I was convincing because I argued well because I was persuasive in the way that I told him the gospel.

That's why he believed so then I get the glory. But God says I don't share my glory with anyone. He does the work. We just scatter seed.

[23 : 22] Don't be afraid to share the gospel. Don't fear. It's his work and not yours. That's reason number one. That's motive number one. Motive number two is closely closely tied to that.

And we find it beginning in verse 30. He tells another parable. With what can we compare the kingdom of God? Or what parable shall we use for it? He says it's 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.

So the kingdom of God is like this tiny seed and this seed will by God's power inevitably it will grow into a very large plant a very large bush so large he says that birds will come and make their nest in

it and you don't make that happen.

In fact in the Old Testament in Ezekiel you can check this for yourself later in Ezekiel chapter 17 the prophet Ezekiel uses this exact same imagery of Israel of God's people being like a tree like a plant with large branches and all the birds which there represent all the nations of the world they come and they nest in its branches.

You see it has always been God's plan to grow a people for himself that is composed of people from every nation every ethnic group every language group that's always been God's plan.

[25 : 10] God has determined from eternity past that he that he will glorify his own name he will exalt himself by creating a people who love him and who worship him by creating those people from out of the midst of every other group of people in the world so that when you come to the end of it all and you read the book of Revelation you find that there are people surrounding the throne of God from every tribe tongue people and nation from every one of them all singing praises to the Lamb of God this has been God's plan from the very beginning have you ever wondered just you ever thought to yourself God why why did you make humanity so diverse why I mean why did you make us this way why are there people with dark skin and light skin and in the middle skin and why are there people with this kind of hair and that kind of hair and these features why are there people why all this diversity you ever wonder what Adam looked like

I have no idea what Adam looked like I'm pretty sure he didn't look anything like me I'm fairly certain of that we have no idea but when you read through the scriptures you find that these things don't happen by accident take languages for instance languages originated at the tower of Babel when God judged the people and he spread them out and made them speak different languages and you think God why why judge them that way why confuse things now isn't it more difficult now to share the gospel we've got to get the Bible translated into thousands of languages couldn't you have made it easier God if you just let them keep speaking the same language and everybody was just kind of monolithic and everybody kind of looked the same and we wouldn't have these racial barriers that are difficult to cross and ethnic distinctions between us so that we have all these cultural barriers and it's hard sometimes to reach people that are different from you and think God why would you do that and God's answer is because I want people praising me in every conceivable language I want people who look this way and people who look that way and people who look like that guy

I want all those different kinds of people to praise me and here's the thing I'm going to make it happen he says I'm going to make it happen it's going to happen he tells Abraham that in you that is through your seed through your descendant Abraham all the nations will be blessed I'm making this happen and Jesus comes along and he says I'm bringing in the kingdom of God and it will be made from people from every nation the birds the nations will rest in the branches of the kingdom people will come from far and wide and every kind of person will become a part of the kingdom of God and you can't stop that Jesus says I will build my church a church composed of every tribe tongue people and nation he says I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it so that we are encouraged and motivated to share the gospel first because it's the work of God and not ours and we don't have to be afraid and then secondly because this great work of God is global and we get to be a part of it if we just scatter seed everybody wants to be a part of something bigger than themselves why do people root for sports teams why do people have favorite basketball teams and football teams why do people do that does it really make any difference in anybody's life does it really matter whether you're an Astros fan or Rangers fan or Texans fan or Cowboys fan

I know you think it does I get it and some of you are passionate about it and I'm treading on thin ice here but ultimately does it matter really no so then why are we all compelled to pick a team why are we all compelled to buy their very overpriced jerseys and wear them around and look ridiculous and shirts that come down to our knees why do we do that because there is wired into human beings a desire to be a part of something that's bigger than us most of us live in small little worlds we do honestly I'm a little bit jealous that my wife has more than 200 more Facebook friends than I do I can't even accumulate I can't even she had that's that's rough she has about 50% more Facebook friends than I do I can't even attract those distant acquaintances enough of them that I can have a larger circle of pseudo friends you know than my wife no

I live in a pretty small little world and so do you most of us do most of us don't most of us we don't we don't impact things on a big global scale or national scale or even statewide or citywide scale I don't know I don't know the mayor of Humboldt anybody know mayor okay I don't know most of us

we're not big influential people and yet there's burning within us a desire to be part of something bigger than we are and to be connected to a world that's bigger than our world and that desire is there because God designed us that way that's not an accident we are designed to desire something better something bigger and that something bigger and better is the kingdom of God it's global it spans every ethnic group and every language group on the face of the earth and all we have to do is believe it and scatter seed and we get to be a part of something that is infinitely bigger than our little worlds so motive number one

[31 : 13] God's gonna do it not you so don't fear motive number two he's not just going to do that in individuals he's building a kingdom and you can be a part of that worldwide movement of God those are good motives they're good motives and yet sometimes sometimes we forget those things and we don't think about those things and so Jesus is careful to balance positive motive with frightening warnings go back up I want you to look in verses 24 and 25 these verses almost seem out of place when you first read this in fact when I first began to study this passage this week when you read it initially it almost sounds like disconnected things like these parables aren't connected in any way but as you begin to think on it and meditate on it you begin to see the connections but these two verses are the ones that for me at least were most difficult to connect what's going on until the spirit opened my eyes to see it look at what he says he said to them pay attention to what you hear and he says with the measure that you use it will be measured to you and still more will be added to you for to the one who has more will be given and from the one who has not even what he has will be taken away what does that have to do with shining light and scattering seed how is that connected in any way it's connected in the first sentence he says pay attention to what you hear and in the verse before that he says if anyone has ears to hear let him hear and earlier in chapter 4 when he explains his parable to his disciples he says to him who has ears to hear let him hear so this whole idea of hearing the word of God and hearing the messages it's tying all this together it's binding it all together and Jesus is saying to those who profess faith in him pay attention to the word that you are supposed to be sharing with others pay careful attention to it live by it respond to it because it's it's only by paying attention to this word that the fruit that you so desperately need to confirm your faith will be produced he says there will be those who pay attention to it who measure what they use and they'll get more in other words there will be those who pay attention to the word and because they pay attention to the word the spirit is going to work through it and he's going to produce all this fruit in their lives and

God is going to look at that and he's going to give them even more blessings and more fruit not necessarily temporal physical blessings but spiritual blessings more fruit more love he's going to increase your love he's going to increase your ability to share the gospel he's going to give you more but he says be careful be very careful he says because to the one who has more will be given but for the one who has not the one who has no fruit even what he has will be taken away even what he has will be taken away I think that is specifically addressed to the man or the woman whom he describes as the word being choked out by the weeds of temptation and persecution and those for whom the love of the things of the world leave no room for the word I think that this is aimed at those because you can't tell the difference most of the time you can't tell the difference everything looks the same outwardly for those who appear to believe and those who really believe

I mean Judas is sitting here Judas is listening to all these explanations that Jesus is giving to the insiders Judas is there and yet Judas is marked out for destruction!

from the beginning the scriptures tell us Jesus says be careful because if you don't produce this fruit and if you don't shine the light and scatter the seed then even what you have will be taken even that initial feeling of comfort that you had when you thought you received the truth even that will be taken away taken away from you scriptures are filled with these kinds of warnings and you come away from them and you say God why would you give us a warning like that why would you scare us like that are you trying to say that we might lose our salvation I don't think that's what he's trying to say what I think that he's doing is he's giving us a warning to say be careful this is what I'm going to use to motivate you so that he can use that warning to keep us away from those dangers he will preserve our faith and strengthen our faith by warning us about the dangers of not having faith and here he's going to move us and motivate us to produce the fruit that we have to have by warning us against not producing fruit

I want you to share the gospel because you're confident that God is going to use his word to transform hearts and I want you to share the gospel because you want to be a part of the biggest

largest enterprise that has ever existed but if that's not enough I'm willing to say with Jesus be careful don't keep it to yourself because even what you have might be taken away maybe maybe you came this morning and a lot of this stuff that I'm saying doesn't make any sense to you because you've never received the word to scatter the word and so I encourage you don't don't move another inch don't do anything else don't do anything else in life until you've got this settled until the seed of the gospel of the good news of Christ crucified for your sins and raised to give you life has taken root in your heart and begun to grow don't do anything until that is secure let's pray