

## Jesus Wow! Series Part 19

### Parables about Kingdom Growth

Mark 4:26-34

Pastor Andrew Neville 30/8/20

#### Sermon Summary

Ever been in an aircraft landing in turbulent weather? It is often very disconcerting. [I used to fly airplanes once – only small ones – and I certainly know the effort and concentration required to land them in such conditions. P.] Pastor Andrew talked about a flight into Queenstown once in which he was a passenger. [The surrounding mountains cause great turbulence at times and a similar condition occurs with Wellington airport sticking out into Cook Strait.] Among the passengers on such flights, a palpable fear of crashing is heightened, and a collective sigh (sometimes spontaneous clapping) occurs when the plane actually touches down safely.

All human life is turbulent at times and creates a natural fear that you might not make your destination, goals etc. Yet, in all things, God is in control – even of you, an insignificant individual.

**Today's text Mark 4: 26-34 contains 2 parables.** The first (v. 26-30) is only found in Mark's gospel. The emphasis is on the seed and the soil. All the farmer does is sow the seed. After that he can do nothing but wait. The growth of that plant is **independent** of the farmer. He does not come back into the picture until harvest time. Of course, the farmer does not go to sleep or take a holiday during the growing period – he still has countless chores to do. But the point of the message is that **God** is doing **all** the growing. The outcome is in His hands. It is the same with life generally. God is in control – even in natural disasters and election outcomes!

God's kingdom is relentlessly growing. It is unstoppable. For God's kingdom is not a work of man. So, are we surplus to requirements? No. The parable tells us that the work does not start until **some human sows** a seed. We do that by witnessing.

Using Carrie Rambo-Toehemotu, a chaplain at Massey University Albany, as an example: she begins her ministry to international students with friendship and frequent meal invitations and a very caring attitude. While students come and go, her ministry never flags. There are always replacements for those who graduate and carry the seeds sown by Carrie's witness and love for them into their future.

The harvest concludes this parable. The farmer comes back into the picture to complete God's work. This story is a metaphor about the growing kingdom that culminates in Christ's return. In Jesus' time, the expectation of Messiah is that He would come suddenly and unexpectedly and with a dynamic life-changing event. In this parable Jesus is explaining that

the kingdom is a slow, gradual, unstoppable event. But suddenly, the harvest is ripe, and it is time for the sickle (judgement). Some of the harvest will be saved; some will be destroyed.

The question for each of us – will you make the final destination despite the turbulence?

Shouldn't that make Christians calmer about the turbulence around us today? Surely, we are aware of our destination!

Two points are obvious from this first parable (v.26-29): (1). God is continually growing the kingdom. Our task is to **sow** the seed. (2). Judgement Day is real and inevitable. The harvest is close.

**The second parable** (v.30-32). "As small as a mustard seed" is a proverbial saying used for thousands of years and referring to anything (whether that be a substance or action) that is virtually insignificant. The story is not whether a mustard seed **is** the smallest in all creation (it isn't. That belongs to the seed of the orchid plant, which would have been unknown in Israel at that time.)

The saying concerns the growth of that mustard seed into a large shrub of up to 6-10 metres in height, certainly large and secure enough for a bird to perch in its shade. This parable reassures Christians that the kingdom will grow from something of little substance to something of considerable consequence. In other words, no matter how small or insignificant your sowing may be, God will use your efforts to grow His kingdom.

That coffee conversation with a neighbor or stranger may yet grow into something of eternal consequence. Remember Jesus' great commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

### **Points to Ponder Discussion Questions**

1. How can knowing that God is building His kingdom even now encourage our witnessing and at the same time reduce the pressure we feel when witnessing?
2. Can you share an example of how you overcame a fear to witness to someone – irrespective of whether you were successful or not?
3. Why does knowing a flight will reach its destination calm passengers? Why does this give more composure and confidence – even cheerfulness? How can you apply that in your current circumstances?

4. Are you – a Christian – afraid of dying tomorrow, or later this year? Why or why not?
5. If you were diagnosed with a terminal illness that promised pain, or a bedridden existence requiring constant supervision, would you seek to terminate your life earlier?
6. Since it is God's kingdom, why do Christians and churches sometimes behave as though they are competing against each other?
7. When you transferred to another town, did you church-shop among many looking for the best? What appealed to you in the eventually selected one?

### **Life Group Prayer Suggestions**

1. Pray that the focus on Covid deaths will not hide the truth of the persecution of Christians. For example, in Nigeria where over 600 have been killed in 2020. Pray for Gods mercy, compassion and protection for his people. Pray that the truth will be known and the world to care enough to act.
2. Pray for our Aussie neighbours. To date, in the state of Victoria have been 438 deaths. Pray for spiritual and mental healing for bereaved families, pray for Gods mercy, pray that Christ will be known as light in darkness and that his name be raised up.
3. Pray for our church family, that even though we are isolated we will be in spiritual unity through prayer and worship. Help us to remain connected so that we can care for each other, especially for those who are struggling and suffering. Pray that we show Jesus sacrificial love.
4. Pray that God will continue to draw people to him through online services.