

"21 And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? 22 "For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. 23 "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." 24 And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25 "For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." 26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows--how, he himself does not know. 28 "The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 "It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples." Mark 4:21-34, NAS95.

Last week our study was the parable of the soils.

We begin this week with the lamps and lampstands.

There is a connection and it has to do with hearing the Word of God..

4:21-25 Lamps and lampstands (see Lk. 8:16-18; cf. Mk. 5:14-16). This section addresses the issue of whether the kingdom of God will always be a secret, hidden from the many and revealed only to the few. (Perhaps it still seems this way to some of us today?) Jesus said that one day God's kingdom will be plain to all. Lamps are meant to give light, not to hide it. In the same way, the final purpose of parables is to reveal truth, not conceal it. However, there is a time when parables are the best way to reveal truth, for they 'filter' or 'strain' the listeners, as we might filter a liquid through a fine cloth to purify it. The disciples must first absorb the truth that Jesus taught through parables, so that they would be able to absorb more truth later. Like any good teacher, Jesus teaches only as we are able to understand and willing to respond. There is no such thing as standing still in the spiritual life; if we cease to grow, then we shrink. This is either a promise or a warning, depending on our spiritual attitude.

Whoever Does not Have

Now look at the negative statement in vs. 25

"25 "For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." Mark 4:25, NAS95.

What does that refer to? The light is obviously the Gospel as is the seed that was sown in the previous parable.

Each of the soils heard the Word just as those who are receiving illumination from the light are doing so. In each case, how the word is received is important.

In each of the first three soils there is a hearing of the Word of God. But in each case what they think they have, is taken away from them.

The first soil: they think they have the Word, but the devil snatches it away. Verse 13, the second soil: they think they have the Word and true spiritual faith and joy, but they have no root to sustain them in time of trial. Their faith is a superficial enthusiasm that is real only for fair weather days. And so when the trial comes, what they think they have is taken away. Finally, the third soil: they think they have the Word of God, but when the worries and riches and pleasures of life come, what they think they have is taken away, and they fail to bear fruit.

So the point of verse 25 is to enforce the interpretation of what was happening in the four soils. Three times it comes true: "Whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him." And one time - the fourth soil - the opposite comes true: "Whoever has, to him more shall be given."

So we need to Take Heed How We Hear.

So whether the truth is represented by light or seed the main point is clear and very urgent: "Take heed how you hear!" To the one who has more will be given. Do you have ears to hear? Do you have a new heart?

Why ask this question? Because only those with a new heart given by God can hear.

Ethnic Israel heard and saw much of the revelation of God's truth and yet they as a

people were an unbelieving people. Whatever measure of truth they had, and remember, they did not have the whole of the truth or of God's revelation yet they, believer or unbeliever, would be held accountable for whatever truth they had as the generations of Israel progressed in God's redemptive history.

And this holds true today.

Paul articulates the same thing in Romans 1:

"18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." Romans 1:18-23, NAS95.

By conscience and general revelation, there was and is a knowledge of God in man.

Neither of these in and of themselves contains the Gospel but they revealed God and man is held accountable for desiring to repress the truth of God as HE revealed himself.

4:21-23. Jesus is a master of the graphic illustrations in which Jewish teachers sought to excel: invisible light is pointless, and God wants the light of his word to be received. The lamps were small clay lamps that had to be set on a stand to shed much light in a room; a bushel basket placed over the lamp would no doubt extinguish it.

4:24-25. The conventional wisdom was that each person is accountable for what he or she does with what he or she had originally been given; Jesus applies this principle to his own teaching. Thus if the crowds did not obey what light they had received, they would never receive more. The language of "measuring" is the language of weighing food and other commodities at the market in Jewish texts.

Now we have to ask ourselves how this applies to us.

The next parables are about growth that comes from God concerning the kingdom and

we are a part of the process of the expansion of the kingdom of God, yet there are always the aspects of it that are God's work and the part we play in God's work, where he has chosen to use men to further the kingdom.

So let's begin with personal growth as the measure that has been given is what we are accountable for.

To those who have the ears to hear and are therefore those who have the light, we are not to be stagnant in our knowledge of the truth of God's word and the incredible process of being what we are in Christ.

We are not talking about intellectual capacity to gain knowledge. We are talking about growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ our Lord.

You do not have to be a scholar to know Christ or to understand the Word of God.

But, you are to increase in the knowledge you have and that is accomplished by hearing the word of God by various means including reading and studying..

Now let me make it very clear here that we are talking about a normative experience.

There are those who do not have bibles or conferences or even churches to attend as we know these experiences. Yet, God will hold these brethren accountable for whatever truth they have revealed to them by whatever means it comes to them.

4:26-34 Parables of growth (see Mt. 13:31-35; Lk. 13:18-19). Here are two more vivid parables of spiritual growth. The first reminds us of the quiet and continuous (we might almost say 'inevitable') growth of God's kingdom in our hearts. We do not need to be anxious and struggle: the seed will bear fruit of its own accord. We cannot understand the process of spiritual growth, any more than we can understand the process of natural growth, but we do not need to understand in order to share in it. The seed needs only the right conditions for growth. Harvest is a promise, but it may bring a hint of God's judgment as well, as it often does in the Bible.

The second parable again describes silent, almost unnoticed, growth, with

amazing results. Mustard seed is tiny, but it grows in time, into a bush that is one of the biggest plants in the Near East. So the kingdom will grow from insignificant beginnings to final triumph. This is a great encouragement to those who live in lands where Christians are a tiny, despised and perhaps persecuted minority. We work with confidence, waiting for God to fulfill his promise. The earthly ministry of Jesus was like that too; it seemed insignificant, yet from it grew a mighty world-wide Christian church, which is still growing. The closing verses show that these are only samples of the many illustrations that Jesus used, and they show his graded method of instruction and explanation (as much as they could understand) to those who would listen. If the others had been ready to listen, then they too would have understood, and so would have received more teaching, as the disciples did. There is no unfair favoritism in the kingdom of God; we all have the same opportunities of spiritual growth, if only we will take them.

As we continue in this study of the kingdom parables it is important for us to reexamine the purpose of the parables concerning their instruction about the secrets, the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

Mystery designates the secret plans, thoughts, and dispensations of God that are **hidden from human reason**, as well as from all other comprehensions below the divine level, and hence **must be revealed to those for whom they were intended**. However, the mystery is proclaimed to all even though only those who believe understand it. All are summoned to faith; but only those who respond are shown to have spiritual perception and understanding (i.e. only to those who have been "given the mystery" as Mark 4:11 says.) The same can be said of Peter in Matthew 16. Jesus asks him, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because **flesh and blood did not reveal this to you**, but My Father who is in heaven." Jesus is clearly indicating that one must receive supernatural illumination to understand the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Although the mystery is

Mark4:21- 34 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier December 30, 2007 6
proclaimed to all, not all are "given" this understanding. "Flesh and blood" is morally incapable of revealing it.

These parables are about the kingdom of heaven. Furthermore, those who will have understanding that is granted by God will be given more ability to understand, their knowledge of the kingdom of heaven will be abundant. But those who have not been granted this ability will lose any perceived understanding of the kingdom of heaven they may have, it will be taken away from them. This is a demonstration of the wisdom of a Sovereign God in the things concerning salvation and the knowledge of God. This has nothing to do with good works or intellect or human ability. It has to do with God and the election of His saints.

This is a judgment against those who deny the Gospel. It is proof that when man is left to himself he cannot understand the things of God and of our Christ.

That is why even in judgement every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord when the consummation of the kingdom occurs.

From Jesus' perspective there is the kingdom as it is when He is on the earth; the kingdom as it will expand to its decreed extent until He returns, even though it is unknown by many and opposed by many. We must not forget that the size or the numbers that will be accounted in the kingdom as true disciples of Christ are already fixed by God. The kingdom does not grow because of the churches evangelistic work. It grows according to God's purpose and He uses the church and the churches evangelism as the means by which the kingdom grows to its full number. Then there is the final consummated eternal kingdom. This is the unopposed kingdom. This is the finalized kingdom with Christ as king as His people as His subjects. There will be no element of distraction or opposition from anyone in this kingdom. Until Jesus comes to consummate His kingdom there will be the mixing of those who are Christ's and those who are not. He has the final authority to separate them from each other.

Here Jesus uses a mustard seed to describe what the kingdom of God is like at its inception or inauguration. A mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds but it is the smallest of a type of seed. The plant here described was very different from that which

is known among us in the Western world. It was several years before it bore fruit, and became properly a tree. Mustard, with us, is an annual plant; it is always small, and is an herb. The Hebrew writers speak of the mustard-tree as one on which they could *climb*, as on a fig tree. Its size owed much to the climate. All plants of that nature grow much larger in a warm climate, like that of Palestine, than in colder regions. The seeds of this tree were remarkably small.

And so it is with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has its beginning in very small numbers, so much so that one would wonder how it could in any way influence the larger world of which it was a part. Its beginnings are very humble.

The Scriptures tell of the one who comes and establishes this kingdom:

The kingdom at its inception is a small thing like a mustard seed. Rather unimposing and small in stature compared to the worldly kingdom that it will one day completely overtake. Yet, Jesus says:

"31 "It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE.'" Mark 4:31, 32, NAS95.

They have learned by now that Jesus speaks with great authority and although they are still in learning mode and have not grasped in the fullest sense, much of what Jesus has taught them, they can be assured that if He says the kingdom will grow, then it will grow.

For the tree to go from a seed to a full grown tree means there will be progressive growth to a pre-determined end. The kingdom will, like the tree become full grown. Neither they nor we know what the full grown tree will look like but we do know that when it has grown as much as God has intended for it to grow, then it will be full grown and at that time the kingdom we be consummated.

As it is with a tree, there will be seasons of little growth and seasons of spectacular growth depending on the conditions that prevail through the trees lifetime. It is the same way with the kingdom of God. There are times when there seems to be so little of the kingdom of God at hand, for example during the Dark and early Middle ages of European history and then God brings a season of true reformation and revival and the kingdom grows at an unparalleled pace. There are seasons when the kingdom expands at a slow but steady pace and then seems to unexpectedly stop.

However, there is nothing that can interfere with the divine purposes of God and His kingdom. Regardless of what we do or do not comprehend, the kingdom will progress

until it is the tree that God has ordained it to be. They could and we should take such immense comfort from this fact.

We must see that from Christ's own humility and humiliation at the cross, the foundation is laid for His exaltation as King over His kingdom and the world as a result of His resurrection and ascension. Let me quote from our newly proposed church constitution from The Truths We Teach:

His Humiliation and Exaltation

The Lord Jesus willingly accepted his appointment as mediator and perfectly fulfilled that office. He endured the most severe tortures of soul and body, was crucified, buried, and remained under the power of death for three days, without seeing corruption. He rose from the dead on the third day. He ascended into heaven, where he sat down at the Father's right hand and intercedes for his people. From the Father's right hand he shall physically return at the end of the world to judge all men and angels..... therefore we need him to be our King to convince, draw, deliver, and preserve us for His heavenly kingdom.

Jesus then says:

v.32 it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

The second half of this statement is a quote from an Old Testament proverb

Ezekiel 17:23, "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.

In Ezekiel's prophecy it is speaking of a time when all the nations will find their rest in the kingdom of God.

The kingdom has its small and unimposing beginnings, it will have progressive growth and not only be full grown but as such it will be a restive place, a protective and secure place, for many from many nations in the eternal kingdom.

Jesus tells his apostles before His ascension to the throne,

Acts 1:6 ¶ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;
8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

One day the Kingdom will prevail to such an extent that no rival sovereignty exists.

The present evil order of the world and of society would be utterly displaced by the

Kingdom of God. But Jesus ministry appears to have initiated no such transformation. He preached the presence of the Kingdom but the world went on as before. How then could this be the Kingdom?

The gradualness of the process was unheard of by the Jews at the time but Jesus reiterated it again and again. No one could have guessed that Jesus small band of disciples had anything to do with the future, glorious Kingdom of God. However that which is now present in the world is indeed the Kingdom itself. This is the mystery, the new truth about the Kingdom.

Christ changes the heart of those who are His. As His people preach the Gospel to those who will be God's elect their hearts will be changed.

In these parables we have studied the establishment and the growth of God's kingdom and the process from Gods point of view.

Once the kingdom has begun and there are a small number of kingdom dwellers, they begin to sow the seed of the word of God. Many will have opportunity to hear the word and there will be many reactions to the word. But only those who have their hearts prepared by God will be able to receive the word in a way that will produce definite evidence that they are God's own people, for this is God's kingdom.

Even so, there will be some who seem to be genuine kingdom dwellers in this kingdom but they will eventually be proven to be false and will have no place in the kingdom when it comes in its fullest and final form and will be separated forever from the kingdom. The kingdom will progress in growth and the people of this kingdom will demonstrate genuine fruit. The kingdom will be constituted with all kinds of people throughout the ages who are called to be in Christ's kingdom and not one who is His will ever be forsaken or cast aside.

Do you rejoice in the fact that God by His mercy and grace has called you to be an inhabitant of His kingdom? Do you glory in God and God alone knowing that it is His work through Christ that makes a place for you in this kingdom?