

## **The Church and the Kingdom Mark 4:21-34**

**Revelation 1:5b-6** – “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

We have been given a designation – we are a Kingdom of Priests – ultimately we serve our God.

When we were last in Mark we considered Jesus’ story of the seeds thrown on different soils – and we learned that being a Christian means to be transformed, to the extent that we bear evidence of that transformation. It is something that naturally happens. If you have a relationship with Christ then you are not the same as you were before you met Him – He has changed your life. He has changed your heart – He has made you ‘a new creation.’

Jesus stretches the Church, and us personally, by means of an analogy and two short stories illustrating God’s work in our calling.

### 1. The Analogy of the Lamp – **The Gospel, by Nature, is an Offering to be Given Away**

A lamp throws off light from itself. Jesus’ point is that what God has done in us He wants to do through us. If you are a Christian you are a vessel by which God dispenses His Grace. You don’t have to be a rock star in the Faith before you can shine. It isn’t a process that takes years. A simple encounter with Jesus is enough for you to have something to share.

As the Church we have been called to be a part of the grand story of God's redemptive work. We don't belong to ourselves. We have been given something that is to be given away.

What is the health of your Christian life? The same could be asked of the Church. The answer: we are as healthy as we give. This is at the very heart of the Gospel.

### **John 3:16**

The evidence of a church's health is not in what it has, but in what it gives away and what it is willing to give up.

#### **2. The First Story – The Gospel Completes Our Imperfect Offerings**

The Church brings many offerings to the table – and it is tempting to think that the results are our responsibility – this can be intimidating and paralyzing – but the Gospel doesn't work that way. It is like a seed that mysteriously germinates and becomes grass.

The greatest joy of the Faith is when we let go – when we offer up what God has given – and then trust Him to do what He will.

And this is the secret of living in the peace of the Gospel. When we are overly concerned with the results it is often because we feel we need to be in control – in our hearts we micro-manage God – we don't enjoy the journey because we are always concerned about the wrong things – we don't trust God.

The Gospel completes our imperfect offerings.

#### **3. The Second Story – The Gospel graces our Offerings with Grace**

What you do for God is always grander and larger than what it appears to be at the moment it is offered. This is the mysterious work of the Kingdom that Jesus speaks to in this second story. That tiny mustard seed grows to be such a large bush – up to 15 feet high – birds even roost in it.

God has called you to be His and He has called you to great things in His Name – but here is the thing – you will rarely perceive it at the time of the offering because it is His work, His Church and His Glory – and the last thing you need to be thinking about is how important or visible or big what you are doing is – none of our egos can handle that – mine can't!

It is easy to believe that one Christian and one church can't make a difference – but this is prideful. It is prideful to not accept that God takes our offerings as they are – and makes them what He wants them to be.

So trust God believing that what He has called you to is huge for the Kingdom regardless of what it is – in comparison to eternity and heaven and God – **everything** is puny – but all of it is necessary – because God has made us His.

As far as the Church goes, you need to know that I am a lot less concerned with failure than I am about faithfulness. If we are faithful I can promise that we **will** fail at times – but that is okay – the Gospel assures that even our success is imperfect.

“Far better to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory, nor defeat.”

Theodore Roosevelt, 1899

All of which takes that analogy. The Gospel teaches that its light best shines through the openings, which for God's people are their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. God's Grace enables our weakness to display His Greatness and His ability to save and forgive. Those vulnerabilities are really the vehicles in which the world learns of God's Nature.

And Consider God the Father. What He had He gave away – Jesus.

Consider Jesus – He entrusted Himself to the Father knowing that it would mean His death – He made Himself weak in order to offer up Himself, that we could share His Glory.

Everything about God is drenched in a Love He constantly gives.