

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: HOW THE KINGDOM COMES

MARK 4.21-34

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1. Last time Jesus explained to us why his preaching evoked such differing responses from the hearers, and why the kingdom of God was not coming in like a whirlwind to take over the world. Jesus isn't finished with his explanation yet, and so our text today will continue those same ideas. Jesus is still discussing the nature of the coming of the kingdom. He is also telling us what to do in light of the coming of the kingdom. So I want to handle this text by posing two questions: First: How does the kingdom come? And Second: What should we do about it?

2. And one more thing before we start: Be very careful how you listen to me this morning ☺ This is not a lecture on economics. This is not a perfunctory talk at the annual meeting of some community club. This is a Kingdom-Proclamation, and that means it holds great promise for those who hear rightly, and terrible woe for those who don't.

3. The words I say this morning will certainly do something to you, as the other two examples of speeches would not. If you listen aggressively, attentively, and with the determination to surrender to God's direction, you will continue on your way to eternal life. If you give only minimal attention, let your mind wander, or yield to distraction, the Word of the Kingdom has the potential to do something very different to you. Be very careful how you hear. Now let's deal with our first question:

HOW DOES THE KINGDOM COME?

1. In order to answer this question we look first at v21-22, the parable of the hidden lamp. Jesus makes the point here that lamps aren't for hiding! You don't light a lamp and then hide it or else you defeat the purpose for which you lit it! Lamps are

purposed to give light and so you place them somewhere open, prominent, and highly visible. In the same way, says Jesus, hidden things are meant to be revealed; think of parents hiding Easter eggs; the purpose of hiding those eggs is so that they will be found.

2. Now what does this lamp represent? One thing we need to know is our translations all do a bad job in v21. It does not literally say, "A lamp is not brought..." It says, "A lamp does not come." Now **this is a strange way to talk about a lamp**, which is why the translations modify it. They don't want to give the impression of a lamp walking on its own two legs into the room, like it were a person. But the Greek actually does give that picture, as if the lamp were coming on its own! The point is that the lamp clearly stands for something which is active, maybe even a person.

3. I think the lamp represents the kingdom of God, probably as it is centered in the person of Jesus. So: Jesus is saying that though the kingdom is presently hidden, it is not at all God's purpose to leave it that way, anymore than parents intend to keep Easter eggs permanently hidden! But now we have the first part of our answer to the question: How does the kingdom come? Answer: It comes like an Easter egg; God hides it behind the tree in the yard, but with the intention that it is eventually going to be revealed.

4. Let's put it as follows: God's redemptive Kingship, by which he is going to renew the entire world, is already present in the world at the time of Jesus, but it is present in a hidden, secret form. How does the kingdom come? It comes incognito; it comes in secret. But its secrecy is not at all permanent; there comes a time in the history of God's Kingship when the disguise is thrown off, and it reveals itself for what it is.

5. Imagine a foreign King who disguised himself and moved to an enemy nation. He is the King so he brings his Kingship with him, in his own person, wherever he goes. And once he arrives in the enemy country he goes to work subverting the

government of the enemy country. When the time is right he throws off his disguise and takes the country for himself. So How Does the Kingdom Come? It comes in hidden, secret form, anticipating the day when it will be fully revealed.

6. Ok. Next we have v26-29, another Parable about the growth of a seed. In this parable a man sows seed, then he goes about his business. After a period of time the seed comes to fruition and it's time for harvest. Our question is "What does the parable mean, and how does it shed light on the way the kingdom comes?"

7. Now I want to share with you a very helpful comment from RT France; his comment concerns methods for right interpretation of parables:

"It is a sound rule in parable interpretation to take as pointers to the parable's intended meaning any features of the story which are either improbable in themselves or are given unnecessary emphasis in the telling of the story."

8. In other words, when studying a parable we need to look for parts of the story that are strange or unexpected, or parts of the story which are given more emphasis than is necessary. So, what parts of this story are either strange or unduly emphasized? France points out 3:

9. First, the detail about the man going to bed and rising is not necessary to the story of the seed's growth. Second, the comment that the man doesn't understand how the seed grows, sticks out. Third, the detail that the seed grows "by itself" is strange. In fact, France points out that the word behind "of itself" is an unusual word better used of wild plants than of a cultivated crop.

10. Lastly, France points out that the parable gives a very unrealistic picture of agricultural labor! Any farmer who gave so little attention to his crop would have an unsatisfactory harvest. But all of this comes together to make Jesus' point about the coming of the kingdom pretty clear.

11. How does the kingdom come? It comes in a manner independent of human effort. It comes in a manner beyond the understanding of men. It grows and develops in a secret and mysterious way. All the farmer did was sow the seed; the innate powers of the seed took it from there, leading to a bounteous harvest. So if we undress this parable and leave it standing in its naked, exposed truth, what do we have?

12. Men preach the message of the kingdom of God. That message falls on the soil and initially may seem to have no results. Those men go away and concern themselves with other things. Meanwhile the Word of the Kingdom slowly, secretly, mysteriously begins to grow. It does so independent of human power or effort; it needs no man to help it. It does so apart from human understanding; men frankly don't grasp the process from Preached Word to Bountiful Harvest! The kingdom continues to grow until the end when it has reached its maturity and it is then right to say God's Saving Kingship has fully come! I might just add quickly that the end of v29 is likely an allusion to Joel 3.13, where God is threatening his judgment on all the nations. This means that Jesus isn't just talking about the progress of the kingdom in his day, but rather he's talking about the totality of its progress from his first coming to his second, in the future.

13. So how does the kingdom come? Secretly, with hiddenness, in obscurity; then it begins to grow mysteriously, totally independent of human effort or understanding, according to the divine power resident within it. We can't understand it; we aren't the ones doing it. It doesn't need our help. That's how the kingdom comes. Now one more piece to the answer and we'll be ready to move on.

14. In v30-32, Jesus gives one more parable, this time about a mustard plant. Now the plant in question is probably what's known as the Black Mustard, the seed of which is extremely small, maybe about the size of a pen tip; when full grown, however, it can reach heights of 10 feet or more so that it dwarfs many other garden plants.

15. Now whereas the last parable was concerned with the growth of the kingdom, this mustard parable is concerned with the contrast between the beginning and end of the kingdom. The mustard plant has an exceedingly small beginning, and a surprisingly large end. And that's not all; Jesus adds an interesting detail at the end of v32:

16. He says the mustard forms large branches so the birds can nest under its shade. Now remember the principle RT France gave us above? Here we go again: Technically it is not accurate to use this Greek phrase of the branches of the mustard plant. Sure, it grows to impressive size, but to call it a tree is a serious exaggeration. So what's going on here?

17. Well, as with the last parable, so here also Jesus makes an important allusion to the OT in the end of v32. The language is straight out of Daniel chapter 4. In that place Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, has a dream where he sees a great tree grow up and provide shade for the animals, with the birds nesting in its branches. Daniel interprets the dream to speak of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian kingdom, which had grown to amazing proportions and ruled over the other nations.

18. So now back to the mustard plant. The kingdom of God starts exceedingly small, with one wandering Carpenter, but is destined to rule over all the nations, and indeed, to be a blessing to all the nations as they find rest and provision in its shade, as forest creatures do under a great tree. So how does the kingdom come? It comes first, seemingly so insignificant as to hardly be noticed, but by the end it will be the super-power which rules over and provides for all the peoples on the face of the earth. I like how one writer puts it when he says that the figure which is used here indicates that the kingdom of God has imperial pretensions. Why, Yes, yes it does ☺

19. There's coming a time when all the governments of this world will get on their knees, put their faces in the dust, and worship before the Son of Man. They will come to Him to get their orders, and then they will diligently carry them out. Well,

so much for How the Kingdom Comes. Now it's time to ask What we should do about it?

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT?

1. v24 has our answer: We must be very careful about how we listen. We need to recall at this point how many times the subject of hearing has surfaced during chapter 4. Hearing is one of the most important issues in this and the last text. In fact, how we listen to the preaching of the kingdom is so serious that it will determine our future, either in blessedness or in ruin.

2. Jesus speaks of the standard of measure which we use being the same measure which will return to us; we are looking at a simple law of reciprocity. This is a form of the idea: "What you do comes back to you." But it is that idea within the realm of how you sit here and listen to this sermon! So what is going on here?

3. In v25 Jesus speaks of some people having something, and God responds by giving them more; then some others don't have something, and so what they do have is taken away. This is another way to express the measure idea above. So here's what's going on:

4. Be careful how you listen! If you come to church for something other than reception of the Word of God and determination to respond with faith and obedience, you are listening wrongly! If you do not apply yourself to the message given, you are listening wrongly! If you do not approach this sermon as a spiritual person would, you are listening wrongly!

5. How would a spiritual person approach it? With prayer, with diligent study beforehand, as a way of life, living in the pursuit of biblical truth throughout the week, whether in bible study or sermon-listening or reading good Christian books! Don't you see that your preparation for this sermon has been going on all week? And that is so whether that preparation was good or bad. If you spent your entire week in the frivolities and banalities of life, in the pointless, mundane, worldly,

unspiritual, Christless trivialities of entertainment and hobby and business, and who knows what, your preparation has been unsuccessful, and you are not listening as Jesus would have you listen.

6. There is a spiritual dullness which the Bible condemns. It is a spiritual dullness for which people are guilty. It isn't God's fault; it is men's fault. It is a pre-existing incapacity to receive the Word of God. And it results in a Sermon-Listener who can think of nothing except how long this sermon is going.

7. What is the cause of this spiritual dullness? Prayerlessness. Neglect of Scripture and Theology. Willing disobedience to the Word of God however small. Unrepentance. Unbelief. Lack of focus on God's redemptive plan for the world. Lack of concern over your place in that plan. These things cause spiritual dullness.

8. And there's more: Excessive Television. Excessive video gaming. Excessive entertainment and hobbies. The need to always be busy with everything but our souls. Allowing sin to remain and grow in our families. And of course you know which aspect of our lives takes the gold on making us spiritual dullards who can't hear a sermon to save our lives, right? You guessed it! That little, black, rectangular god in your pocket! What Satan and his legion of demons have failed to do for 2,000 years has now been successfully accomplished by Verizon and ATT.

9. This subject is worth a month of sermons, but I'll only say this about it: If tomorrow every soul in this church lost the ability to use media devices the spiritual health of this church would go through the roof.

10. Well, that's an overstatement, isn't it? I believe it is. Because the fact is, All Get What They Want. If some person in here simply has no interest in knowing God and doing his will, taking away their I Phone would only result in them finding some other idol, and that quickly. That's who we are as sinners.

11. And that's a fair picture of how we violate Jesus' command to be careful how we listen. Recall that Jesus is dealing with people whose ears have become deafened. So

what does the other side look like? And how does this connect with the nature of the coming of the kingdom?

12. Well, I've told you the kingdom comes slow and secret, hidden and mysterious. That means that anyone who demands immediate, explosive sensation in the coming of the kingdom is bound to be disappointed; the kingdom doesn't come that way. Subsequently such persons won't stick around long enough to understand Christ, nor will they press in deeper to become part of his inner circle. As soon as they get bored they start checking their Facebook and wander away to catch a movie.

13. So Jesus exhorts us to listen carefully, attentively, aggressively, persistently, and with prayer, study, faith, repentance, and a serious determination to enter the kingdom of God. Give it time and you'll see this mustard seed grow into a Dominant World Power. Listen with persistent faith and determination and when it grows into that World Power, you'll be one of the creatures who huddle underneath to enjoy the shade and blessing.

14. I'm calling on every person here to ensure they are living a spiritual life, caring specially for the wellbeing of their soul. If all you have time for is work then you are working too much. If you have to work that much then you're spending too much. If all you have time for is work, family, and the pursuit of God, then social media has to go. So long and farewell. Or any other hobby or pursuit which hinders you. I'm calling on us, if need be, to turn a corner now and devote ourselves to grow in obedience and faith to God. To be full of good works and service to the church.

15. Why? Because all of this is simply cultivation of the ear. Don't be a spiritual dullard who brings nothing to the preaching of the kingdom and consequently receives nothing. Start preparing for the Preaching of the Word on Monday morning. Be careful how you hear.

SUMMARY

1. How does the kingdom come? Secretly and in hiddenness, quietly and mysteriously and with almost invisible smallness. It grows apart from human effort and wisdom, by the divine power resident within it, until finally it becomes The One, Uncontested, World Power within which the nations find shelter and blessing.

2. And what should we do because of this? We must be very careful to hear rightly, reckoning wisely with the small beginnings of the kingdom, not simply despising and ignoring it. This right hearing amounts to a lifestyle of personal, spiritual cultivation to avoid spiritual dullness, since what we bring to the preaching of the kingdom is proportionate to what we'll get out of it.