

The Word and the Kingdom of God

Mark 4:21-34 (Key Verse: 4:31-32)

“It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

As we saw last week, Jesus has begun to teach in parables. Last week we learned about the parable of the sower. Today we continue with Jesus parables. Jesus gives us these parables in order to teach us that God’s kingdom is made through the word, the parable of the lamp on a stand, the parable of the growing seed and the parable of the mustard seed. It is my prayer and hope that through these parables we may receive Jesus faith and vision for the gospel in our hearts. May we also find what hope we should have and what we should do in this hard age. Amen!

Part I: Parable of the Lamp (21-25)

Look at verse 21, “21He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand?” In ancient times they turned up a wick on a plate with oil and used it as a lamp. During the day they would put it under a bowl or a bed so that nobody might kick it by mistake. Once the sun was setting and it was getting dark, they would put the lamp on its stand which was usually hung on a pillar or a wall. By putting it higher like this, they could light a room. Therefore putting a lamp under a bowl or a bed is for lighting a room well at night. However, what does this mean, what is Jesus trying to teach.

Jesus came as the light in fact Jesus himself is the Lamp (Rev 21:23). He had come to illuminate what the kingdom of God is like. In God’s kingdom evil spirits are driven out, paralyzed men gets up, a leper becomes clean and healed, tax collectors and notorious sinners who were cast out are forgiven and have a party with Jesus. However, the religious leaders rejected the Lamp of God and as a result were actually rejecting the kingdom of God. When Jesus forgave a man his sins, they said Jesus was blaspheming. They said he was using the spirit of demons to do miracles. When they saw Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, they said he was destroying the law. When Jesus healed a man with shriveled hands on the Sabbath day, they began to plot how they might kill Jesus. In this way they actually put the lamp under a bed instead of putting Jesus on a stand. They hid the lamp never giving it a chance to be on its stand. However, look at verse 22 “22For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.” Their efforts were really pointless because, no matter how hard they tried to hide the lamp, nothing can stop Jesus from been revealed to the world. Whatever they are trying to hide will be revealed. No one can suppress Jesus forever, no one can suppress the truth forever. Jesus will ultimately reign. And his reign will not be in some hidden secret place, his reign will be in the open and will be seen by all. If anyone has an ear to hear let him hear [23]. It does not matter what they or we think about Jesus. Rev 1:7 reads, ““Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.”

However, how can we know the hidden meaning of Jesus’ words?

First, we should consider carefully. In verse 24a, Jesus says, ““Consider carefully what you hear,” this means that we should think carefully about Jesus word. Jesus here means that, when we hear his word, we should hold it in our hearts and think about it all the time. It is only when we think about it very carefully that we can find the meaning of the word deeply. When we individually consider God’s word deeply, we will not only understand it but we will also make it our own, which will give us self supporting faith. When we have God’s word digested well, and we received some form of person conviction, we will not be ruled by our emotions or worldly desires any more. However, if we have never made his word our own, then somebody should help us all the time. And usually when we receive help from others, we could become confused whether we being guided by God or being led by them. We can also become irritated, thinking I am always rebuked.

Of course we need some help in considering God’s word. But some day we should be able to consider carefully for ourselves. We grow up to be a self supporting person of the world by considering carefully for ourselves, repenting due to the word and making decisions of faith on our own. Though In our ministry we may try to always focus on the word of God. If we do not consider carefully on our own what the word really says, we will remain to be hearts like a path or rocky hearts, never be rooted, always tossed to and from by the situations of this life. Though we have testimony writing which is a good time to consider carefully the word of God, if we simply write testimony as a tick box, for sake of doing it, either because others are looking. We would be wasting precious time to know Jesus deeply and be rooted in His vision and faith.

Generally most especially in our times, people do not try to consider for themselves carefully what the word is saying. We simply download what others considered and just follow them without any thought. It is my prayer that we really overcome this trend and develop our power to consider for ourselves carefully what the word of God is saying.

Secondly, the measure we use will be measured to us, look at verse 24-25, “24Consider carefully what you hear he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.” 25Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” This means that the amount that will be given to us depends on the size of our thinking. If we measure God’s word with small thinking, then we will receive just a little bit. But if we think deeper and give more time to thinking about his words, we will also receive much. Let us look at an example of this in the bible.

When Jesus went to the vicinity of Tyre, a Greek woman came and begged to drive out an evil spirit from her daughter (Mark 7:24-26). But Jesus surprisingly refused, saying, “First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” This word not only rejected her begging but also could be understood as treating her as a dog. If we had heard such a word, we would have rebelled against Jesus. But the Greek woman said, “yes lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” The woman did not measure Jesus’ word in a narrow-minded way. She admitted that Jesus was the great man who could reject her request and she was only like a dog. So she humbly asked for Jesus’ crumb f mercy. Then Jesus said, “For such a reply, you may go the demon has left your daughter.” If the woman had measured Jesus’ word in a narrow-minded way, she could have ended up with nothing. But because she measured Jesus word in a broad-minded way, in a deep way, though she was a Gentile, she could receive so much, Jesus mercy and her daughter was saved. This was all possible because she understood who Jesus was, because she thought deeply about Jesus, she did not have a shallow view of Jesus, rather Jesus was Lord and king. And so she could accept to be called a dog. She could experience what the kingdom of God is like, through the healing of her daughter.

If we measure God’s word only with our small experience and shallow knowledge, then we cannot come out of the world of our experience and common knowledge. Jesus is creator God. We cannot measure His word enough with the measure of our experience and common knowledge. Like the woman, I we accept Jesus word as Lord and king, as the creator, then we can find out the mystery of the universe, the profoundness of our lives and the secret of the kingdom of God. The bigger we measure God’s word the bigger our faith, along with our hearts and desires. Then we can try creative things, even do a great work.

If one is only concerned about his own blessing or just about his family and his job, their marks, then they are a person with a small measure. However, if we consider the kingdom of God beyond our own lives and situations, then we can receive God’s word greatly.

Verse 25 is actually also a strong warning, “Whoever has will be given more, whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” It means that if we have not accepted Jesus for who he truly is, if we do not have Jesus in our hearts as lord and king, as our savior God. Whatever little they have will be taken away from them. The religious leaders had chosen to hide the lamp, rejecting Jesus as lord and king. In the end whatever little they had was taken away from them. In fact, something I newly learned this year is that, non of the religious leaders were chosen to be Jesus disciples. If we continues to hide the lamb under the bed, if we continue to reject Jesus in to our lives, if we continue to accept the shallow narrow view of Jesus, never really thinking more about his word and teachings. What is for sure is that when he comes one day to judge the living and the dead, we will lose our lives. We will not enter the kingdom of God. This also means that as believers if we are not growing in our faith, if we rely on the fact that we received Jesus into our hearts once upon a time and that enough. No more need to grow in knowing him and his vision for our lives, we will loose what we think we have received. A Christian life is a dynamic life, not a stagnant life, not an Instagram life or facebook life, look at the disciples after they met Jesus. Their lives was no longer a boring routine life, they saw the blind made to see, they saw the paralyzed being healed and so on, next week they are in a storm. More importantly Jesus revealed God’s word to them so they may receive in their hearts Jesus vision and faith. It is my prayer that, we may not settle for less, we may not settle for the good, but find out more what the word of God is really saying, to know Jesus, not hide him, but know Him and reveal Him to the others. This is the great work of God.

Part II: The Parable of the Growing Seed (26-29)

Look at verse 26-27, “He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.” Here we learn that God’s kingdom begins as the seed of the word is sown/planted. However, it does not start like magic. Jesus said, “all by itself the soil produces grain, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the heard. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts a sickle to it, because the harvest has come” (28,29). No stalk without sprouting, no grain without the stalk. Seed has to go through the process until it bears fruit. So it takes time. A farmer does not know how all this happens. But the farmer knows one thing, seed has life power. Because it has life power, it sprouts, grows and bears fruit.

Therefore, once a farmer sows seed, he does not check if it sprouts or not. Digging up the ground with anxiety. Though it seems to grow too slowly, he does not pull or stretch the stalk. The farmer just takes it easy and he sleeps and gets up night and day. For example, Chinese bamboo trees take five years to grow before breaking through the soil. However, once it breaks through, it can grow up to 27 meters in five weeks. As we study God's word, we expect that we may grow up quickly and be changed soon. But because the kingdom of God does not come fast, some people study only a few times and then give up, thinking that it is useless. Some people are concerned that they might not be able to bear fruit and end up forsaking their faith, even though they are growing. The important issue here is to sow. Are we planting? First for our hearts then for others, Are we thinking deeply about the word of God so it is planted in our hearts? Are we going out to plant the word of God to others? What measure are we using? Once the word is planted, we should not worry about how it will grow. Once we have shared the word with someone, we should not be concerned whether that person is growing or not, like the farmer who goes to sleep. What is important is that we plant, the seed is sown. I pray that we may learn the heart of a farmer who believes that once he sows, the seed will surely bear fruit and waits calmly.

Part III: The Parable of the Mustard Seed (30-34)

In this parable Jesus continues to reveal what the kingdom of God is like. Look at verse 31-32, "It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." A mustard seed is very small. It is as small as dust. However, Jesus says, mustard seed is the smallest seed in the ground. But when planted, it grows up to 3-4 meters and even 7 meters. The thickness of its branch becomes as big as an adult's forearm. It grows from being a plant into a large tree, becoming one of the largest in the garden plants. The word of God may appear so insignificant to us. However, the truth is that once planted it becomes one of the largest trees where, birds find their habited. Those who receive God's word, our lord Jesus, no matter how worthless one may look. If they receive God's word, they can be used greatly by God. One good example is the disciples, some were simple fisher men who minded their business. However, when they received the word of God they could become great men of faith. The gospel could spread through many nations, God's kingdom could grow greatly.

The disciples preached the gospel in a time of great Greek philosophers and persecution from Rome. After medieval times, the age of illuminism came over and atheism became powerful. Voltaire, a representative atheist, prophesied that the bible would be gone in his time. But now he is gone and his house is used as a storehouse of the Bible Society. God's work begins with as small as a mustard seed. But the result is not small at all. One ministry began in a house of two young couple from Korea. They had received one word of God in their hearts and came as missionaries to South Africa. I remember one of the Sundays, where the pulpit stand for the bible was the ironing board and only one or two attendees. They did not worry about how the members in number would grow, all they focused on what to plant the word of God in our hearts. Today we are here on campus from a small room using the ironing board. I too while a student was only concerned about making more money. There was black tax back home and wanted to graduate as quickly as possible to improve my life and those of my family. However, little did I know that through these insignificant missionaries, God was also busy planting His word in my heart. It is such a great privilege to find myself entrusted by God to stand before you. Not talking about money or anything else other than the word of God. Had it not been for the word of God planted in me, I would probably be at some company probably a mine since they funded my studies busy with things that do not contribute anything towards the kingdom of God. So am thankful that though, am a nobody, a sinner who but received mercy from God, I stand before you only because of what Jesus did for me on the cross and what he is continuing to do for me. I have not even responded well to God's amazing grace in my life and its my prayer that I too may plant God's word in others hearts beginning with my heart. Amen.

In conclusion, It is my prayer that God may bless our mustard like ministry. Jesus saw the kingdom of God from his small work. He sowed the seed of the word into his twelve disciples with conviction and vision toward his gospel work. I was glad to hear of some word planting work on campus by some of our members. God will surely bless and grow his kingdom in our campus. I believe that if we continue to sow the seed of the word with faith and vision, campus students will know Jesus as lord and savior. An that God will raise leaders who have his vision and hope in their hearts. Amen.