

## “Understanding the Kingdom of God”

Mark 4:21-34

This morning we're in the fourth chapter of Mark, verses 21 through 34. We're in a section of Mark where Jesus taught His disciples the truth about the 'kingdom' using a series of parables. When you hear the word 'kingdom,' what exactly comes to mind? For some of you, your mind goes to a resort park in Florida known as the 'magic kingdom.' Or, others of you may have something else in mind altogether. There is something about the concept of a kingdom that strikes a chord deep within our hearts. From the earliest days of civilization, there has always been this fascination with kingdoms and empires. We're intrigued by the kings and rulers of history, whether they be those mentioned in Scripture such as David and Solomon, or figures such as the Caesars of Rome or the kings and queens who have worn the British crown. One writer says it this way:

**Tony Evans** — *“There is Napoleon, the dominator of continental Europe, who possessed a formidable intellect and superior mind. There is Genghis Khan, the evil and brutal ruler who conquered most of the world during his time. There are the Pharaohs, most of whom possessed strength and skill to such a degree that for many centuries they led Egypt beyond the others in academics, buildings, medicine, and writing...Stories of conquerors, conquests, rebellions, and conspiracy mesmerize us. We tell them to our children in fairy tales riddles with kings, queens, princes, princesses, and kingdoms...The life of a king or queen is often envied. Yet that envy is naive. Any true historian knows the utter fragility that comes with ultimate power. As Shakespeare wrote, ‘Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.’”*

There is One who is worthy to wear the crown! Keep in mind what Mark says about how Jesus began His ministry:

**Mark 1:14-15—“Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”**

Jesus came preaching the message of the kingdom. And to say to that ‘kingdom of God is at hand’ is to say that it has come near. That which Israel’s prophets had foretold and wrote about has now come near in the person of God’s Son. Jesus is the King, and He has come to usher in the kingdom. When the Bible refers to the kingdom of God, it is referring to the complete and total rule of God over all of creation. He will usher in the plan and purpose that He has always had in mind for His creation. Now, in this fourth chapter of Mark, Jesus presents a series of parables that are known as ‘kingdom’ parables because they explain the nature of God’s coming kingdom. (Read)

Many would say that the ‘kingdom of God’ is the unifying theme of the Bible. While that phrase is rarely used in the Old Testament, the concept unfolds from Genesis to the Prophets and reaches its fulfillment in the New Testament through Jesus Christ. Understanding this progression is essential for interpreting Jesus’ teaching in passages like Mark 4. Without this understanding, we’d be left in the dark about what He means when He refers to the kingdom.

When Jesus refers to the kingdom of God, those in the first century knew what He was talking about. We’re entering a conversation about a subject that had already been going on for centuries. Maybe you’ve had the experience of joining a conversation already underway and feeling lost. For you to understand what is going on, someone needs to bring you up to speed. Or you want to watch a ballgame on television, but you turn it on halfway through. You see the score and wonder how it came to be that way. Well, that’s sort of the way it is with our understanding of the kingdom of God. If we start with the New Testament as the

foundation for what the kingdom means, we'll quickly find ourselves in the middle of a conversation that we didn't start and don't fully understand. In the first century, God's people shared some expectations about what the kingdom means. Jesus challenged many of those expectations, but He also clarified them. That's exactly what He does in the kingdom parables. And so for that reason, I want to give you just a basic 'big picture' overview of what the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God. Which means we're not going to look at the parables themselves this morning, we'll come back to them, but I do want you to grasp what is meant by the term 'kingdom of God.' And so this is topical, but I believe it will help us better understand these kingdom parables.

### **#1 – The kingdom is intended with God's universal rule over His creation**

The theme of God's kingdom begins with His sovereign reign over creation. The Bible opens by presenting God as the sovereign and rightful King over all creation. From the very first verse of Genesis, God exercises regal authority by creating, by ordering, and governing the universe (Gen. 1-2). His resting on the seventh day of creation shows that He has successfully completed His work of creation. His creation of human in His image reflects His rule. So that Adam and Eve are commissioned to "have dominion" over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28), not as independent rulers, but as vice-regents who exercise God's authority under His rule. As His image bearers, God intended for them to spread His glory throughout the whole world. The psalmist echoes this when he writes:

**Psalm 8:3-6—“When look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with**

**glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.”**

That’s what God originally had in mind for humanity. To have dominion over the works of God’s hands. God gave that dominion to the man made in His image. However, there is something tragic that happens:

## **#2—The kingdom is forfeited through Adam’s sin**

With the fall of humanity into sin in Genesis 3, the kingdom of God as it was in the beginning, under Adam’s rule, was marred. Adam’s sin did not cause God to cease being King—God has always remained the sovereign Ruler over all creation. Instead, what happened was that Adam forfeited humanity’s privilege of exercising God’s righteous rule over the earth as His vice-regent. Adam is the federal head and representative of the human race who was entrusted with administering God’s kingdom rule on earth.

When Adam sinned, he rebelled against God’s kingship and surrendered his God-given dominion to the power of sin and Satan. This is why Jesus later refers to Satan as the ‘ruler of this world’ (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and why Paul calls Satan ‘the god of this age’ (2 Cor. 4:4). Because of humanity’s rebellion, the world lies under his influence (1 John 5:19). So the kingdom was not lost in the sense that God ceases to reign. What it means is that humanity lost its rightful place as God’s faithful representatives on earth.

Life in a fallen world as we know it is now under a curse:

**Genesis 3:17-19—“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you**

**shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”**

Sin and death has now entered the picture, and humanity is alienated from God. As a consequence of Adam’s sin, there is a conflict that will be seen throughout Scripture and history. It is a ‘kingdom conflict’ between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. The question is, “Will the kingdom that Adam forfeited ever be regained?”

### **#3—The kingdom is promised through God’s covenant**

Immediately after the fall of man, God promises a coming Deliverer. This is the first indication that the kingdom will be restored through the work of a Redeemer. Even in the midst of their failure, as He pronounces a curse upon the serpent who deceived Eve, God makes this promise:

**Genesis 3:15—“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”**

This coming Deliverer will be the promised ‘Seed’ of the woman, and refers to a coming Child who would destroy the works of the devil, plunder his kingdom, and recover what Adam lost in the beginning.

God’s covenant with Abraham expands this promise. He promises a people, a land, and blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3). The same promise is given to his son Isaac, and to Isaac’s son, Jacob. These covenant promises are God’s kingdom promises. God’s purpose is to establish a people who joyfully live under His rule and so become a blessing to the world.

### **#4—The kingdom is foreshadowed in Israel’s salvation from Egypt**

When God delivers Israel from Egypt, He reveals Himself as their true King. At Mt. Sinai, He declares, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Israel was never intended to be merely another nation, but they were to demonstrate what life under God’s rule looks like. The tabernacle symbolized God’s presence dwelling among His people, with the Holy of Holies being His throne room! God dwelling with His redeemed people.

#### **#5—The kingdom is centered in God’s covenant with David**

A major turning point comes in 2 Samuel 7 and in God’s covenant with David, the most important king in the Old Testament. We know that David was a man after God’s own heart. God promised David an everlasting dynasty, an eternal throne, and an everlasting kingdom. He said this:

**2 Samuel 7:8-16—“Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over My people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over My people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever...And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever.”**

This promise from God to David is known as the Davidic Covenant. It is this covenant that becomes the foundation for Israel's messianic hope. The coming of this Davidic offspring (v. 12) fulfills the earlier Abrahamic promise of an offspring from Abraham (Gen. 15:4) and ultimately fulfills the promise that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

The prophets begin looking beyond David to a future Son of David who will reign forever from David's throne.

### **#6—The kingdom is anticipated by Israel's prophets**

After Israel's exile, the prophets proclaim that God has not abandoned His kingdom purposes. Things look bleak, the people of God have been carried off. But God isn't through with His people. He will not go back on His Word. Several themes show up in their writings:

- A coming Davidic King (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6)
- A universal kingdom made up of all nations (Isaiah 2:2-4)
- A new covenant producing transformed hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34)
- God's everlasting dominion replacing man's fallen and earthly kingdoms (Daniel 2; Daniel 7)

This prophetic hope explains why first-century Jews were eagerly awaiting the kingdom. The Old Testament ends without any resolution. I mean, it is almost as if the words 'to be continued' are the last words of Malachi. And that brings us all the way to the New Testament.

### **#7—The kingdom is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ**

That's why the very first words in Matthew's gospel are these words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." So that now what we have in the New Testament is the glorious arrival of the kingdom of God with the coming of Christ! When Jesus begins His ministry, His first public message is this:

**Mark 1:15—“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**

This announcement is astonishing! Jesus is declaring that everything the Old Testament anticipated is now arriving in Him. He is the promised Seed of the woman, the Son of Abraham, the greater Moses, the Son of David, and the divine King whom the prophets wrote about. The kingdom of God isn't merely an idea. We're not talking about pie in the sky or some wishful thinking. Rather, it is God's saving reign breaking into history through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In a spiritual sense, Jesus established His kingdom reign in a small and subtle way in His first coming. Jesus came to fulfill the Father's plan, to suffer and die to make atonement for sin, and to be raised to life again. And after His resurrection, He commissioned His disciples and ascended to heaven. However, this wasn't fully understood by them. Acts 1:6 says they had a question that involved the future kingdom:

*“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

It was a legitimate question that reflected an understanding of Jesus being crowned as King who would rule and reign over all. After all, the promise of God to David involved one of his descendants seated on an eternal throne. They all were aware of the promises of the kingdom that were made by God through the prophets. They fully anticipated that it was time for Him to march back to

Jerusalem and set up a kingdom in which He would reign from David's throne. The disciples were correct in their understanding, but they were incorrect in their focus. They were curious about the time it would happen. And so Jesus doesn't rebuke them for their question. Rather, He redirects them in their focus. And in verses 7-8 He says:

*"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority.'"*

Instead of being distracted with the future, He wants them to be diligent in the present. Instead of being preoccupied with the future, He wants them to be engaged in a mission:

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

That's the mission of the church. It is a kingdom mission as believers are saved and sent out with the message of the gospel. The church is not the kingdom, but is a vehicle of the kingdom, an agent of the kingdom. Which is why we must have a kingdom focus in everything that we do, for the church exists for the kingdom. Jesus tells His disciples to pray and to live with a kingdom mindset:

**Matthew 6:9-10—“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

**Matthew 6:33—“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”**

In a kingdom, life is to be lived under the rule and authority of the king. That's what we're talking about when we refer to the kingdom of God. It is the righteous rule of God in our hearts and lives as His people. The kingdom rule of God's Son is established in the hearts of believers. And the time is coming when it will one day be established in a physical throne and a literal, tangible kingdom upon the earth when Jesus returns. So the kingdom is both now and not yet.

There has been a failure among pastors in our generation to faithfully preach and teach this to people. When pastors fail to teach the biblical doctrine of the kingdom of God, the church loses sight of this overarching story of Scripture. We reduce Christianity to nothing more than our personal salvation, or moral improvement. Believers may come to view the gospel primarily as a means of escaping hell rather than entering the gracious reign of Jesus Christ and living their lives under His Lordship. It produces shallow discipleship, weak evangelism, an inward-focused church that neglects its mission in the world.

And something else, without a healthy understanding of the kingdom, Christians can also become susceptible to false teachings that equate the kingdom with political power, or the prosperity gospel, or social activism disconnected from the gospel, etc. But let me tell you, when 'kingdom truth' is faithfully understood, believers recognize that Jesus is the reigning and soon-coming King, His kingdom cause is advancing through the proclamation of the gospel, and that they are called to live as faithful citizens of that kingdom while waiting for its future aspect at His return. The truth about God's kingdom gives us a biblical understanding of salvation, discipleship, mission, suffering, and hope in the face of loss. It enables us to see our lives as part of His grand redemptive plan and what He has in mind for the world:

**Revelation 11:15—“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”**

And so that’s the background. Now for the parables, which we will get to next time, but let me at least tell you what it is that Jesus is saying...

- The secret of the kingdom is revealed, and it must be declared (4:21-25)
- The growth of the kingdom is expanding, and will do so until the time of the harvest (4:26-29)
- The triumph of the kingdom is certain, and will one day fill the earth (4:30-34)

**Habakkuk 2:14—“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”**

The parables about the kingdom correspond to the fruitful ground hearers who are described in the Parable of the Sower. These additional parables illustrate the certainty of God’s kingdom and its growth throughout the world. Fruit is produced in the life of the one who welcomes the good news of the kingdom. They welcome the word immediately so that Satan cannot snatch it away, and they welcome it deeply so it is not withered by persecution, and they also welcome it exclusively so that other concerns don’t strangle it and keep it from being unfruitful. In Matthew’s account of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus describes the seed as the ‘word’ of the kingdom. Those who inherit the kingdom are those who embrace the gospel!

The greatest hope for humanity is the kingdom of God in which His Son is enthroned and ruling over the affairs of the world. What began in a garden is reclaimed in a cross and an empty tomb, and will be realized when the King returns triumphantly to rule over what is rightfully His.

**Abraham Kuyper** — *“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”*

Right now, can it truly be said that He is ruling over every square inch of your life? Is He King of your thought life? Your habits? Your relationships? We’re to be kingdom-minded people in the midst of a world that is confusing and chaotic. We’re to be kingdom parents who raise kingdom-minded kids. We’re to be a kingdom-focused church, with kingdom-focused preaching and teaching that encourages kingdom living and kingdom mission. I heard a powerful statement this week—“We can’t build God’s kingdom and our castles at the same time.”

In Christ, God has a kingdom in mind for His people, but we are all too often preoccupied with our little sand castles!

As I finish, I want you to go back to the image from Daniel 2, the one in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream which represented the various empires of man. The very best of what man tries to build, the kingdoms of man that are not led by the light of God’s truth, mankind in its rebellion against God—golden Babylon, fierce Persia, Greece under Alexander, Rome and its Caesars. These kingdoms were fierce and seemed invincible, persecuting God’s people out a sense of pomp and pride. But these kingdoms did not last. In fact, scholars and historians will tell you that the typical shelf life of man’s empires are merely 10 generations, or roughly 250 years. That’s the average lifespan. Despite the power of these kingdoms which are depicted by the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, none of them would ultimately prevail against the kingdom of God. Because there is something else in his vision, something not part of the statue itself.

Nebuchadnezzar also saw a stone uncut by human hands that crushed all the other kingdoms. And Daniel explained what it meant:

**Daniel 2:44—“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”**

This week, we will celebrate 250 years of independence as a nation. And don't you find it interesting that we are at that point? Even as I speak, our nation has never been in a more precarious position than we are right now. In our pride, we've abandoned the One who made our nation great in the first place. We've worshiped the gods of materialism and sensuality, and called it free expression. We've murdered our children in the womb, and have called it freedom of choice. America has become the biggest promoter of filth and pornographic material in the world. We've worshiped our play and played at our worship. And while we've been asleep, the enemy has been hard at work. Did you know that the fastest growing religion in our country right now is Islam? In 1970, there were just over 100 mosques in the country. By 2000, there were 1,209. As of early 2026, there are an estimated 3,150. The greatest issue facing the church in our day is the global advance of Islam. But friends, in no way does it mean that God's kingdom purposes will fail. Just the opposite! We're witnessing prophecy unfold before our very eyes. It means that we as the church had better get busy sharing the gospel and making disciples.

But I want to tell you that the hope for America's future is in a King. The hope for my life and for your life is in a King. Friends, as a nation we are no better than Babylon or Assyria, Greece or Rome. God has not obligated Himself to build the American empire, but He has promised to build His church. He has promised to bless the man or woman who builds their life upon the solid rock of His truth. And He has promised to establish the kingdom of His Son, of which you and I are

citizens if you know Jesus personally through faith in Him. That kingdom starts in the humblest of ways, but ends up outlasting the most powerful kingdom in the world, for the kingdom of God is eternal and everlasting. That's what Jesus is going to teach you and me in these kingdom parables, which we will look at next time. Let's pray.