

# The Kingdom is coming, so get listening!

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[ 0 : 00 ] So the reading this evening is from Mark chapter 4 verse 20, 20, 21 to 34 and if you're in the pew bibles that's on page 1006. He 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 for whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear let them hear. Consider carefully what you hear he continued with the measure you use it will be measured to you and even more. Whoever has will be given more whoever does not have even what they have will be taken from them. He also said this, this is what the kingdom of God is like.

A man scatters seed on the ground night and day whether he sleeps or gets up the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces corn first the stalk then the ear then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the corn is ripe he puts a sickle to it because the harvest has come. 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 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. With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them as much as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable but when he was alone with his own disciples he explained everything. Amen.

Brilliant, thanks Jackie. Well good evening, my name is Simon, I'm a trainee minister here at St Silas. Let's pray for God's help as we hear him speak through his word this evening.

Father give us ears to hear what you have to say. Help us to pay careful attention to what you say through your word this evening and to trust that you are at work to grow us and to grow your kingdom.

Amen. If you're around at St Silas for any length of time you will probably hear someone say well done for making it to this event or well done for making it to the service or specifically well done for making it to the prayer meeting. We kind of love that phrase and especially as the nights grow darker and the inevitable Glasgow rain just kind of sets in, turning up and listening in can just seem like harder work. We kind of take it as given that probably turning up is a good thing but a good question to ask is why? Does it really matter that we turn up and listen? Does it really matter that I come to a Sunday service? Is it really worth making the effort when it's cold and dark and wet outside? I could actually be home with a hot chocolate and something new on Netflix. Is there much point actually turning up? I could have dinner with my family or go see friends far away. Is it even worth losing that extra half hour in bed just to get up and read my Bible? Does it actually achieve anything? Well in order to answer those questions we need to understand what is God doing through his words when I hear it? What is he achieving in me and through me as I interact with what he says?

[ 3 : 51 ] And so in today's section of Mark, Jesus is going to tell us what his words do but also therefore to pay most careful attention to them. I'm going to look at four short stories. They are parables that Mark has put together to help us understand what Jesus is saying about his word.

And we're midway through chapter four. Mark's just given us an extended parable from Jesus about how we listen to God's word already. The message that Jonathan brought out for us last week was that we have to pay careful attention to what God's word is saying and whether we accept it or reject it really matters. Now Mark tells us that Jesus is teaching the crowds and if you go and look down in chapter four verse two just the page before he's been teaching them by parables. Then in verse nine he gives this call whoever has ears to hear let them hear. So it's a call for everyone who's listening not to just listen passively but really actively think what Jesus is saying.

Later in verse 11 with his disciples in private it says the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you but on the outside everything is said in parables. And in tonight's passage if you look to

verses 33 and 34 we hear this. With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable but when he was alone with his own disciples he explained everything. And so throughout this chapter so far we have this idea that Jesus is teaching in parables to have a bit of a kind of two-sided effect. The call goes out to everyone to listen. And some hear these words but they reject them. They think that the parables are proof that Jesus isn't actually worth following. But to others they want to hear more and they become disciples of Jesus and in doing so Jesus reveals the kingdom of God to them. And so in the first two parables we're looking at this evening in verses 21 to 25 which you can find a bit of an outline of in we're going to hear a bit more about why we should listen and find out that Jesus' words reveal what is hidden and so we must pay attention to him. Now I don't know when the last time was that you were in a conversation and had that awful just terrible moment of realizing that actually you've completely phased out and you have no idea what the person in front of you is talking about. It's just so embarrassing isn't that kind of tension and I think it happens to some of us more than others but we just get that sinking feeling of realizing I have no idea what this person is saying anymore.

Sometimes it's insignificant enough and people don't even notice and you can kind of rescue it and be like ah that's what it was. But sometimes actually that can cause real harm when a friend or loved one realizes that we're not really listening to them when they're telling us something important. Okay sometimes it's a mistake but sometimes it just shows us that we don't really value the person who's talking. And in these two parables here we're going to get a sense of what our listening to Jesus says about how we value and think about him.

So our first parable then is a parable about a lamp in verse 21. Now 2,000 years ago we're talking oil about a lamp and obviously in a culture of no electricity. The only light that you have in an evening is moonlight and starlight and then if you light one firelight. You don't go to the cost and effort of lighting a lamp only to cover it up and remain in darkness. Lamps are meant to light up rooms and so they're put on a stand to light up everything. Light is by its very nature not meant to be hidden.

[ 7 : 52 ] Imagine how ridiculous it would be to come into this building to find that we've put shades on every single lamp in the whole building. What complete waste of time and effort. Well the first few chapters of Mark we've been seeing kind of a light slowly dawning. We've been told by Mark that Jesus is the one that the people of Israel were waiting for. That he's the son of God who's going to come and save people from their sins. That he is the good news. He's the one bringing the kingdom of God into being.

We've seen that he can heal. That he can cast out evil. That he can forgive and restore and we see that Jesus is a light shining in a dark place. Hope in a dark world. And he's not doing this in secret is he?

He's actually doing this publicly. His miracles and his teaching are in public. These parables are being told to a mountainside full of people. Because in Jesus what was hidden the way that God would bring about forgiveness of sin and salvation are being revealed. And so it makes sense in verse 22 that Jesus says whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed. Whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. Because that's what he's doing.

In a world of darkness waiting for a light to shine. Jesus brings the kingdom to people. He brings hope. And of course therefore that message is meant to be shared. That is its very purpose.

You do not hide a light. You do not hide this message says Jesus. Displaying it out to the world. And so no wonder verse 23 Jesus immediately says anyone who has ears to hear let them hear.

[ 9 : 40 ] If you have ears get listening. All who hear his words are called to hear the truth about the kingdom of God as a light shining in darkness. The mystery made known.

Hope on display in Jesus. But there's more to this. Let's power on the second parable then in verses 24 and 25. The second parable is of a measure.

Again introduced with the words consider carefully what you hear. So this again is a short story about how we listen. And again in the 2,000 years ago context. A measure was what you would go with to the market to buy some grain.

Maybe some sort of bowl. If you come to the market with a small measure. Well you can't take very much home. If you come with a big measure. You can take a lot home. And Jesus says that is a bit like his word.

Those who come expectantly with a big measure wanting to hear and understand lots. Well they will be filled. And they will receive even more than they asked for. But for those who reject.

[10:43] For those who don't expect Jesus' words to mean very much or matter at all. Even what little understanding they receive will be taken away from them. The attitude with which we come to Jesus' word is crucial.

And that's why the invitation of both parables is to hear and consider carefully. Jesus is inviting the crowd. And through this gospel inviting us. To listen in and consider carefully what we hear from him.

So are we listening to Jesus' words as if these really are the words of God? As if this really is light in the darkness. Wonderfully good news of God's coming kingdom drawing near.

Or do we just treat it as mere words? How much do you value listening to Jesus when he speaks? There might have been some there at the time thinking.

Why all these parables? What is Jesus doing? Why tell stories that seem to confuse people? Why veil things? But yet these first two parables show us that Jesus' words aren't veiling.

[11:56] But revealing the kingdom of God. And we see that they are effective. Because there are already people choosing to follow. The big parable that Jesus told in verses 1 to 20 wasn't meant to make us pessimists about God's word.

But realists about the fact that some will reject. But what Jesus is reminding us here is that through him. The truth about God and the truth about salvation is being revealed to the world.

And so if you are a person who is accepting Jesus' invitation. And therefore listening to his words. That might even be you for the first time this evening. Hearing this in the way you've never heard before.

Let me say you're listening to the right thing. This is light breaking into darkness. And the choices we make to sacrifice time to come to church.

To Friday night live. To roots. To growth groups. To do a one-to-one Bible study. Even just to get up in the morning and read our Bibles. Are completely worth it.

[13:01] That is absolutely the right thing to do. That is how valuable the word is. And that is the right response. Because as we dig into that word. We trust that deeper and deeper riches will be given to us from that word.

We will understand more and more of who our God and Savior is. And that makes coming to God's words exciting. Not only is the God of the universe speaking to us.

But he will not stop. We will never exhaust the word of God. There will still be fresh depths to find. Even when you're in your 80s and 90s. And so we come expectantly.

Jesus is clear that whoever has will be given more. That's a promise we can trust. But it comes with a simultaneous warning. About our hearing.

Because we can be people who hear and then reject. And if you look at those verses. That isn't a particularly active rejection. It is just a passive rejection. Just not paying attention.

[14:07] Not seeing the value. And there is a cost to that rejection. For those who think that Jesus' words don't matter. And don't consider what they say.

In verse 25. Jesus says. Even what they have will be taken from them. When people reject Jesus' words. And his invitation to hear. They become more and more deaf to the truth.

We see this in Mark's gospel. With the Pharisees. Who even by this point in the story. Are already planning to have Jesus killed. Because they don't like his words. And the warning for all of us who are hearing this is.

If we stop listening to Jesus. Treating his words as insignificant. Then one day we might find. That we are people who were never listening at all. That we had no interest in Jesus really.

And we will face the consequences of that rejection. Things that Mark will make more clear. As we read through the rest of this gospel. But I want to say.

[15:10] With both the positive and negative reaction there. It's more of a pattern than a moment thing. If one day you find yourself struggling to concentrate on a Bible study.

If you're sitting here and struggling to concentrate on a sermon because you're tired. You don't need to panic. That doesn't mean the pattern of your life is rejection of Jesus' words. But at the same time.

That doesn't mean that because we heard one sermon. Or listened to one podcast about Christianity in the morning. And that we can just then ignore it the rest of the time. As if that's kind of

the box ticked and it doesn't matter anymore.

This is about our attitudes to him and his words. And whether we are listening. We're allowed to struggle with that. But we can always come back and listen more.

Now the most beautiful news about that. Is that Jesus is achieving more than we understand through his word though. And that's what the next two parables are about. So we're going to move on from these first two parables to the next two.

[16:16] In verses 26 to 32. Now I wonder if you can imagine being one of the crowd on the mountainside. Listening to Jesus speak. And say these parables.

As Jack pointed out a few weeks ago. People have come from all over the country to hear this. As Jonathan pointed out last week. These are images and ideas that people would understand.

They are images that are big parts of their lives in a farming community. But if they only have a surface hearing. They're just hearing a man on a hill.

Talk about house lights. Measuring bulls and farming. And there are definitely times. When it's easy to miss the significance. Of the things that we are hearing.

Because we're so familiar with it. I think maybe there's something in what Jesus says. Of just using images that people understand. Is actually meant to really make them think.

[17:12] Am I so familiar with this that I just don't care? Or actually am I going to focus in? Because sometimes the biggest things are overlooked. Because they just seem mundane.

And our thoughts about church can easily become like that. The church in the UK. Let's face it. Just occasionally seems like the background scenery. Of our culture. If you were to walk.

Up onto Great Western Road. Turn left. Walk all the way down to Byers Road. Turn left again. And go down to Partick. You would have come within 100 meters. Of more than 20 church buildings.

And yet.

Church attendance in Scotland. Is the lowest it's been in centuries. It would be easy to question.

Whether the message about Jesus. Really is significant. When it just seems to have so little cultural power.

When it's so rejected. And when Jesus' word just seems small. Is it really bringing about some sort of big kingdom? Well Jesus says yes.

[18:10] Yes it is. And the next two parables. Are going to grow our confidence in that. Because even though Jesus' word can seem small. It is growing a vast kingdom.

So the third of our four parables. Is about a harvest. Showing us. How Jesus' kingdom grows. Even as we don't see it. The picture is.

Of a farmer sowing a seed. From verse 26 onwards. And this time. It isn't about the soil. That the seed is planted into. But about the plant that grows.

The farmer scatters the seed. And then he just gets on. With the rest of his day. He just goes about. The rest of his business. Because the farmer can't force. This plant to grow.

And in fact in verse 27. The farmer can in fact. Go and sleep. And the plant will get on with growing anyway. The farmer doesn't need to understand. The intricate details of botany.

[19:06] To make the plant grow. The plant just grows. So the farmer just sows. And waits. Confident that one day. A harvest will come. And verse 28.

Implies that this growth. Is just incremental. It's a little bit at a time. Stage by stage. But it's always moving towards. That harvest of ripe grain. And so we ask.

Well in what way. Is God's kingdom like this? Well there's a few things. That we can learn. The first is that the kingdom. Really does just grow. Bit by bit. It takes time.

And for us. That will mean patience. We can't force the kingdom to grow. We can't force the church to expand. We can't coerce people. Into believing the gospel. And becoming Christians.

It's not how the kingdom grows. No kingdom growth takes time. Because only God grows his kingdom. What we can do.

[20:03] Is sow that word. Take it out. And wait. Trusting that the harvest. Is absolutely assured. We need not worry about the outcome.

God is building his kingdom. Through his word. And that's as sure as the sunrise. The kingdom will come. The parable then. Is both comforting.

But also a bit challenging. But there's more about the kingdom. To find out. On that second. On that final parable. From verse 30. And here.

It's about the size of the kingdom. What starts small. Looks. And looks insignificant. Will one day become huge. Now in Jesus' day. Mustard seeds. Were kind of the proverbial. Small thing. And it's at least the smallest thing. That anyone really interacts with. In their day to day lives. But in verse 32. Jesus says. It grows. And becomes the largest.

[ 20 : 56 ] Of all the garden plants. With such big branches. That the birds can perch. In its shade. In the same way. That you can't just look at an acorn. And imagine an oak tree.

By staring at it intently. You can't imagine the full extent. Of the kingdom. By just what we see of it. On display. Here on a Sunday. Jesus says.

That what looks small. And insignificant. Will grow to become something huge. We hear the stories about Jesus. And we don't easily think. This that I'm reading right now.

Is going to grow. A multinational kingdom. Of believers. But it is. And I'm sure. Even in Jesus' day. There were people in the crowd. So intent. On arguing over the relative size.

Of mustard seeds. And plants. That they missed the whole point. Of the parable. That yes it does seem insignificant. Initially. But it becomes far greater. Than we can imagine. And of course that's true.

[ 21 : 52 ] Because. A dusty 30 something. Religious teacher. In the Middle East. Sitting on a hill. Tearing stories about farming. Does not seem significant. In anybody's eyes. And yet.

That brought about. The kingdom of God. It must have seemed. Impossible. For many of those. There. That there would be. This big kingdom. Expanding around the world.

And through history. And yet. Here we are. 2,000 years later. 3,500 miles northwest. And we are still talking. About the words. That he said. On that hill. How small and weak.

That initial band of disciples. Looked. And yet. Going to Acts. They. Become bold. And by the spirit. Spark the early church. Into being. And preach to crowds. And are willing to be martyred.

For the sake of this message. How insignificant. And small. Jesus seems. And his humanity. And yet. He is the God. That flung the stars.

[ 22 : 47 ] Into space. The smallness of something. Does not mean. That it cannot become. Far bigger. And so.

The message for us. Is that. In the moment. That we're in. If I just focus. On the here and now. I'm not going to. Understand. The eventual outcome.

That only comes by trust. However small. The kingdom. Might look at any point. However small.

The world. The word. Feels. In my hands. And in my mouth. As I speak it to people. It will grow.

Jesus huge. Everlasting kingdom. And therefore. Both of those parables. About the kingdom. Are a challenge to us. And I think. In an age. Where everything is so fast.

And we're told. That huge. World changing events. Are happening. Every five minutes. In the face of. International politics. And commerce. The church. Just seems so small. And so insignificant.

[ 23 : 44 ] To our limited senses. And it might not look like. The kingdom is coming. And in a certain way. To one person. At one place. At one time. It will never look that way.

But as with the farmer. Who gets on with his work. As the crops grow. So we're called. To get on. Listening to Jesus. Trusting him. For the growth. Of his kingdom. But also.

In our age. In the kind of. Hyper connected age. That we live in. We do get a bit. Of a sense of this. Because if we look out. To the wider world. Jesus word. Is growing his kingdom. Absolutely.

The growth in the church. In the global south. And east. Is huge. And whilst Christianity. So often written off. In the west. Is irrelevant. It's changing whole countries. And cultures. In Africa. And Asia. For us then. Trust in Jesus. Looks like. Getting on with. What we are called to do. And trusting him. With what he will do.

[ 24 : 42 ] And being able to understand. The difference. We cannot force. The kingdom to grow. But we can get on. Listening. And sharing his words. With others. And that's where those four parables unite.

God's word. Does his work. To build his kingdom. Jesus will bring the growth. And we can have absolute confidence in that. So as I said.

We get on listening. And paying careful attention. To Jesus words. Trusting that he will build his kingdom. Kingdom. We so often want to judge the success of a church or a ministry. By how many people are coming along.

And how many people become Christians. And whilst those are wonderfully good and encouraging things. They are just not our goal. Our goal is to listen. And to faithfully get on with sowing the word.

And we can do so joyfully. Trusting that Jesus will use that to build his kingdom. This is a great comfort to us I think. When gospel work is hard. If you ever found yourself discouraged. [ 25 : 41 ] Because of your efforts to share your faith. With your colleagues. Or your sports team. Or people at school. Or your grandparents. Or grandchildren. When you find that hard.

Well take heart. Jesus is using that. If you're a leader of one of our small groups here. A roots group. A kids or youth ministry. And sometimes it feels like.

People aren't really growing. And bible studies feel like hard work. Take heart. The growth is coming. Even when you don't see it. We work hard.

Not always needing to see the outcomes of our work. To maintain confidence. Because we just believe that Jesus is at work. And will build his kingdom. And that friends.

Makes all the things we do as a church. In the ministry that we do. So much more exciting. Because God really is achieving something. With our words. When you really make an effort.

[ 26 : 38 ] To share with someone. God is using that. Even if in human terms. It doesn't seem like it's really very much of a difference. I had a beautiful picture of this a couple of weeks ago. By the kindness of God.

I bumped into a guy who was in one of the youth camps I led on years ago. I just bumped into him in the street. And honestly at the time of the youth camp. I cannot imagine anyone more disinterested in Jesus at all.

He was fully a bit of a pain in the neck. To actually try and teach about Jesus. He did not want to answer questions. And he did not want to participate in Bible studies. And when I bumped into him. I had a bit of that moment of.

Oh this might be quite an awkward conversation. But I was listening. When I asked him how he was. He said yeah I'm doing great. I'm actually off to my church for a membership meeting. Because I'm becoming a member.

And I just thought. Oh yeah fair enough. Jesus is doing his work. And I don't need to be able to see it. I just need to get on with it. And we trust that.

[ 27 : 35 ] And let me say. If it's your first time here. Or if it's your first time hearing about Jesus. The invitation is open to you. From Jesus. Come and listen to him. And consider very carefully.

What you hear about him. And for those of us who already know the Lord. It's our responsibility. After being careful to listen to his words. To go out and share those.

As light in the world. To reveal hope in a place of darkness. To take out the news of this kingdom. And its king. That are so good. And tell the world.

That this is where things are heading. Towards his glorious kingdom. Coming in full. So let's listen to Jesus expectantly. Going out confidently. Knowing that he will take what seems mundane and ordinary.

And use it to build his everlasting kingdom. Let's pray. Revelation chapter 7.

[ 28 : 31 ] And says this. After this I looked. And there before me was a great multitude. That no one could count. From every nation. Tribe. People. And language. Standing before the throne.

And before the lamb. And they were wearing white robes. And were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice. Salvation belongs to our God. Who sits on the throne.

And to the lamb. So Lord Jesus. We thank you. That you are growing your kingdom. Through your words. Help us to listen carefully as we hear you speak. Trusting that you are growing your kingdom.

And no less we pray in the name of our king. Amen. Amen.