

Mark 4:21-34

Date: Sunday, 21 February 2021

Scripture: Mark 4:21-34

Sermon: Participating in the Kingdom of God

Preacher: Justin Ang

Passage

Mark 4:21 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? 22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." 24 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. 25 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."

Mark 4:26 And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Mark 4:30 And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 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."

Mark 4:33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. 34 He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Transcript

The Kingdom of God

Recently, Rachel and I have been rock climbing down at Climbfit Kirawee. We both love doing it because it's a kind of exercise that we can do together without worrying about what the weather is like. It's great for the teamwork. It's great for the focus you have as you climb. Fitness. They rate the climbs between 1 and 10. 1 being easy and 10 being the hardest. In the last two months, Rachel and I have progressed to 5. But there's a course that's a 3 which I can't do. And it really annoys me. Sometimes, I get up in the middle of the night with sweaty palms because I'm having nightmares about it. In fact, on Wednesday, I tried to do it again and I failed at the point where you're climbing backwards. Now you might laugh and go, well at least you're trying. But it really is frustrating. But I worked out that perhaps it's because I'm focused on the outcome, I'm focused on getting to the top. Rather than being focused on the process, focused on my technique, focused on getting the movements.

I've been thinking about how rock climbing is related to participating in the kingdom of God. Being part of the kingdom of God is frustrating at times. There are times when it feels like you're soaring with Jesus. Growth happens naturally, maybe you think of those circumstances in your life. But then there are times when it feels like you're crawling. It can be very frustrating. I reflect on the last 12 months with COVID and it feels like we as a church have been crawling. There have been moments where it's been frustrating. How long do we have to wear masks for? How long before we can sing? There are many areas of Australia where people no longer need to wear masks, they can gather in groups more than 300 and they can do things like yell, scream and sing if they choose to.

Participating in the kingdom of God means that we are following Jesus with our lives. We are seeking to have Jesus as our king, the ruler of our lives, the one whom we follow. And I want to show you from this particular Scripture that June read out to us that participating in the kingdom of God requires us to do certain things. Firstly, we're told that being part of God's kingdom means that we need to pay attention. Secondly, we're told to persevere in sowing. Thirdly, practice patience.

Pay attention. Persevere in sowing. Practice patience.

Pay Attention

Let's talk about the first point. To pay attention.

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."
Mark 4:21-25 (ESV)

We're continuing on from last week, where we saw that Jesus spoke to parables to the crowd that was around him. But when he spoke to his disciples he would explain what the parables meant. Here we're told a couple of parables. And the main point that we get from these particular verses is to pay attention. Specifically, we are to pay attention to what Jesus has to say to us.

This week, I heard that Facebook has decided to no longer allow the sharing of news content to Australians. It's not just the news you might get from the ABC, SMH, The Australian, the Daily Telegraph. But it's also news you might get from international publishers. I find it interesting because there's been talk about the fact that many people get their information from Facebook. We pay a lot of attention to the news online. But I wonder whether we pay attention to what Jesus says to us through the Scriptures? Jesus as the Word in the Scriptures. Again, in the past few weeks, I've asked you, how often are you reading your bibles? It's something I want to lay down again.

I read a story of a man who went for a job interview with John MacArthur. He's this American pastor. Towards the end of the interview, MacArthur asked the man to produce his bible. So the man produces his bible. The cover is half missing, pages are torn, you know when paper gets hand marks on it because it's been used so much. And the man who is telling the story is nervous. He's thinking that John MacArthur would not be in the least bit impressed. But he hires him on the spot and says, "If your Bible is falling apart, you probably aren't." That story has stuck with me because Rachel tells me to stop buying new bibles!

But in all seriousness, I wonder whether if I were to look at your bible, whether I could say those same words, "If your Bible is falling apart, you probably aren't" Because do you see the promise that Jesus gives us if we pay attention? More will be given. He says that the measure that we use, it will be measured and more will be added to you. It's kind of like riding a bike. When you ride a bike, unless you're using training wheels, what's the only way to keep standing up on a bike? The only way to be standing up, is to make sure that you're riding forwards. I realise though there are some very talented bike riders who can stay standing up without moving forward and that's where my analogy falls down!

But I wonder whether the reason why some of us here aren't fruitful in our walk with Jesus is because we don't pay attention. Whether it's in one ear and out the other. I wonder whether we don't show our light to those around us like a shining lamp is because we aren't paying attention to what Jesus is saying. It's like that hymn, Turn Your Eyes,

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Look full, in his wonderful face

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of his glory and grace

You know when you look at Jesus, when you pay attention to him, something incredible happens. Without you realising it, you will shine out to others around you. You become fruitful because you become like Jesus. Isn't that incredible?

Pay attention.

Persist in Sowing

But we're also told to persist in sowing. We're told to persist in sowing the word of God. Let's have a look.

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.” Mark 4:26-29 (ESV)

This parable that Jesus tells, we're told that it is all about the kingdom of God. And Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a seed. It grows to become a harvest. But do you notice the man's involvement with the seed? What does the man do? All he does is he scatters it, and then at the end he harvests it. He scatters and harvests. Let me ask you, does the man have anything to do with the growth of the seed? No he doesn't! In fact, we're told he has no idea how it happens. It just happens. But the message that we get here is that we are to persist in sowing the word.

What does sowing the word look like? It means sharing the gospel in and out of season with those around us. It means sowing the gospel into people's lives around us, those who are not believers and those who are believers. It means sowing the word of God in our lives. I wonder whether we do that?

Maybe you struggle with persisting in it. I know I do. I struggle with that at times. But I really want to encourage you with these words, to persist in sowing the word. Because sometimes, there doesn't feel like there is any progress. Right? I know some of you can say that is true from your own experience. You sow, and there doesn't seem to be a harvest. But we're told to persist because why? Because God is the one who gives the growth in God's own kingdom. God is the one who gives growth.

A Japanese friend of mine was sharing with me about how discouraged some of his missionary friends have been when they go to Japan. They go for years living in Japan telling people about Jesus. One particular family had been there for decades, and came back to America not having seen one single convert. And my friend was reflecting on how they got bitter because they had not seen any growth. Do you feel at times frustrated, bitter, disappointed when there doesn't seem to be any growth in your own walk, or perhaps other people?

The encouragement is that God sees the growth even when we can't. God is the one who gives the growth, not us. Sometimes, when you plant seeds, there doesn't seem to be progress for ages and ages. Like nothing is happening. But that's because we are only looking at the surface. We can't see what's happening underground. We can't see that the seed has sprouted. We want everything to happen now, but God is still working.

Persist in sowing.

Practice Patience

Finally, let's talk about practicing patience. One of the things that we might struggle with as we pay attention to Jesus, and as we persist in sowing the word is that we may grow impatient. But we might say, "Oh Justin, I'm not impatient, I just want things now! Right now!" When we're sowing the word, there doesn't seem to be much growth, there isn't any change in our family members. There isn't any change in those we're sowing into. But what we need to be reminded to do is to practice patience.

Let's look at the last parable in this passage.

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable 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." Mark 4:30-32 (ESV)

Jesus here is reminding his disciples that the kingdom will eventually become something great. Apparently, mustard seeds are very small. But they grow up to be very big compared to the size of their seeds. But Jesus' parable is an encouragement to us isn't it? It's an encouragement to us because these parables remind us that it's not up to us to see the growth. It's not up to us to force growth. We may look at our young children and we don't think what we're sowing makes a difference. But actually, what seems small will grow to be something substantial even if we don't understand it, even if we can't perceive it.

At a previous church, one of the elders told me that they had taught Gladys Berejikian when she was in primary school. Can you imagine what that would have been like? To have the future NSW premier in your class? I sometimes think about those famous ministers and preachers. Tim Keller, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon. And I wonder what they would have been like in primary school. To be sowing into their lives at such a young age, for them to be influential and having such an impact on society. Can you imagine?

This parable of the mustard seed is an encouragement to us to be patient. What may be small can grow into something amazing. In fact, it's an encouragement to practice patience when things don't seem to grow according to our own expectations. We may be paying attention to Jesus, we may be faithfully sowing the Word of God, and yet we can't see any growth.

It's like the hymn we'll reflect on later on.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,

But His smile quickly drives it away;

Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,

Can abide while we trust and obey.

I know that for many of us, our hearts mourn when we look at our family who choose not to believe the gospel. Many of our children have chosen to walk away from the LORD, to live their own ways. We try our very best to not be hypocrites, and yet they still have turned their backs on Jesus. Here is an encouragement to us, we can be faithful in sowing the word in their hearts and practice patience. Because it is God who gives the growth.

From humble beginnings, we can be confident that the kingdom of God will grow around us. Doesn't Jesus' life show that? Born in the little town of Bethlehem, with twelve ordinary men as his apostles. Dying in a backwater province of the Roman Empire, hardly known to the world at that time. But since then? Haven't we seen the kingdom of God grow because of his life, death and resurrection? And we can be confident that our labours will not go in vain because he shows through his death and resurrection that he is the mustard seed that grows. That through his death and resurrection, the power of the kingdom of God is seen in something that is weak.

So let's pay attention. Let's persevere in sowing and Let's practice patience.

Let's pray.