

POWER OF THE KINGDOM

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 4:21-34

CONTEXT

After Jesus taught and explained to His disciples the parable of the sower and the importance of letting the gospel sink deep roots into our lives, Jesus delivered several short parables about the kingdom of God. He again emphasized the importance of truly listening to His words and living out their powerful implications in the world. Jesus knew His kingdom would start off small in this world, but it also would grow and cover the whole earth.

KEY CONCEPT

The kingdom of God may start small but will be revealed and grow in power.

As you examine Mark 4:21-34:

- Reflect on the truth that God's kingdom grows in this world in God's power and timing, not ours.
- Contemplate that Jesus's ministry started small but would usher in a worldwide kingdom for His glory and purposes.



TIMELINE

Jesus Appoints His Twelve Disciples (Mark 3:13-19)

Jesus Teaches and Explains the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Teaches Parables on the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:21-34)

Jesus Calms a Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

Jesus Heals Two Daughters (Mark 5:21-43)

Daily Readings

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| ☐ Day 1: Mark 4:21-25 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 8:16-18 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 4:26-29 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 8:19-21 |
| ☐ Day 3: Mark 4:30-34 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 9 |



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

WE ARE MEANT TO REVEAL THE MESSAGE OF THE POWERFUL KINGDOM OF GOD (MARK 4:21-29).

Underline the final outcome or goal in each of Jesus's three illustrations.

21 He also said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed? Isn’t it to be put on a lampstand? **22** For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing concealed that will not be brought to light. **23** If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen.” **24** And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear. By the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and more will be added to you. **25** For whoever has, more will be given to him, and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” **26** “The kingdom of God is like this,” he said. “A man scatters seed on the ground. **27** He sleeps and rises night and day; the seed sprouts and grows, although he doesn’t know how. **28** The soil produces a crop by itself—first the blade, then the head, and then the full grain on the head. **29** As soon as the crop is ready, he sends for the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Jesus continued to teach the crowds using everyday examples in surprising ways. “Would you bring a light into a room only to hide it?” He asked. Likewise, did God send Jesus into the world only to hide His light? Of course not. Although at this point, it may have appeared that way.

LEADER NOTE: When God sent His Son into the world, His glory (light) was concealed, to a degree, such that He wasn’t recognized (John 1:10; cf. Phil. 2:7-8). Although His miracles displayed His supernatural power and divine authority, Jesus was largely rejected. He would not “be put on a lampstand” (Mark 4:21) until He was “lifted up” on the cross (John 8:28). Now He shines brightly in His church as we are transformed into His glory (Matt. 5:14-16, 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6-7).

When Jesus spoke, He often concealed His truths in parables, similar to how He often tried to conceal His miracles (Mark 1:44; 5:43). In the series of short sayings in Mark 4, Jesus explained that though His kingdom was now largely hidden, it would soon be revealed in the Father’s perfect timing. But how would people respond to that revelation? “Pay attention” (4:24), Jesus warned because God’s revelation comes to us to the extent that we listen and receive it. As in the parable of the sower, the person who fails to receive the Word soon discovers that it has been stolen away. But the one who receives the Word by faith is rewarded with greater understanding.

How are you putting the kingdom of God on a lampstand through your life?

Key Concept: The kingdom of God may start small but will be revealed and grow in power.

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

MISSION OF THE CHURCH: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

Jesus expanded on these truths about the kingdom of God with another brief parable about a farmer scattering seed. The emphasis of this parable, however, is on the sure growth of the seed rather than the soil's condition. Once sown, the seed sprouts and grows, independent of the farmer's understanding or attention. The sun, rain, and soil nourish the plants to maturity, and then the harvest comes. Likewise, believers sow God's Word with the confidence that God is the One germinating, maturing, and readying His people for the harvest at Jesus's return (1 Cor. 3:7; Rom. 8:30).

LEADER NOTE: God accomplishes His work of growth, maturity, and harvest through the Holy Spirit's mysterious yet certain work in salvation. The Spirit blows where He wishes, producing new spiritual life by cleansing and renewing hearts (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5). As the Spirit leads believers, He produces in and through them the fruit of love, joy, and peace (Gal. 5:16,22-23). The only way for God's Word to take root, sprout, mature, and bear fruit in a person's life is for Christ to sanctify believers by the Spirit and the Word (Eph. 5:26).

What role does the church play in the certainty of God's coming kingdom?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"The point of Jesus' analogy is clear: Those who have received the light of the gospel are not to conceal it; rather they are to let it shine for others to see."¹

—John MacArthur (1939–2025)

GOD'S KINGDOM MAY HAVE STARTED SMALL AND HUMBLY BUT WILL GROW TO BE A BLESSING FOR ALL (MARK 4:30-34).

Underline how the mustard seed starts out, and circle its final form.

30 And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to describe it? **31** It's like a mustard seed that, when sown upon the soil, is the smallest of all the seeds on the ground. **32** And when sown, it comes up and grows taller than all the garden plants, and produces large branches, so that the birds of the sky can nest in its shade."

33 He was speaking the word to them with many parables like these, as they were able to understand. **34** He did not speak to them without a parable. Privately, however, he explained everything to his own disciples.

Jesus's next parable compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and plant. Considered the tiniest of seeds in the region, mustard seeds could grow to produce plants as tall as ten feet. Comparing God's kingdom to this plant would have surprised many of Jesus's listeners, who may have expected God's kingdom to begin with a dramatic overthrow of the Roman Empire. That was not God's plan, however.

The kingdom of God started with the death of one small seed, a death that would bear much fruit (John 12:23-24). In Jerusalem alone, thousands came to faith in Christ after Jesus's death and resurrection (see Acts 2; 4). The good news of what Jesus accomplished spread throughout Judea and Samaria and then through the entire Roman Empire. It continues to spread today on all continents and will not be stopped until people from all nations have come to find refuge in Christ (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 5:9), like birds nesting in a humble mustard bush.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus's parable of the mustard seed alluded to Ezekiel 17, where God promised to plant a small twig that would produce branches and bear fruit, growing into a majestic cedar tree that sheltered "birds of every kind" (17:22-24). While Jesus's parable emphasized the smallest seed that grew to become a lush tree, Ezekiel's prophecy focused on God's sovereign work to bring down the prideful and exalt the lowly. Yet both stories picture birds nesting in a plant's branches, a reference to the diversity of nations that will turn to Christ. In Christ, believers of all nationalities have full access to God and His covenant promises (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:17-22).

What are some blessings bestowed on those who find shelter in God's kingdom?

Key Concept: The kingdom of God may start small but will be revealed and grow in power.

PHRASE STUDY

KINGDOM OF GOD: Jesus's miracles, preaching, forgiving sins, and resurrection ushered in God's sovereign rule. Jesus chose and sent out His followers with kingly authority (Matt. 28:18-20). Whether Jew or Gentile, those who trust in Jesus are transferred from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:13).²

Jesus's parables illustrated God's kingdom. The development and characteristics of His kingdom contrast so profoundly with the kingdoms of humankind that Jesus graciously prepared His followers for its in-breaking with many parables. Jesus was wise, though, not to overwhelm the people with more truth than their hearts could take in (Mark 4:33; cf. John 16:12). Little by little, He taught the crowds and explained to His disciples about His kingdom that would, little by little, topple earth's kingdoms and establish everlasting righteousness (Dan. 2:44; 9:24).

LEADER NOTE: Although Christ's kingdom has grown exponentially from the disciples' time until now, it is still rejected as foolishness by many (1 Cor. 1:23). Its fullness will not be realized until Jesus returns. While we wait, many people will not want to join a kingdom that bids us to come and die, but we believers in Christ sow His seeds of truth patiently and expectantly, knowing that God brings the growth and saves sinners (Jas. 5:7-8).

How should our teaching model Jesus's teaching, both in what we teach and in how we teach it?

CHURCH CONNECTION

Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God, and we are blessed to have a part in revealing the message of His kingdom, seeing God's glory grow.

Notes



Notes

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As your group arrives, ask: “Recalling the previous session on seeds and soils, what have you planted as a seed and seen it grow into a beautiful, fruitful plant? What role did you play in this growth? What are some ways you have seen your faith grow like a seed into a plant?”

TRANSITION: Sometimes a little seed planted in the garden produces a bumper crop. Sometimes an underweight child at birth outgrows his or her parents in the teen years. Today in our Bible passage, Jesus used a parable of a mustard seed to illustrate the growth of His kingdom on earth.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: At the start of His ministry in the book of Mark, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was near (1:14-15). After that, He and His disciples went throughout the region healing the sick, performing miracles, and preaching the gospel. In Mark 4, Jesus shifted to begin speaking in parables. Last week we focused on the parable of the sower and the soils, in which we learned that the condition of the hearer’s heart determines how the Word takes root. Today we will focus on Mark 4:21-34, which describes what occurs as the gospel takes root in a person’s life and in the world at large.

RECAP

ASK: As you read through the passage this week, what stood out to you about the kingdom of God?

TRANSITION: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 4: Kingdom Parables**, and briefly review some of the ways Jesus described His kingdom. Say: “Jesus used the parables in Mark 4 to help the disciples understand how God’s kingdom can grow when there is faith. Jesus calls people to respond to the gospel with faith and trust and then to spread the Word among others.”



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GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 30 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “Three Parables.” Recreate the chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with Scripture.

Notes

Three Parables

Read Mark 4:21-34. Write out the beginning of each parable, how it ends, and summarize its meaning in your own words.

	BEGINNING	RESULT	MEANING
LAMP Mark 4:21-25			
GROWING SEED Mark 4:26-29			
MUSTARD SEED Mark 4:30-34			

DEFINE: Remind your group that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus used the common images of a lamp, a seed, and a mustard seed so that the disciples would be able to grasp the bigger concepts that He was trying to teach them.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 4:21-25.

ENGAGE: Lead your group to summarize the beginning, the result, and the meaning of the parable of the lamp. Write down their findings on the chart on the board and give them the opportunity to record them in their PSG as well.

READ: Invite a second volunteer to read Mark 4:26-29.

DISCUSS: Direct your group to identify the beginning, the result, and the meaning of the parable of the growing seed. Note that most of the growth occurred without the planter’s knowledge, but the planter still needed to scatter the seed. Record the group’s conclusions on the board.

READ: Invite a third volunteer to read Mark 4:30-34.

ENGAGE: Lead your group to fill in the chart for the parable of the mustard seed. Point out that the kingdom of God started with Christ's death and resurrection, and now it has grown and traveled all over the world. People from every tribe, nation, and tongue will hear and believe the gospel, and like the variety of birds of the air nesting in a single tree, all believers in Christ will find rest in the shade of the kingdom of God.

DEBRIEF

Which parable encourages you the most? Why?

How do these parables illustrate what success looks like in faith and ministry?

SUMMARIZE

Recall **Pack Item 3: Kingdom Growth** and highlight the related sections for the following. Say: "The growth of the kingdom of God on earth is a responsibility that belongs to the Lord. God alone changes hearts, converts sinners, and restores His intended goodness in this world. And yet, God has called and equipped believers in Christ to participate in the growth of God's kingdom. Through the wisdom and power of God's Holy Spirit in us, we proclaim Christ and His gospel, we act in faithful obedience to see God work through us, and we look forward to the harvest of salvation God has promised to bring."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 31). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: We often get ahead of ourselves in Bible study, looking for a quick application or encouraging insight without focusing on what the text actually teaches. We need to pray for God's wisdom to rightly interpret the Word of truth. Jesus's commands to "listen" and "pay attention" (Mark 4:23-24) admonish our minds to use diligence with God's Word just as much as they awaken our hearts to submit to what it says.

What are some dangers of misinterpreting and misapplying God's Word?



HEART: Jesus promised in Mark 4:24 that we will receive divine revelation to the degree that we open our hearts to it. The apostle Peter echoed this truth: "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Pet. 1:3). We can know and reflect Christ to the extent that we desire to know Him. So, like Paul, we pray for God to open the eyes of our hearts to all that God has for us (Eph. 1:18-19).



Key Concept: The kingdom of God may start small but will be revealed and grow in power.

What obstacles or distractions keep you from desiring God's kingdom and God's Word, and how will you address those?



HANDS: In Mark 4, Jesus is the lamp that will be revealed, yet in Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells His followers that they are the light of the world. He commands them to let their light shine so that others may “see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Jesus no longer walks on this earth physically, but He still reveals the kingdom to the world through the witness of His church. Our words and actions should reflect the light and love of Christ's kingdom.

How will you point people to God's kingdom through your words and actions this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Start praying for an opportunity to share your faith with a co-worker, neighbor, family member, or friend.
- Talk with a pastor or outreach leader to figure out how you can join or support what God is already doing in your community.
- Like the old children's song about letting your light shine, consider what you can do this week to reveal the glory of God's kingdom.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 9:1-2 with your group, praising the name of the Lord and praying to boldly declare His goodness as you go throughout the week.

References

1. John MacArthur, Mark 1-8, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 213.
2. Stan Norman with Gentry Peter, “Kingdom of God,” in Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 988.

Notes

