

“The Progress of God’s Kingdom”
(Mark 4:26-29)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation: Jesus has been showing His disciples something of the nature of the kingdom He was bringing in their days and has now brought into the world.

1. This kingdom is not like other kingdoms in the sense that it has specific location and boundaries:

- a. It’s a spiritual kingdom that affects the hearts and so the lives of everyone that becomes a part of it by faith.
- b. Since it’s not geo-political in nature, the way it grows is also different: Not by force of arms, but rather by the force of truth – truth made powerful by the Spirit of God.

2. That’s what we see in the parables.

- a. Jesus showed us in the Parable of the Sower that the kingdom expands by broadcasting the Gospel through preaching and witnessing.
 - (i) Because most of the hearts it will fall on are hard, most will reject it.
 - (ii) There will also be many who receive it initially, but who will fall away because they’re unwilling either to give up this world or their comfort.
 - (iii) But there will be those who receive it, whose lives will be changed, and who will bear the good fruit of righteousness.
- b. Jesus showed us something similar in the Parable of the Lamp.
 - (i) Since the kingdom grows through broadcasting the truth, He has committed His truth to His church.
 - (ii) We are to shine that truth intensely – all of it.
 - (iii) We are to shine it to everyone – to as many as we can.
 - (iv) And we are to know that the Lord will reward us according to how generously we do this, and even more.

B. Preview.

1. The next two parables – that of the seed and that of the mustard seed – have to do with how the kingdom will progress and how large it will get. This morning, we’ll consider the first of these two.

- a. Again Jesus uses agriculture to illustrate His point – after all, He was speaking to an agrarian society.
 - (i) The farmer prepares his field; he plants his seed; then he waits.
 - (ii) The seed sprouts and grows – how, he doesn’t know, except that God causes it to do so by His inscrutable wisdom.
 - (iii) The blade comes up, then the head, then the mature grain.
 - (iv) When it reaches maturity, the field is harvested.
- b. What did Jesus mean by this? Actually two things.
 - (i) He is showing us how the Gospel progresses in the lives of individuals.
 - (ii) And He is showing us how it advances in the world as a whole.

(iii) As the seed of the Gospel is sown in the world and hearts are changed, so is the world.

2. Let's consider two things:
 - a. How the kingdom progresses in the heart.
 - b. And how it progresses in the world.

II. Sermon.

A. First, how does the kingdom of God progress in your heart?

1. It begins with the sowing of the seed.
 - a. This has to happen first: you must hear the Gospel. Paul writes, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).
 - b. Whether or not you listen to it also has a great deal to do with how it affects you:
 - (i) If you close your ears, it won't penetrate and produce new life.
 - (ii) But if you take it in prayerfully, the Lord will cause it to bring life.
2. Once the seed is sown, the Lord will either cause it to germinate or not.
 - a. This has to do with whether it is His sovereign good pleasure – very few are converted compared to the number who hear the Gospel.
 - b. He doesn't always convert those who hear right away.
 - (i) Sometimes He will have you listen to the Gospel for years before He raises you spiritually – sometimes He will make you seek for a while until you really want it.
 - (ii) Sometimes, He will convert you all at once.
3. Once germination takes place, He causes that seed to grow.
 - a. Once He has raised you, there is an immediate change in your heart and mind – your disposition to the Lord and His Word change – the things you used to hate, you now love; and the things you used to love, you now hate.
 - b. That principle grows and becomes stronger.
 - (i) You begin as a spiritual baby – the Lord gives you a lot of comfort; there aren't too many trials.
 - (ii) You continue to mature – advancing from childhood to adulthood.
 - (iii) You become more and more fruitful, more and more useful to the Master.
 - (iv) Your treasures in heaven increase, as well as your trials on earth.
 - (v) How the Lord does this isn't always clear.
 - (a) He often takes you down paths you never thought He would.
 - (b) And yet each step causes you to grow.
 - (c) His ways are unfathomable – but they are good.
4. Let's pause here for a moment of self-examination: Are you spiritually alive and growing? Where are you in this process?
 - a. Has the seed of the Gospel been sown in your heart?
 - (i) Have you heard it; have you listened to it?
 - (ii) Has it penetrated deep into your soul?
 - (iii) If it hasn't, you must let it penetrate.
 - (a) Your eternal wellbeing depends on it.
 - (b) Listen to what Jesus says to you this morning.

- b. Has the Gospel germinated in you?
 - (i) Has it become a living principle in your heart? Has it changed your life?
 - (ii) It must if you are to see heaven.
 - (iii) If it hasn't, then pray and ask the Lord to grant you new life:
 - (a) Pray that He would give you eyes to see and ears to hear.
 - (b) Pray that He would melt your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

- c. Is that truth maturing in you?
 - (i) Are you growing in your understanding? Is your love for Him increasing?
 - (ii) Are you doing more of what the Lord calls you to do?
 - (a) Are you ministering your gifts to your brothers and sisters in the Lord?
 - (b) Are you ministering the Gospel to others?

 - (iii) If not, why not? What's choking its fruitfulness? Are you not willing to give up your comfort? Are you *not willing to let go of the world*?
 - (a) Whatever it is, get rid of it. Your life depends on it.
 - (b) Remember, you only have so much time to serve Him in this life, so much time to store up heavenly treasure.

- d. Take a good look at what your life is bearing, because this is what the Lord will be looking at on the day of His judgment.
 - (i) Are you living for His glory? Are you being useful to Him and others?
 - (ii) If not, then repent and seek to be more fruitful.
 - (iii) Do what needs to be done to advance His work in your heart.
 - (iv) That day is coming.

B. Second, let's consider how the kingdom progresses in the world.

1. It progresses, first, through the sowing of the Gospel.
 - a. The Lord has called His church to sow the Gospel – year after year, generation after generation.
 - (i) That responsibility is partly ours, because we are part of the church.
 - (ii) The Lord calls you to sometimes to sow, sometimes to water, as He gives you opportunity.

 - b. Every farmer knows if he doesn't sow seed, he'll have no crop – if we're not sowing the Gospel, we can't expect anyone to be saved.
 - (i) Are you using your God-given opportunities?
 - (ii) Are you building bridges to others – not hiding the Gospel only to risk burning your bridge once it's built, but with the Gospel at the forefront?
 - (iii) The Lord has not called us merely to make friends, but to make disciples – to save their souls.

2. It progresses, second, through the Lord's faithfulness – He will cause the kingdom to move forward as you are faithful to sow the Gospel.
 - a. As more people hear and come into the kingdom by faith, there will be more sowers, and with more sowers, the potential of a much greater harvest.

- b. You don't always see or understand the effect your witness has on the kingdom.
 - (i) Just as the farmer doesn't understand the process by which his seed grows into plants, so you don't always understand everything the Lord is doing through you to build His kingdom.
 - (ii) But you can know that He is building it through you, as you are faithful to tell others about Jesus Christ.

- 3. Know that eventually there will be a harvest.
 - a. There will be particular harvests.
 - (i) Sowing and watering will always bring souls to conversion.
 - (ii) And of course, there have been those great times of revival when the Lord pours His Spirit out and thousands are harvested at once.

 - b. And there will be the great harvest at the end of the age.
 - (i) The Lord will send forth His reapers – the holy angels.
 - (ii) They will bind all the tares – all those who would not repent and believe – and cast them into the lake of fire.
 - (iii) But they will gather His wheat – true believers – and bring them into the Lord's storehouse – the new heavens and earth.

- 4. And so how's your farming going? Are you sowing, are you watering, are you working towards that day?
 - a. You must sow if you are to see a harvest.
 - (i) If you don't share the Gospel with your family members, your children, your friends, they will remain unbelievers.
 - (ii) But if you do – though you may have to put up with their complaints and cutting remarks – some of that seed will penetrate, some of it will germinate, and some of them will be saved.
 - (iii) Isn't it worth any price, any difficulty you might have to face, to save even one of these precious souls from eternal damnation?
 - (iv) Somehow, we don't seem to see how important this is until our opportunities are all gone.

 - b. And so,
 - (i) Let's take up the Gospel and begin to sow.
 - (ii) Let's pray for opportunities to reach those who are near and far.
 - (iii) And let's pray that as we sow, the Lord will bless that holy seed, that it will penetrate, germinate and lead to a great harvest.
 - (iv) Next time, we'll consider the encouragement the Parable of the Mustard Seed gives us as to how large and powerful the kingdom will eventually become.
Amen.