

Kingdom Growth

Mark 4:26-34

- Let me ask you an honest question this morning: Do you ever feel like Christianity is losing?
- If you listen to the news, you have heard jarring reports about the rise of the “nones”, those who claim no religious affiliation whatsoever, over the last decade.
- You have heard the stats about the decline in church attendance across the country, and you have noticed that people don't seem as interested in Jesus as they used to be.
- In fact, analysts keep saying that if the church doesn't change her message in certain areas, we are going to find ourselves on the “wrong side of history.”
- I was recently asked, regarding outreach, “Does anything work anymore?”

- There is plenty we could say this morning about all we see going on around us.
- We could point to the fact that the denominations losing the most ground are those who are giving up on central tenets of the Bible.
- We could argue that what is dying is cultural Christianity, which is Christian in name only, and that the number people who are genuinely following Christ is greater than it has been.
- Instead of focusing on those things, however, I want us to see an underlying truth about the kingdom.
- As usual, Jesus has some great words for us this morning that help us see what God is up to.

- We are picking back up in Mark this morning, so go ahead and open up to **Mark 4:26-34**.

- We have seen the theme of the “kingdom of God” coming up time and time again in our study, and I hope you are beginning to get a better picture of what that is.
- The kingdom isn't just the church, although the church is a part of the kingdom; the kingdom is God's rule and reign over everything in creation.
- Although God never surrendered his right to be king over everything, sin damaged his kingdom and we have rebelled against his authority.
- With the work of Jesus, God has been reestablishing his rightful rule and reign.
- One day, as we will see, that rule and reign will be completely restored.

- However, as we have said before, Jesus' ministry so far hasn't looked like people thought it would.
- They thought the kingdom of God would be first and foremost a physical kingdom, which God would initiate by a military coup that would throw off the Romans.
- Sure, it would be accompanied by signs like the healings Jesus has been doing, but that was just the opening act. Any day, they expect Jesus to start the insurrection.

- The two parables Jesus gives us this morning give us great insight into how the kingdom of God grows.
- As we look at them, I want you to take this truth away today: *God is at work building his kingdom.*
- As a great pastor from years ago used to say, “Write it down tall, plain, and straight”.
- You may not see it today, you may not understand it, and you may not ever fully appreciate it in this life, but is at work building his kingdom.

- Let's read the passage to see that. Start with me in **verse 26...**
- **Although there are lots of truths we could draw from this passage this morning, I want us to look at three:**

1) God grows his kingdom.

- Scholars debate about whether Jesus is talking about the growth of the kingdom or the salvation of an individual.
- I may be wrong in this, but I would say it is both. This process happens on an individual basis when a person hears the message of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and reign, and eventually, somewhat mysteriously even to them, one day, it clicks, and they come to genuine salvation.
- As that process happens in individual lives, God's kingdom grows more and more as people submit themselves to his rule and reign over them.
- Either way, one point of the parable is clear: God is the one who does the growing, not us.
- The clearest statement of that is in **verse 28** – *"The soil produces crops by itself..."*
- The farmer isn't the one who makes the seed grow; that's up to the seed and the soil!
- If the seed or the soil is bad, you won't get a healthy plant.
- The farmer can work to prepare the soil and make sure he is using good seed, he can water it, but he cannot make it grow.
- What does that mean for us?
- It means that we cannot save anyone, and we cannot grow God's kingdom; that's up to God.
- We are called to represent Christ faithfully to those around us:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20, NASB95)

- Ultimately, the growth in a heart and the growth of the kingdom is up to God!
- Jesus applied this principle to the church, which is only one aspect of God's kingdom:

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (Matthew 16:18, NASB95)
- Jesus called Peter a small rock and then referred to himself as the rock upon which Jesus would build the church.
- Jesus is the one who builds his church.
- We are called to faithfully tell others about Jesus, pray for God to soften their hearts, love them, seek to teach and disciple anyone God brings, and actively join him in what he is doing, but ultimately, salvation and kingdom growth are in the hands of God.
- That ought to bring you some comfort on multiple levels.
- On one hand, that means it isn't your responsibility to save someone, so you don't have to be scared to tell them about Jesus! You faithfully say what God leads you to say, and trust God with the results.
- That also gives us comfort because we can rest in the fact that God knows what he is up to! He knows his plan and how he is working to bring in the fulness of his kingdom in hearts and in the world as a whole.
- **Here's the hard part about that, though. Since God is the one doing it,**

2) We won't always understand.

- That's the part we hate, isn't it?
- When God is working to grow his kingdom, we won't always see it.

- **Verse 27** describes the worst part of farming for most of us.
- The farmer gets up and goes to bed, day in, day out, and lots of days, nothing seems to be happening.
- Somehow, though, unknown to him and most of us, that gradual process causes a blade to poke its little head out of the soil.
- Then, for a while, nothing may seem to happen, until you realize that blade has gotten taller and now, there is a head on it.
- Again, it looks for a while like nothing is going on, until finally one day, that head has a mature grain in it, and its ready for harvest.

- Most of us don't have any clue how that process happens in the natural world. Even those who do still have to admit that at some point, we still don't understand what life really is.
- In a similar way, we won't always understand how God is working.
- You may share the gospel with someone dozens of times and it never sink in, and suddenly one day, the truth pierces their heart and they come to Christ.
- You may pray for God to move in revival and expand his kingdom and draw people to himself, and you may do it day in and day out for years, until one day, he finally breaks through and draws people to himself in greater ways than you have seen before.

- We aren't called to understand it. We are called to prayerfully and obediently honor Christ in everything we do, trusting that all the while God is at work in ways we may not be able to see now.
- It gets difficult, though, some days. We see more people become more vocal about things we know break the heart of God, and yet he doesn't seem to step in.
- The world around us seems to be moving farther and farther from lives that honor the God who made them and gave himself to save them, so is he really working?
- **That's the last truth we want to draw out of this passage:**

3) His kingdom will come.

- Look back at **verse 29-32**.
- On our darkest days, when hope seems lost, we need to look back at these verses and remember: his kingdom will come fully.
- Although we don't always see or understand what he is doing, there will come a day when the harvest will come.
- Using the second picture Jesus gave, we see that although the kingdom starts out tiny, with Jesus and 11 true disciples in one corner of the world, one day that kingdom will reach to every corner of creation.
- The mustard seed, one of the smallest commonly used in Jesus' day, could grow up to 15ft tall¹.
- That is large enough that birds could come and enjoy the shade and sit on its branches.

¹ MacArthur Study Bible on Mark 4:32.

- Jesus uses that picture to remind us that the kingdom of God started out small, primarily with Jesus and eleven faithful disciples.
 - The message has spread throughout the entire world.
 - In fact, The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon Conwell University says that there are an estimated 2,479,563,000 Christians worldwide, and the number of Christians is growing just a little faster than the growth of the world population, so the kingdom is making up ground.²
 - Nations across the globe are seeing people come to Christ, finding shelter in the kingdom of God.
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- One day, Jesus will come back and fully restore his kingdom.
 - In that day, he will set up his kingdom on a fully restored earth in a city called the New Jerusalem.
 - The city will be illuminated by the very glory of God, and the Bible says

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; (Revelation 21:24–26, NASB95)
 - We look forward to that day, but here's the beautiful truth: You don't have to wait until then to be a part of his kingdom.
 - Maybe this morning, it has finally clicked for you. You have been hearing about the work of God, that he made you and loved you and you turned your back on him.
 - Jesus came, not just to do some cool parlor tricks in healing people, but ultimately to die in your place.

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<http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/StatusofGlobalChristianity2017.pdf>. Accessed 17 May 2017.

- He died as your king, the representative of the kingdom taking the place of his people.
 - However, he rose from the dead, proving that as our king, he is victorious over even death itself.
 - Now, he offers you a place in his kingdom, a ransomed life, a new start.
 - It requires that you lay everything down at his feet, die to your old way of living, and surrender to life his way.
 - I have been walking with Christ, as a citizen of his kingdom, for almost 25 years, and I can tell you that the greatest joy, satisfaction, happiness, and purpose in life are found in surrendering to a king who would die for you.
 - Why not do that today?
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- If you are here this morning and you know you are a citizen of the kingdom, what do you need to do?
 - Perhaps you need to go back to the line from the model prayer Jesus gave his disciples:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10, NASB95)
 - Commit in a new way to trust, serve, honor, and seek for his kingdom to expand in your own heart and life and in the lives of those around you.