



The Joy of God's Plan

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Mark 4:21-34

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*<sup>21</sup> 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? <sup>22</sup> For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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>26</sup> And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. <sup>28</sup> The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. <sup>29</sup> But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." <sup>30</sup> And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, <sup>32</sup> 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>33</sup> With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. <sup>34</sup> He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.*

*(Pastor prays)*

Friday night in this very room, we had our graduation from Hickory Grove Christian School. Most of you are sitting right here again this morning. It was all of the family and the friends and those close to the students who came. I stood out in the lobby, greeting people and a guy came through I'd never seen before. He said his niece was graduating and hugged me. Brother, I'm not going off to war, go find your seat in there. Anyway, people crowded in here and the graduates were in the balcony where a lot of you are seated

right now. They lined up and when “Pomp & Circumstance” began, they walked down the stairs and when the first graduate hit the floor right over there, the crowd of parents and friends and family started to celebrate. Any idea of decorum was thrown out the window, and I think it was because it felt so *good* to see so many kids accomplishing so *much*. Not only that, I mean accomplishment is one thing but you can look back, put the diploma on the wall and say *that’s* what I accomplished.

And a lot of them are looking forward. In that class of graduates, there are close to \$12 million of scholarships that were given. When you look forward, you can’t really know how certain things are going to go, but when you look back, you can see what you’ve done. You can write it down and say, “that’s my history.” When you look forward, you can get anxious because you don’t know what it’s going to be like down the road. We understand that God has a plan and He is working out His plan, but the problem is we can’t see His plan. But in Chapter 4 of Mark, part of God’s plan is unfolding and it’s Jesus. Jesus is not only healing and raising people. He’s not only feeding people and doing miracles, He is teaching. And He’s teaching that this gospel truth drops into the soil of your heart. There’s only one kind of soil that does any good. It is that soil where the crop begins to produce. That theme continues now in Mark 4:21 when he begins to give a statement about what it looks like to be in the Kingdom, what it looks like to follow God’s plan. And I hope this morning you can take this away with you if you’re one of God’s people.

### God’s People Take Joy in God’s Plan

God’s people look back and we can see all that He’s done and you can write it down in history. You can celebrate your accomplishments. But what I’m asking you to do is to look forward into what you *can’t* see. That is God’s plan. I’m going to encourage you to rejoice in God’s plan. How are we going to do that? Well, we need a couple of things along the way and hopefully this passage will help us. Here’s the first one. Number one. We need to see that the word of God is God’s plan and should be our focus.

## The word of God is our focus

What I want to do is take verse 21 and read all the way down to verse 25. Let me read it and give some comment and then we'll come back and make some application. If you're a guest, we just go through the Bible and the sermon *is* what the Bible says. So join me there. <sup>21</sup> *And he said to them,* (Now we don't know who "them" is. It's more than the twelve and less than the great crowd, but it's a lot of people there. He spoke to them. You will see that language over and over. It's the emphasis on Jesus' teaching. And here comes a little pithy statement. It's not really a parable, it's more like a rhetorical statement. This is ridiculous. It's meant to be absurd. *"Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?"* <sup>22</sup>

So you have two rhetorical questions. The absurdity says, of course, that's not what you do. You put it on a stand. *For nothing is hidden* (He's going to talk about himself now.) *except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.* (He is the lamp in verse 21.) He is no longer held secret in the Old Testament. He has now come to the Earth. John the Baptist was the forerunner. Jesus came, was baptized, fulfilling Scripture, and is shown to be the Messiah. His ministry is unfolding, people are being healed. His teaching is fulfillment of scripture and what He's saying here is, Now, this is going to spread around the world. <sup>23</sup> *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.*" When I pray for you, that's what I pray. When I pray about Sundays, I pray that I would not say anything that would be outside of what the Bible says and that it would be honoring to the Lord and good for the people He's given me to pastor. When I pray for you specifically, I pray that God gives you spiritual discernment and when you hear, your soul is fed, your heart is full and your mind is right before the Lord.

Jesus says "He who has ears to hear, let him hear, and then He takes that forward in verse 24 <sup>24</sup> *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.* You have to pay attention to what you hear with the measure you use. It will be measured to you as you pay attention. Those

dividends will pay off. It's going to be worth it if you'll pay attention. And still more will be added to you. And verse 25 is a bit of a scary verse. <sup>25</sup> *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.*" For to the one who has been paying attention—you're using the measure, you're investing your mind and heart—more will be given. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

So there are the two statements. Now let's go back to it and let me make some application. What do we do? What does this tell us to do? The first one tells us to share the Gospel. And you might even want to write it like this: shine the Gospel. You see it in verse 21, right? There's the lamp. What is the lamp supposed to do? The lamp is not supposed to be put under a basket. It's not supposed to be put under a bed. You take that lamp, which is Christ, and you put it in the most prominent place in the house so that the light can cascade down on a dark room. That lamp that He's talking about would be a clay pot with olive oil and a little handle. It would be an open flame. Jesus says, that's me. And everybody here, if you've been coming for any time, there are a couple of things that you already know. If you've come to Hickory Grove for let's say a year, you probably accidentally have memorized Isaiah 40:8: "The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever." OK, you didn't mean to memorize that, but you've got it.

You know what else you have? You actually have the Gospel. Every single Sunday I use the exact same template to talk through what the Gospel is. You understand that God is a holy creator. He created us in His image. We have that image of God in us but it is disfigured by your sin. So we have a Holy God, sinful men, and there is a problem. You see, Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God. He lived perfectly and died on the cross in the place of sinners. God raised Him from the dead. So you have God, man, Christ and now there is a necessary response for the Gospel to be appropriated to your heart. And that response is repentance and a faith in what Christ has done for you. You turn from your sin and turn to Jesus.

Now you know the Gospel, you have it. When you read this passage in verse 21, Jesus is saying you have the lamp. You have it. You don't take that and cover it up and put it somewhere where it's not useful. You take that Gospel and put it at the most prominent part of your life and that Gospel becomes useful. That's how people are won to Christ. You've got an iPhone? On the screen, Apple has done something to it that has baffled all old people like me. So often now I accidentally touch it in some way and the flashlight comes on and all the kids make fun. Look at the old man with his flashlight on in his pocket. You've got the flashlight. That's not how that's supposed to work. Here's the lamp. We don't put that away somewhere, we share the Gospel.

And what else do we do? I'll give a second thing to consider in this one point. We trust that the Gospel will do its work. In verse 22, Jesus says, *For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light*. This is the unfolding of God's revelation in Jesus. It will come about. We'll talk more about it in a minute, but let's just say, you and I are **not** making a sales pitch to people when we share the Gospel. We are not putting pressure on anyone because the gospel will do its work. Paul says that it is the power of God unto salvation. What else do we do with this? I'll give you a third thing to consider. We lean on the Gospel. What did He say there in verse 23? *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.*" That's the discernment. God has given you a measure of discernment so that you can separate truth from fiction. And Jesus, even dials it in. If you have ears, let you hear. So we put our full weight on the Gospel of Jesus. I'll give you something else. We should be growing in the Gospel. Look at what Jesus says in verse 24. *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.* So that's the command, with the measure you use in paying attention. What is the measure you put into hearing when you really apply yourself? It will be measured back to you. In other words, you can grow as a Christian in the Gospel. There is discipleship. This is your community or your discipleship group. This is you finding out more. What a pity it is for people to come to church their entire life and never actually grow in discipleship.

I'll give you one more command I think is here in verse 25. That is to believe the Gospel. I want to address any of you here who are not yet Christians. You're not sure. There's something haunting about verse 25 when you read it. Jesus says, for the one who has, the one who is receiving, who is hearing and listening more, you're going to keep growing. And then the verse turns its attention to those who are not. <sup>25</sup> *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.*" Here is the person who's not a Christian, but who has benefited in some way from being around Christians and being connected to the church. You've benefited from *cultural* Christianity. There has been a sense of decency over the last century or so, that Christianity, even if you weren't a Christian, was brought to the forefront. Now that's fading. It feels as if Romans 1 is coming true in our own world. You've seen all the stuff going on with Target. In Romans 1, where the judgment of God is, that God gave them over to their own depraved minds. It feels like we live in that and verse 25 is saying those who have benefited and are not Christians, but they benefited from being close to the church or close to a Christian, even what you've benefited from is taken away from you. So my appeal to you is to believe the Gospel of God that's been so lovingly given to you today. Come and receive the grace of God found in Jesus. We're marching forward as part of God's Kingdom, and we do so joyfully. But in order for that joy to remain, the word of God must be our focus.

Let's drop down into the parables. You'll find them there in verse 26. It's the second point, #2. If the word of God is our focus...

### **The Kingdom of God is our hope**

There are two parables and both of them are about the Kingdom. Let's read them and then talk about them. Join me in verse 26. By the way, verse 26 starts a parable that you won't find in any other place in the Gospels. This parable is unique to Mark. I don't know why Mark chose to have this one and nobody else picked it up. But Mark puts it here for us to read. Let's pay special attention to what he says here in verse 26. <sup>26</sup> *And he said, "The kingdom of*

*God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.* It's the farmer. He goes and does his work. His work is to test the seed. He's sowing the seed and the seed hits the ground. We hope it's going to take root. He does that in verse 26. And in verse 27, he goes about his routine. He sleeps, he rises, night and day. He doesn't worry about what's going on out there. The seed sprouts and grows. It does what it's going to do. In verse 26 and 27, he doesn't know how it works. That's not his job. And in verse 28 Jesus says, *The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.* The Greek word is the word we have for "automatic." It has nothing to do with the farmer. He sowed the seed. Everything else now is out of his hands. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. There's a process going here. <sup>29</sup> *But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

So you have three things. You have the sowing of the seed, the growing of the seed, and the harvesting of the crops. So let's back up and pull some things out of this parable. You ready? Let's go to it in verse 26. What do we do? What we learn is our obligation. Here's the first obligation. It is to sow the seed. That's our job. Our only job is to share the Gospel. What does the farmer do? His job isn't to make it grow. His job is to share the Gospel, put the seed on the ground. That's the only thing he can do. We scatter the seed. You have it within you to share the Gospel. You know the Gospel. God has given you people in your life who need to hear the Gospel. You don't manipulate it, you don't turn it into a sales pitch. You don't put pressure. You only *share* the Gospel. That's what the farmer does in verse 26.

Now come down in verse 27. What else can we learn here? Verse 27 tells us that you and I must trust providence. What is providence? Providence is God working. We trust that God is going to actually do the work. Do you see us described in verse 27? We are the farmer. He sleeps, he rises, night and day, he goes about his business. He's not worried about it. There's nothing he can do. It's out of his control. All of that anxiety, all of that pressure, no. In fact, Jesus tells us that he rises, night and day, he sleeps. The seed sprouts and it

grows. He even gives a little commentary. The farmer doesn't know how it works. That's not his business. Look, our business is to share the Gospel, and God's business is to save people. *You* do not save people, but God *does*. And the way He does it is through the Gospel you have shared. That's how God has chosen to save and call people to Himself, and you have been given the grace of sharing the Gospel. God will do all of the work. So what do we do? We stand back and pray.

In verse 27 Jesus says the farmer doesn't know how it works. Neither do I. All I can do is share the Gospel and pray to God to please open their heart. God, please make their hearts filled with nutrients so that the Gospel seed would grow. Please send the rain so that they are ready and that there would be something that happens. I don't know how it works. I don't know why God works like He does. But we trust that God's doing the work. We trust that there is something happening. In verse 28, there is something that is ongoing. The seed is dropped into the ground, and in verse 28, the Earth produces by itself. What does that tell us? We trust how God works.

And then in verse 29 we look expectantly for the result. Notice the wording in verse 29. There are a couple of ways to understand this. I'll look briefly at both of them.<sup>29</sup> *But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.*" Now there are two ways to understand the harvest. This feels like it's quoting Joel 3 and Revelation 14. It speaks of the final day when the angels will come and harvest all of the souls. Those who are in Christ will spend eternity with God running toward the new Heaven and the new Earth. Those who are not in Christ will spend eternity tortured in Hell. It feels like that.

So let me pause and say, if you are not in Christ, but you had the seed of the Gospel planted in your heart, ask God to save you based on what you have heard. So now we look to the result of God's saving people. That's one way to understand it. Or it could be that Jesus has given us the typical cycle: sowing, growing, and harvesting. The seed was sown and then your heart begins to



grow. It's the natural process of being a Christian. And one day, when you have breathed your last, you will be harvested, so to speak, with Jesus.

So we have the first parable of the Kingdom. That first parable tells us that the Kingdom of God is our hope. Let's look very quickly at the second parable of the Kingdom. You pick it up with me in verse 30. Let me just read briefly and comment, verse 30. <sup>30</sup> *And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?"*

It's interesting that He would ask two questions here. It's like you saying, "Let me see if I can explain this in a way that you can understand it. What shall we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use?" So here is the parable of the mustard seed that is so small, and the Kingdom of God that is so large. <sup>31</sup> *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.*

Now science will tell you it's not the smallest seed. He's talking to Palestinians. It would be the smallest seed that *they* know. He's making a point. <sup>32</sup> *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."* What is the point of that parable? I'll give you a couple of ways to look at it. One would understand that the point is that God can use the smallest acts, the smallest things you can do, God can use the most inconsequential words. You can never know when a small seed is planted. The understanding is that the mustard seed is so small, and the Kingdom of God (or the mustard tree), is the largest one of the garden. It spreads out wherever it wants to. It's so big the birds can come and sit on it. And the point of this parable is not that there's power in the seed. The point is that there's power in God, that God is the one who's going to take something so small and turn it into something that is so large. The point is a kind word, a dinner invitation, it's you saying to a neighbor, "how can I pray for you?"

We baptized 15 people last Sunday. Two of them were a father and son, Tom Jones with his son. Tom has been an officer here at Hickory Grove, protecting

us. I am so thankful for the police who are here. Tom and his wife have been here at Hickory Grove for a while. He wasn't raised in a church but over the course of time just small seeds were planted. Do not despise the day of the small seeds. There are people right now volunteering in the nursery so that moms and dads who have had a hard week can come and worship. The volunteers are doing that so this can happen. The men and women who are the greeters, they were here before me this morning. I walked by and they're standing at the door on a rainy, terrible Memorial Day weekend. There are gonna be folks who come into this building, a lot of you sitting right here, who have had a terrible week and a greeter just says something kind. It's just a seed.

Friday night, Abby Sampson, one of our very own at Hickory Grove Christian School gave the graduation speech and that speech was laced and filled and covered with the Gospel. This started so small. The Kingdom of God, the Bible teaches, is going to flourish. It flourishes and goes where it wants, and it starts with something small. The word of God is our focus and the Kingdom of God is our hope. Let me pull one last thing out of verses 33 and 34. I'll make this a third Point. #3.

### **The Grace of God is our comfort**

There is grace in verses 33 and 34. Mark provides an editorial with two parts, both filled with grace. So let's look at the first grace in verse 33. <sup>33</sup> *With many such parables he spoke the word to them, (Look at this grace right here.) as they were able to hear it.* What do you learn there? You can understand the Gospel. It's not over your head. It's not more complicated than you can understand. The promise of verse 33 is that when Jesus speaks to the people, what He says there is said in such a way that they get it. Your problem is not that you don't get it. You get it. Your problem is submitting your life to the grace of God found in Jesus. You can understand Gospel truth. That's for those who maybe are not in Christ, but let's come closer here in verse 34. Look at the grace here in verse 34 for his closest disciples. I love verse 34. Verse 34 tells us, <sup>34</sup> *He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately*

(here's your discipleship) *to his own disciples he explained everything.* So, for those of you who are not saved, you can understand the Gospel. But, for those of you who are, you can grow in the truth of the Gospel. God has brought you close. He's brought you here. You have a Bible. You have a community group. You have a discipleship group. You have a family of believers around you. You have the truth in front of you, the spirit of God dwells in you. You can grow in the Gospel. This is Kingdom talk here. In God's Kingdom plan, how do you do it? The word of God is our focus. The Kingdom of God is our hope. And the grace of God is our comfort.

*(Pastor prays)*