

## **Remarkable Truths about God's Kingdom**

Mark 4:21-34

In our text for this morning, the Lord Jesus, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, is going to use three parables to teach some remarkable truths about His Kingdom, how it works, and its future expansion upon the earth. We need to keep in mind that even though Christ is the rightful King of the nations, He has not been the embraced King of the nations. Ever since the Fall, the vast majority of humanity has rejected God's rule and has chosen to follow the idols of their own imaginations.

However, about 2,000 years ago, something happened which began to change that scenario. Both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus announced to the people of their day – “Repent from your vain imaginations and turn toward the Kingdom of God, which is near and breaking out.” That makes sense because the King was in their presence. Those who embraced that truth would experience God's blessings and those who continued to reject that truth, would sooner or later experience God's judgments. Either choice man makes, displays that God is in charge. So what do you think, is it better to experience the blessings of God – or His judgments?

In the first parable Jesus uses an ordinary lamp to teach how God's Kingdom blessings are designed to change the world. Let's begin with verse 21, “He said to them [probably a large crowd of people], ‘Do you bring a lamp [into your house or a room] to put it under a bowl or a bed? [of course not] Instead, don't you put it on its stand?’” Everyone knows that a lighted lamp overcomes darkness and enables people to see.

Darkness hides things. Light reveals things.

Jesus is the ultimate lamp of this parable. And He rules over a kingdom of light, that overcomes darkness. When Christians are doing our jobs, we are living and speaking truth – which can enable people to see reality. Jesus continues this thought in verse 22, “For whatever is hidden [by ignorance or lies] is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.”

Let me give you an example of this truth. In the beginning of Christ’s earthly life, His deity was largely cloaked by His humanity. And even when Jesus made His perfect sacrifice for our sins, it looked like a horrible tragedy. But that changed when Christ rose from the dead – never to die again. And now the great redemptive victories Christ achieved by means of His death and resurrection – are to be brought out into the open for all to see.

But friends, this will be a battle. Why? Because fallen people like darkness. Why? Because Satan deludes them with lies. The prince of darkness does not want people to be exposed to the full light of truth. He is fine with half-truths, but he hates the full truth because it cripples his perverted plans. Let me show you the difference between a half-truth and a full truth. Satan is delighted for people to know that sex can be quite enjoyable. What Satan doesn’t want people to know is that the misuse of sex will wreck havoc in our lives. If you think living a morally pure life is difficult, then you need to know that living immorally is far more difficult in the long run. **I Corinthians 6:13** makes this point very simply, “The

body [which includes our emotions] is not meant for sexual immorality.”

Is there anything vague about that statement? This is why

**I Corinthians 6:18** commands us to “Flee from sexual immorality.” But let’s not get bogged down in sexual sin. If we insist on wallowing in any unrepentant, ongoing sin, then according to I Corinthians 6:9-11, we will not enter the Kingdom of God.

This is why Jesus urges His listeners in verse 23, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” People who want truth and embrace truth are the freest people on earth. But there is a warning that goes along with being open and committed to the light of truth. Listen to the first part of verse 24, “Consider carefully what you hear.” Jesus is saying **listen with discernment**. If we are hearing information that seems reasonable and verifiable, but it contradicts what we have been taught by people we respect, then we had better closely examine what we are hearing **AND** what we have been taught. It could be that what we have been taught and what we are hearing are both wrong. But if they contradict each other, both cannot be true.

One of the commentators I read, noted that there is something about truth that is indestructible. It may be attacked, delayed, suppressed, mocked at; but in the end – truth prevails. This is why Christians must be careful not to fight against truth because all truth is God’s truth. In the sixteenth century there were advancements in science which enabled us to understand that the earth rotates around the sun and not the sun around the earth – as everyone had been saying for thousands of years – and some

people are still saying. At that time the Church declared with great certainty that the Bible teaches it is the sun that rotates around the earth. I am here to tell you – it doesn't. There are times when the Bible uses the language of appearance – just as we do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when we talk about the sun rising and the sun setting – as if the sun was moving around the earth. The false claims of Christians in the sixteen hundreds made the Bible and Christianity look foolish.

I have been taught some things about the Bible – by very good people – that are not standing up to scrutiny and will not endure the test of time. I have confidence that what the Bible actually teaches is always true. In **Psalm 119:160** the Psalmist declares to God, “All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.”

In verses 24-25, Jesus teaches some unchanging principles that apply to both believers and unbelievers,

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more.<sup>25</sup> Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

Jesus is teaching that the more we apply ourselves to learning truth, the more capable we become in understanding and embracing additional truth. On the other hand, if people do not use the truth they have already been given, why should God give them any more truth to sit on and do nothing with?

Before we continue, let me remind you that in the Bible, the Kingdom of God has a number of meanings. It's broadest meaning is that God rules over everything – believers and unbelievers alike. God shows His

authority over unbelievers through His judgments. At other times God's Kingdom is speaking about the Church – God's redeemed people. And certainly the truths of verses 24-25, apply to the Church. For example, if Christians faithfully use our spiritual gifts on behalf of others, we will grow in our abilities to use our gifts and bless others. If Christians do not use our gifts on behalf of others, then we will lose our ability to use them. However the principles of verses 24-25, are true and valid in many different settings. For example, in **Luke 19:12-26**, Jesus applies these truths to a business setting,

“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. <sup>13</sup> So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back’ [he wanted his money invested in worthwhile business ventures that would strengthen the kingdom he was going to rule] . . . <sup>15</sup> He was made king . . . and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. <sup>16</sup> The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ <sup>17</sup> ‘Well done, my good servant’ . . . <sup>18</sup> The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ <sup>19</sup> His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’ <sup>20</sup> Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth [he did that because he did not love the king or want to take any risks for him] . . . <sup>24</sup> Then he [the king] said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ <sup>25</sup> ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’ <sup>26</sup> He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing [due to negligence], even what he has will be taken away.’”

Who do you want handling your investments? A person who through intelligent, hard work, multiplies it by ten, or someone who does nothing with it? If I entrusted money to a person who didn't do anything with it,

then I would take it away from him and give it to a person who knows what to do with it. And yet in our culture today, we have many who loudly shout their agreement with verse 25, “Sir, he already has ten” . . . meaning, it is not fair that the man with ten minas should get more money. In their thinking, we should take money away from the one with the most and give it to those who don’t have as much. But the wise king in this parable [who represents the Lord Jesus Christ] takes his money away from the one not doing anything with it and gives it to the man who has the knowledge, desire and work ethic to make it grow. And the growth of honest industry is good for a whole community. This principle is a law of life, and it is every bit as real as the law of gravity. This is why the economic system of socialism is never sustainable. It fights against the truths Christ has just stated.

How do we best help those who need a helping hand. Jesus tells us in a parable about a landowner who at six in the morning hired people to work in his vineyard at an agreed upon fair wage. He then finds more workers at nine in the morning, and hires them – promising to give them a fair wage. He does this again at noon, at three and then at five in the evening. An hour later, at quitting time, he gathers all the workers and pays them the same amount. Those hired at six in the morning complained and said that wasn’t fair. The owner reminded them the he paid them a fair wage and then asks those who were complaining two probing questions recorded in **Matthew 20:15**, “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous [to people I wanted to

help]?” A requirement for any nation that wants to be great, is to have generous people who voluntarily help those in need with the resources God has entrusted to them. Generosity cannot be legislated. Morality is always legislated – the only question is whose morality? Generosity is a quality most seen in people who embrace the truths and principles of God’s Word. When civil government tries to help the poor by the forceful redistribution of peoples’ money, it brings God’s judgment, because it violates God’s laws and principles.

The next parable – which is found in verses 26-29, is only found in the Gospel of Mark,

“He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.<sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.<sup>28</sup> All by itself [the Greek word is *automata*, which is where we get our word automatically] the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.<sup>29</sup> As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.’”

The seed in this parable represents the good news of the gospel and the word of God in general. As the Word of God goes out into the world, some may **not listen**; and even if they do, they may **not embrace it**. But for those who do embrace it – God’s Word will produce life-changing fruit. Why do some people respond to the gospel and others do not? Salvation is a work of God that man cannot understand – anymore than we understand how putting a dry little seed into the soil produces a living plant that bears life-giving grain. And friends, there is yet to be a scientist who can make a seed in his laboratory – that when planted in dirt will

grow into a stalk of corn or wheat. And if a group of scientists ever do pull that off, it will prove that intelligent design was necessary.

This brings us to our last parable for this morning – recorded in Mark 4:30-32,

“Again he said, ‘What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground [of their gardens].<sup>32</sup> Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants [grown in that area of the world], with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.’”

I have seen pictures of mustard seeds that look like termite droppings. They are indeed small, but when you put a mustard seed into the ground, it can grow into the largest plant in your garden – big enough for birds to perch in. The point of this parable is that the truths about God’s kingdom, which Christ planted in the lives of His followers, are destined to grow mightily. As I have already said, Christ has always been the rightful king of the nations, but He has not been the embraced king. And so God uses followers of Christ, to plant the seeds of God’s Word into the lives of other people, and some by God’s grace receive it and pass it on to others.

Two thousand years ago, Christ’s Kingdom began with just a few followers, but what has happened since then? At present the world’s population is about 7.3 billion people. The most populous nation is China – with about 1.4 billion people, followed by India with about 1.3 billion. The United States is the third most populous nation with over 300 million people. Of the 7.3 billion people on earth, 2.4 billion identify themselves as Christians – which is a billion more people than the largest nation on

earth. And so about 30% of the world's population now profess to be Christians. I recognize that many of these people do not know Christ in a saving way, but we should not minimize how many of them do.

One of the latest polls taken in the United States made four statements to which people either agreed or disagreed. Here are the statements:

1. The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
2. It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
3. Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
4. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

A person had to strongly agree with all four statements to be considered an evangelical Christian. The survey revealed that 30% of the American adult population strongly agreed with all four statements. If a person only mildly agreed with even one of those statements he or she was not be counted as an evangelical Christian.

In these three parables, Christ has revealed some remarkable truths about His Kingdom upon the earth. And if we are to experience these truths – then we must embrace what verses 33-34 tell us,

“With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them [the crowds of people], as much as they could understand [because many of them did not have ears to hear – they understood very little].<sup>34</sup> He did not say anything to them without using a parable [Jesus hid truth from those who did not want to know truth]. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything” [parables are designed to teach truth to those who want truth].

Friends, if we want to know truth, then we must spend time with Christ in His Word and time with followers of Christ who are committed to embracing truth and then sharing it with others. Let's pray.