

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“Kingdom of God”
Mark 4:26-34
New City Church of LA
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I. Vision of New City

Welcome to New City. We’re in the middle of a series called THE REAL JESUS. We’ve been going through the Book of Mark a passage at a time.

As we always do, let’s look at our vision statement: Our vision to be an inclusive gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ who connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God’s kingdom.

Our vision is to BE a multi-ethnic multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are, in other word, inclusive, church of lovers of Jesus Christ right here in downtown LA.

And our vision is to DO this: connect to God, then grow, then serve the city, and then to extend the Kingdom of God. What do we mean by the Kingdom of God?

When Jesus started his public ministry, the first thing he said was: The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news! In today’s passage, he’s telling us what this Kingdom is like.

II. The passage

Let’s read Mark 4:26-34 [Read]

This passage tells us three things about the Kingdom of God: (1) the nature of the Kingdom of God; (2) the process of the Kingdom of God; and (3) where to get the power to live in the Kingdom of God.

III. First, the nature of the Kingdom of God.

When we think about the Kingdom of God, we think of it as the most powerful kingdom we can imagine. I mean we are talking about God—and His Kingdom. God created the universe with the mere power of his word. He made the universe out of

nothing. He can just snap his fingers and things happen. Why is it that when this God decided to bring the Kingdom of God down here, why didn't he do it with a bang? Why didn't he come down and demonstrate his power, wield the power of his sword, and make everyone wake up. Wake up! You better repent, or else! Instead he came down as a little bitty baby in a stable, born into poverty. After he started his public ministry, he ministered in a small little area called Palestine, an area that was occupied by foreign power—the Roman Empire. Then, he later was crucified on the cross like a common criminal. If you are building a Kingdom of God, this seems like a very inefficient way to build the Kingdom. Why so small, so weak?

In both of the parables we read today, the point is that the Kingdom of God starts really small and seemingly insignificant. In the first parable, it starts as a seed, a seemingly insignificant seed. In the second parable, Jesus accentuates this point by saying that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, proverbially the smallest of the seeds.

Because the Kingdom of God is a world turned upside down:

What looks smallest will be the biggest.

The way up is down.

The way to power and influence is to become a servant of all.

The way to be rich is to give everything away.

The way to fullness is to empty yourself.

The way to reign is to submit.

The way to find yourself is to lose yourself.

The way to freedom is to submit to God.

The way of the Kingdom is the cross.

The way to strength is weakness.

The way to bear fruit is to die.

How about: Love your enemies. Turn the other cheek. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the persecuted. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are those who mourn. Become like a little child.

Kingdom of God is world upside down. It is absolutely and directly opposite to the Kingdom of this world, which says:

If way up is up.

Those who are big are more significant.

The way to be rich is to accumulate.

You essentially divide up the world in the pecking order: those who are high up in the pecking order and those who are low in the pecking order. And the game of life is about moving up the pecking order. If you are up, you look down those who are down. And if you are down, you look up to those who are up. Jesus absolutely and radically destroys this paradigm.

Here's the election week special: Here's one way to think about the differences between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World:

Kingdom of the World	Kingdom of God
Sword	Cross
Power-Over -law and order -justice -external behavior control	Power-Under -sacrificial service -agape love -grace
Changed by external power: -threat/judgment/shame/social pressure	Transformed by internal transformation: -Influential but non-coercive power sacrificial love as the Holy Spirit works in people's heart
Trust in the power of the sword	Trust in the power of the cross
Purpose is to control behavior	Purpose is to transform life from the heart

- When the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world is becomes fused, where either the Kingdom of God take over the Kingdom of the world or the other way around, there is damage to the mission of the Kingdom of God. Kingdom people must be careful when they seek political power because it will impede the purpose and mission of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God also creates a new kind of community:

God has reversed the position of inside and outsiders. The poor and marginalized people received Jesus. But, the respectable did not. In many ways, the poor love the gospel. Why? Because the way up is down. They are down and they know it. There is nothing more deadly than go up and be blinded. The gospel says you have to go down and know that you are a moral failure. People in the margins understand that. They understand their own weaknesses, their own sins, their own struggles. When people who are upwardly mobile confront the gospel, the first thing that the gospel says is to go down.

Do you get this? Do you know what this means? This means that if you are down, you are blessed. If you are poor, you are blessed. If you are a failure, you are blessed. If you are lost, you are blessed. If are down and out, you are blessed. Does this sound like something Jesus said?

IV. Second, the Process of the Kingdom of God.

If you look at the parable of the growing seed, the seed grows but the farmer doesn't really notice it. It's not one of those bean stock seeds in a children's story where they grow instantaneously. In fact, if you went out to the field and waited for it grow, you are going to get tired out.

When we are living in the Kingdom of God, it will sometimes feel like nothing is happening. It feels like nothing is changing. The work of God is not visible to us, sometimes. The work of the seed growing was hidden. God is doing something in our lives. This parable assures us that God's kingdom is at work in ways we don't understand.

A couple of months ago, I spent a day just listening to God. I felt this sense that God was calling me out to the beach. I just walked around the beach talking to God. One thing God clearly put into my heart was this: I am the God of the undercurrents. I am working even when you don't see me work. There is something going on. That's what God told me about our church. He is God of the undercurrents. I don't have to see everything. God is working!

- Do you feel down because of what's going on in your life? Our God is the God of the undercurrents. He working even when you don't know and don't see. We are finite and we can't see the big picture that God is working on. I

love the attitude of Apostle Paul when he was imprisoned: In Phil 1:12-14, he said his imprisonment was not a setback for the gospel; but served to advance the gospel because the whole palace guards heard about the gospel and others became more bold to proclaim the gospel.

- Did you lose a job recently? God is working in the undercurrents.
- Are you facing a health issue? God is working in the undercurrents. I know it is hard to see what God is doing, but somehow he is going to grow this radical kingdom of his in your life through this issue.
- Did you lose half of your money in the stock market? God is working in the undercurrents. Maybe God is working on your character. Maybe God is working on liberating you. Maybe God is trying to get you to pull closer to him.

I think it easier to understand how things work in the kingdom of the world. We work to go up, we go up. If we want power, we do what we can to rise up the ladder. If someone punches me, I punch him back. If you want to get rich, you have to accumulate. If you want a good life, you have to grab on to it. If you want to have power, you need a sword. All of these make intuitive sense, and in some ways, you can see how the result happens. But, if you follow the Kingdom, you have to put your faith in God. You have to put your trust in the God of the undercurrents.

V. Third, where do you get the power to live in the Kingdom?

We have to see Jesus and what he has done for us. God went down so much that he actually and literally became seed. Before the cross, before his public ministry, before his poor childhood, before he was born in a stable, he was a seed. God actually became one cell. He became small. And in John 12:24, Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Jesus lived by it. He died so that it will produce much fruit.