

## Pictures of a Kingdom

*Series on the Book of Mark*

By Dr. Paul Tripp

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Mark 4:21-34

**Preached on:** Sunday, May 9, 2010

### **Paul Tripp Ministries**

7214 Frankford Avenue

Philadelphia, PA 19135

**Website:** [www.paultripp.com](http://www.paultripp.com)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/paultripp](http://www.sermonaudio.com/paultripp)

I would ask you to be honest for a moment. Are there times when God confuses you? Are there moments when if you were honest you would have to say you struggle with doubt? Is there ever a time when it seems like what you are doing in the name of God isn't making a difference? We ought to be able to be honest about the struggle of faith. Scripture surely is.

As I was thinking about the parables we are going to look at this evening, I was thinking about two famous names in Scripture. One, Elijah, a great prophet of God, but had a stunning moment of doubt in his own life. You remember the story. Elijah had contested the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The 450 prophets had cut themselves and screamed and yelled and danced and no fire very came down to consume their sacrifice. Elijah had an altar built and a trench built around the altar and water doused on the altar three times and prayed a simple prayer and fire came down and consumed the sacrifice and the wood and the stones and all the water as well.

Now you would think that this would lead to great revival in Israel. The next thing Elijah faces is that Queen Jezebel now has a contract out on his life. And here is Elijah's prayer.

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.'"<sup>1</sup>

He says elsewhere that after all that you have done, after all the display of your glory, I alone am the only one that is left. It has all been for nothing.

Or I think of Moses, dear Moses. Numbers 11 in the wilderness leading that ragtag bag of former slaves who are very dissatisfied with the menu that God has provided, manna, which would arrive every day, edible material that would just appear. What a sign of God's covenant love. In fact, such a stunning sign of God's provision takes manna as his name. He says, "I am the bread that has come down from heaven." But Israel doesn't see it this way. They begin to think of Egypt, the leeks, the onions, the fish they say they

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 19:4.

consumed at no cost. At no cost? I mean at this moment Egypt sounds more like a deli than a place of slavery. And Moses is just burdened by all of this. He can't believe what is happening. And listen to his prayer.

Moses was displeased. Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."<sup>2</sup>

Let's be honest. Life in the kingdom of God can be confusing. Often things don't work out the way that you would expect. And there are three little parables at this point in Mark four that surely are spoken by Christ to speak into the confusion and the questions of these dear men who have given their lives to follow Christ. Think of the disciples. Think of how little they knew. Think of how confusing it must have been to watch at one point multitudes follow Christ and at the other point to see Christ rejected by his own family. To know that the Pharisees have now set themselves to destroy him. They have no idea at all where the story is going. They don't have any idea that the one that they are following is the Lamb who will soon offer his life as a sacrifice. They could have never figured it out. They could have never thought of such a thing, that this was the ultimate provision of God.

Because like us, they couldn't write the story ahead of time. And so Christ speaks in these parables into this moment for them. And it really speaks to our confusion. Maybe the three questions are: Will I ever understand? Does my work really make a difference? Will this kingdom ever come?

Look at verses 21 through 24. Let me read them again for you.

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."<sup>3</sup>

Now Jesus actually in this parable is talking about himself. And he is talking about something that is initiated in his coming. This is really quite a prophetic little parable.

---

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 11:10-15.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 4:21-24.

Jesus is saying, don't you realize that light has come? God has sent, if you would, his lamp into the world. This is Jesus, the Word from God. This is Jesus in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This is the light of the world and he is saying to his disciples: Would it make any sense for God to send the ultimate light of lights and keep him covered up? And then he says this.

“For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.”<sup>4</sup>

That is God promising that this is the beginning of my revelation of the gospel and I will continue that work until the truths of the gospel have been revealed. Surely this is a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit that was to come. Remember when Jesus was at the end of his life facing the cross he said to his disciples, “There is many more things that you need to know, but you are not able yet to bear them. I will send another teacher and he will lead you into truth.” That was a direct promise of the work of the Spirit that would to come that would open up all the mysteries of the gospel. Brothers and sisters, that is why we have Romans all the way to Revelation, because God fulfilled that promise and the lamp brought his truth and thought the Spirit, began, continued to teach and to teach and to teach and now the deep mysteries of the gospel are open to us. What a beautiful thing.

And that Spirit that is pictured in this parable, the Spirit of Christ still operates and still teaches the people of God. And God will not relent until all of his work in us is done. He will teach, teach, teach. He is come to us to unfold the mysteries. There will be a day when we understand.

Now how do you respond to that? Well you listen. You respond. Look what it says here.

“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.”<sup>5</sup>

Again, this is a theme in Mark. It is faith again that is active faith. I grab a hold of the understanding that I have now. I live on the basis of the gospel. And as I do that, God continues to mature me. He continues to grow me. And to the one who uses it more will be given. And to the one who does not listen, does not hear what he has will be taken away. The light has come. And the light will shine until we know and understand and rest.

Second parable, the parable of the growing seed.

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,

---

<sup>4</sup> Mark 4:22.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 4:24.

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.”<sup>6</sup>

Maybe this parable is really about knowing your place. I was reminded—Luella will remember this, too—of the first vegetable garden that we planted. We were planting in Pennsylvania soil and you know what Pennsylvania soil is like. It is rocky. But we were able to clear that area and I remember the day we took our children out and we dropped little beans down the row because we were going to have green beans as our harvest. We covered up the soil. We watered it and I told my children that some day we would harvest green beans that would come out of this soil.

The next day they got up before breakfast and they ran out to harvest green beans. And they were amazed that there were no beans. I can remember one of our children—I don’t know which one said—saying to me, “Dad, it didn’t work.” Perhaps that is how we are with the work of the kingdom of God. We have little children garden mentality. We want the process of the gospel to be an event. Oh, you struggle with that as a husband and wife. You struggle with that with your children. You struggle with that as you are sharing the gospel with somebody. You struggle with that as you look at the Church. You struggle with that as you look at the surrounding the world. You wonder: Is all this planting actually doing anything? And the temptation is—oh, you have got to get a hold of this—is to try to somehow to manipulate the results. Maybe we should dig up the soil and massage the beans. Maybe we just need to put more water and more water and more water. There are a lot of novice gardeners who drown plants. And there is a tendency in the Church to be result centered. Maybe we need something to attract people a little more to the gospel. Maybe we are not instilling enough fear and guilt. Maybe if the gospel could be given by some famous person, people would listen. Maybe cooler music.

And all of that is forgetting your place. Here is your place. Plant. And what it says here about the farmer is really very humbling. It says this.

“He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself.”<sup>7</sup>

Once you have planted that seed, you have done your job. Everything else belongs to the Lord. Why is it that sometimes someone will respond and another person right next to them won’t? Why is it that some people’s growth seems so rapid and other people seem to grow so slowly? Why is it that some churches seem to explode with growth in numbers and others remain small? These are the mysteries of the kingdom of God. That is looking at the soil and wondering. And so it is very, very important that we know our place. Here is our place. Plant the beans. And God will grow his harvest. You don’t have to carry harvest on your shoulders.

Parents, hear this. You have no capacity whatsoever to produce belief in your children. None. Brothers and sisters, you have no ability whatsoever to argue a person into the

---

<sup>6</sup> Mark 4:26-29.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 4:27-28.

kingdom of God, none. I remember a mom saying to me and it scared me as she said it. She, in a moment of anger in my office said, “If it is the last thing I ever do, I will get my children to believe.” Oh, my. I thought and maybe this was not a healthy thought for me. But I thought I wouldn’t want to be one of your children.

We must know our place, because if we don’t, we will do things that distort the very seeds of the gospel that we are planting. We must know our place. You plant the seed. You don’t know how it grows. The earth produces by itself. Your work is important, but the harvest belongs to the Lord.

Third little parable, the parable of the mustard seed.

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.”<sup>8</sup>

You know, the disciples hearing the message of the kingdom of God were convinced that the final kingdom was right around the corner. You get that from their conversation. And they would struggle with the smallness of this little kingdom band at this point, because this wasn’t a great number of true followers of Christ. Remember, the crowd was after Christ because they wanted the miracles. They were astounded by his power, but when the gospel teaching would get hard, the crowd would melt away and there would be left this small little band of followers. And it would be tempting to think: Is this it? Is this the kingdom? Is this what it is going to be? Us?

Maybe you have felt that way. You know, if you look around the city of Philadelphia, if you watch television and listen to the news, does it look to you like this kingdom is just gloriously expanding? It is easy to look around and say, “Well, is it just us? This is it? This little band of people, this is it?”

And Jesus says, “Let me tell you something. Out of this small band of followers is going to come a kingdom that will spread from pole to pole that will transform the world as we know it. Every knee will bow some day and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. This will be a world wide eternal kingdom. And like that little mustard seed that grows this big bush, this little band of followers, this little seed of faith, I will use to bring to the gospel to the entire world. My kingdom will come. And you can’t estimate the coming kingdom by keeping numbers. You can’t understand the kingdom to come by looking at this little seed, because out of this seed will come a company of faith more than you could ever number.”

What is this parable about? It is about patience and perseverance, because Jesus is

---

<sup>8</sup> Mark 4:30-32.

saying, “My kingdom will come. My will will be done. This will be a large and glorious and eternal kingdom. Have faith. Be patient. Persevere.”

Mark ends with a bit of an editorial comment that Jesus continued to speak in parables. The parables really sifted the crowd. They would blind the eyes of those who didn't believe. They would put deep questions in the hearts of the disciples who believed in and Jesus would make explanation to them.

Will you ever understand? Yes, you will. There will be a day when you will look back and say, “God, I understand your plan. I understand your purpose. It all makes sense to me now.”

Is your work worth it? Yes. But you can't have a gospel event mentality, because you are planting seeds and the minute you plant that seed of the gospel your work is done. And you must trust your heavenly Father who controls the harvest. And then you must be patient and persevere. Out of a little unremarkable group of people God is at work in transforming, restoring and renewing his world. And his kingdom will come. Be patient. Persevere. His will will be done.

Let's pray.

*Lord, thank you for these pictures of your kingdom. First, that it is a kingdom of gospel truth, that you came as the Word, as the light, as the one in whom all the treasures are hidden. And with zeal you unleashed the truths of the gospel in your coming. And you sent your Spirit to continue your work so that your apostles would gift the Church with deeper and further understanding of the gospel and so that you would work in us helping us to understand your truth. Lord, we pray that you would help us to be people that know our place, that know we have no ability whatsoever to control the harvest, that we can't manipulate the results, that our job is to faithfully plant those seeds and trust your power and your glory and your grace to bring the harvest that you will. And, Lord, help us to understand out of what seems to be the smallness of your kingdom, small seeds will grow the glory of your world wide eternal kingdom. And may we be persevering and may we be patient as your kingdom marches on. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*