

Melva's Corner

The Real Kingdom Of God



Central Truth: The kingdom of God advances are typically without fanfare, as individuals hear, receive and are redeemed by the almost imperceptible planting, nurturing, growth, and fruition of the gospel in heart after heart.

Jesus could have used the slogan "The Real Kingdom of God"—to summarize a key fact about His ministry. Certainly the four parables in Mark 4 could be listed under the single heading "The Real Kingdom Of God." Each of them calls attention to the steady and gentle — though ever-so-productive — power of the kingdom of heaven at work on Planet Earth.

Oh, there are other truths to be found in this sequence of parables. But I think this is one of the most obvious and thematic of the four. First comes the Parable of the Sower (4:1-20); a farmer sows seed that fall on various kinds of soil and the seed sown on good soil "produce a crop — thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown." Next is the only non-agricultural parable in the group, the Parable of the Lamp (4:21-25); the lamp of divine light that had been given the world in the person of Jesus would illuminate spiritual truth and draw people to God — as silently and effectively as a candle flame draws a moth. Third is the Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (4:26-29); "Night and day, whether [the farmer] sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." Finally comes the Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30-34); a tiny seed put in a garden would routinely grow into a garden plant big enough and sturdy enough for birds to perch on it.

So many people like noise, splash, and the tooting of horns — especially their own. They are inclined — even in church and parachurch ministries — to favor show over substance,

numbers over authenticity, buildings over spirituality. It seems that we cannot get over the ancient temptation to build monuments and make a name for ourselves (cf. Gen. 11:1ff). The kingdom of God advances are typically without fanfare, as individuals hear, receive, and are redeemed by the almost imperceptible planting, nurturing, growth, and fruition of the gospel in heart after heart.

A Parable of Silent Advance

Jesus loved to teach through parables, and he was the master at it. Especially when trying to tell his disciples about the kingdom of God, he used parables rather than straightforward declarations. There were so many entrenched notions of the kingdom as "splash" — a militaristic Messiah, a Jewish army under the flag of revolt against Rome, the glory of David and Solomon's time restored — that He had to find an effective way to counter and correct them. It is unlikely that a blunt denunciation would have produced anything other than the alienation of the masses from Day One.

So Jesus went about His task of correcting wrongheaded ideas more subtly. He used simple stories, metaphors, and figures of speech to squash the nationalistic agenda of Israel's rulers. And the "secret" to their correct interpretation was in the knowledge that Jesus Himself was their hermeneutical "key" (4:11). Listen to Him. Watch Him. See how He treats people. That is the kingdom of heaven. One writer points out that Jesus managed both to claim that He was fulfilling the old prophecies, the old hopes, of Israel and to do so in a way which radically subverted them. The Kingdom of God is here, He seemed to be saying, but it's not like you thought it was going to be.

And the kingdom of God is often not like we expect it to be. There are those who want Sunday morning to be the focus point of their faith. They want a tingle powerful enough to carry them through the week. They want to help with a ministry that will get headline attention. They want a tame and establishment-acceptable preacher everybody knows and loves, an ostentatious building that is a monument to their vanity, and a reputation as the "trendiest" or "best" or "biggest." Everything about the life of a kingdom person is His or Her worshipful gift to God, not just the things we do in our assemblies.

I like Peterson's translation of Paul's words on this point: "Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering" (Rom 12:1, The Message). Again, "God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach [résumé, portfolio, or ecclesiastical vanity], for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as He sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with you. Your task is to single-mindedly serve the Lord. Do that and you'll kill two birds with one stone: pleasing the God in you and proving your worth to the people around you" (Romans 14:17-18, The Message).

God does more kingdom work through a mother loving and nurturing her children than he can possibly get done through an ego-driven preacher. A man who is faithful and loving to his wife teaches his little girl more about her worth as a human being and does more to protect her against drugs and teen promiscuity than all the school or government programs ever designed to nurture their self-esteem. Somebody on the production line or in the top executive spot who maintains personal integrity day after day, a Sunday School teacher staying with that ministry through tight budgets and tighter room space, a teenager choosing not to follow his peers onto Internet porn sites, a frustrated church member who is fed up with the lack of faith the congregation's "leaders" demonstrate yet stays and continues to pray for them and an alcoholic or sex addict who takes responsibility and begins a lifelong process of recovery over sin — these quiet victories in the power of the Holy Spirit are the low-profiled and inconspicuous advances of the kingdom of God.

Your willingness to plant the good seed of the Word of God with your art or your music, in your junior high classroom, or by mentoring an exasperated person through CCSI or Welfare is the silent progress of God's work in the world. Your praying, your giving, your note to a sick person, your work at the prison, your effort to get one person to hear the gospel at the next revival, your commitment to follow up with that person, your bag of groceries brought to a family in need, your help with children — these are the humble events by which God does His work in the world.

Conclusion

The kingdom of God really is a secretly growing seed rather than a gaudy brass band. It is love, joy, and peace in the Holy

Spirit. It is a father's purity and a mother's compassion. It is the faithfulness of a Bible School worker and a Welfare mentor. It is our teens challenging one another to a lifestyle built on Jesus' words and lifestyle rather than anti-Christian cultural icons. It is dealing with cancer in faith and getting someone else's attention onto the Christ who is seen you through. It is your early morning quiet time in the Word of God, your secret prayers, your generous gifts, your daily offering of yourself to God.

The growth, progress, and outcome of God's kingdom is His responsibility. We don't have to beat drums and create events. We simply do what He puts it within our power to do — as Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase (cf. I Corinthians 3:6).

So don't sell yourself short in God's scheme of things. You are important to the kingdom of God. You are the kingdom of God.

Scriptural References:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. (I Corinthians 3:5-7 NIV)