The Kingdom of God is Growing

Mark 4:21-34

Key Verse: 4:32 “Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

In today’s passage Jesus teaches his disciples the nature of the kingdom of God through three parables. How does the kingdom of God look like and how does it work?

First, the kingdom of God is illuminating. (21-25) Look at verses 21-23. “***He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear***.” The kingdom of God is like a lamp. No one puts the lamp under a bowl or a bed. We put the lamp on its stand so that it can illuminate and give light to its area. In the same way, Jesus taught the kingdom of God so that it could give light to darkness. John 1:4-5 says, “*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*.” In these verses John said that Jesus came to the world as the light. Jesus illuminates this dark world with the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good new.” (Mk 1:15) The good news is that God is love. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16). To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (Jn 1:12) Amen!

The Pharisees and the religious leaders tried to put off the light by denying Jesus and accusing him. They tried to put the light under their tradition and hide it behind their Judaism, and yet still the light of the world shines. They were not the first ones who put Jesus under authority and tradition. When Jesus was born, Herod the king of the Jews, tried to kill Jesus. He wanted to cover up the truth through his lying and evil. But the light which birthed from the manger in Bethlehem has continued to illuminate the world by revealing the truth and the kingdom of God. Look at verse 22 again. Whatever is hidden indicates the truth of God. The truth of God will be disclosed and brought out into the open no matter how the religious leaders tried to hide or cover up.

Before the Cultural Revolution started in China, there were around 4 million Christians in mainland China. Mao arrested the Christians, burnt Bibles, and closed churches, thinking that Christians would disappear in China within 10 years. But, unfortunately for Mao, since the Revolution in the 1960s, Christianity increased to 40 million in China. The kingdom of God has been revealing and spreading through numerous underground churches in China for the last several decades.

Second, the kingdom of God is advancing. Look at 24-25. “***Consider carefully what you hear.” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.***” The kingdom of God is given to those who know its value. Jesus said, “*Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*” (Mt 7:6) Jesus taught the kingdom of God to his disciples. They were new wineskins which held Jesus’ new teaching. They could have more. Jesus taught the same message to the Pharisees and the religious leaders. They were old wineskins which couldn’t hold Jesus’ teaching. Those who know the secret of the kingdom of God will have more, but those who reject the truth and follow evil will lose even what they have.

This teaches us what kind of attitude we should have toward the message of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is advancing. It does not stay, but advances. It moves with power. The kingdom of God starts from Jerusalem. It spread through all of Judea and Samaria through the disciples. It advanced to Europe through Paul. It reached all the world through the apostles. The kingdom of God belongs to those who forcefully hold it. Jesus said in Matthew 11:12, “*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it*.” We are saved and called to advance the gospel on campus. We should be more active and creative in advancing the gospel. We need to put more time, energy, and heart for the kingdom of God. Amen!

Third, the kingdom of God is growing. Look at verses 26-28. “***He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.***” Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like the growing seed. The farmer does not know when and how the seed grows. He does not monitor the growth of the seed. He sows and then goes home. While he does other things, the seed grows and bears fruit. It is similar to teaching the Bible to students. We sow the seed of the word in the hearts of students. We don’t know how and when it grows. But as long as it is sown in the heart of soil, it grows. They bear the fruits of life.

What does ‘the kingdom of God is growing’ mean? Growing means increasing and expanding its size and content in quantity and in quality, visible and invisible. It grows because it has life. If we sow rocks on the ground, they don’t grow because they have no life. Seeds grow because they have life in it. In the same way the seed of the kingdom of God grows in our hearts because it contains eternal life. The growth of the kingdom of God is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our faith grows until we bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23) When our faith grows, our love grows, our joy, peace, patience, kindness, increases, we experience the kingdom of God. The knowledge and desire for knowing Jesus also grows in our hearts. The knowledge of Jesus starts small, then increases until our hearts are filled with the truth of God. Faith and hope for eternal life in the kingdom of God also increase with the knowledge of Christ Jesus. When our sins are forgiven, the kingdom of God comes. This is why Jesus said that the kingdom of God is within you. (Lk 17:21) Jesus prayed for the coming of the kingdom of God in his prayer. “*For your kingdom come and your will be done.*” Jesus believed that God’s kingdom comes, domains, and grows in our hearts and on this earth.

Christianity in Korea started with two missionaries from America, Underwood, a Presbyterian missionary and Appenzeller, a Methodist missionary. In 1885 God sowed the seed of the kingdom of God in Korea through these two missionaries and other missionaries who had joined later. They built churches, schools, and hospitals. They taught the kingdom of God to Koreans. One and half century later Korea became the second largest missionary- sending country next to America. UBF is one of the churches which American missionary Sarah Barry started. The UBF ministry was like the growing seed. It started with prayer meetings and group Bible studies in a local college in Korea in 1961. The movement spread to other colleges in other cities. Soon, it covered the whole South Korea. This spiritual movement spread to Asia and Europe in 1970s, North America in 1980s, Africa and Latin America in 1990s, CIS and Oceania in 2000, and now the whole world with 97 countries. For the last six decades God has raised numerous spiritual leaders and converted Christians.

Look at verses 30-32. “***Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade***.” Jesus used another parable on his disciples to understand the kingdom of God. A mustard seed is the smallest seed among all seeds on earth. But when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants. It grows up to 8 through 10 feet. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It grows and becomes a blessing.

We are preparing for the coming Christmas worship service. We will praise and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Christianity is a manger ministry like a mustard seed. It started with a little baby in a manger in Bethlehem in Judea, the smallest town in the smallest country. It has grown and spread since then, now covering the whole earth. Jesus brought the kingdom of God. He came to this world as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He rules our hearts with peace and love. His birth is glory to God in the highest and peace to all men on earth. His kingdom will never end and it lasts forever and ever until he comes back.

The biggest church in Washington DC is called the Central Presbyterian Church with more than 3,000 members. The pastor of the church used to study the Bible in UBF when he was a college student. At that time nobody thought that this young man would be a great pastor. Even his Bible teacher did not know. He just planted the seed of the gospel in his heart through one-to-one Bible study. A few decades later, without knowing when or how, the kingdom of God grew in his heart and God called him as a pastor. For our Christmas worship service we invited his Bible teacher as our messenger who taught the pastor. We’ll hear what God has done through him and through the pastor. We don’t know who will accept the seed of the word. But God knows. God will provide those who need to hear the gospel. God will grow them as his chosen servant like the pastor Ryu and Ben and Michael and Luke and David. We don’t know who will be used by God and for his glory in the future. Our mission is to continue to scatter the seeds of God’s kingdom and water them through prayer. Let us remember our prayer topics: Advance the gospel, Raise Jesus’ disciples, and Expand God’s kingdom. Let us pray that God’s kingdom may come in our hearts and God’s will be done on Wash U. and on all the campuses in the St. Louis area. Amen!