

STUDY 6



The transforming touch of Heaven

Sunday 27th May 2018

Reading – Mark 4.1-34

6. THE STORIES OF THE KINGDOM.

Jesus declared *the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near* (Mk 1.15). This was a revolutionary message. Jesus taught his own disciples and the larger crowds in many different ways, but the use of parables featured extensively.

Mk 4.2 *He taught them many things by parables.*

- There are nearly 50 parables recorded in the gospels. What is your favourite parable?
- What is the main reason that Jesus taught in parables?

In presenting the revolution of God, Jesus was communicating a subversive message concerning the kingdom with its radical message. You can see in the parables coded language being used.

- Turn to Mark 4.10-12 and there Jesus speaks about parables that conceal and also reveal. What does Jesus infer by using this quotation from the prophet Isaiah in 6.9-10.

There is the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the kingdom. The kingdom has come but it has not yet come in its fullness. The parables speak about entering into the 'now' of the kingdom and others refer to the 'not yet' of the kingdom when Jesus returns and completeness of the kingdom will come in power.

Many of the parables used the image of seed.

- In what way is the seed a powerful image of the kingdom?

1. THE SOWER AND THE SEED 4.1-9; 13-20

The parable is not so much about the seed itself but what happens to the seed when it falls into different kinds of soil.

Stolen seed – 4.4

Scorched seed – 4.5-6

Strangled seed – 4.7

Successful seed – 4.8

- In what ways do the different soils represent the hearts of the hearers of this parable?

The hard heart 5.15 What has helped you soften your heart towards God?

The shallow heart 5.16-17 How can we avoid shallowness in our own hearts?

The divided heart 4.18-19 What are some of the common weeds that choke our lives?

The whole heart 4.20 How do we go about allowing the seed to flourish?

- **What are some of the truths that arise in this familiar parable?**

If you read these notes before your meeting – try praying through the parable, maybe take a prayer walk through a corn field! Joyce Huggett suggests: ‘Invite Jesus to re-tell the story just for you for today. As the story unfolds, listen to the details, the tone of voice and the mannerisms of the Storyteller.’

‘Send your Spirit
heavenly Sower,
into ever particle of the soil of my life.
Soften it,
cleanse it,
fertilise it,
deepen it,
break up the clods,
pull out the weeds
that I may yield, not just a meagre harvest
but fruit in abundance
for you and your kingdom.’

2. THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY 4.26-29

The seed is sown and there is then little direct input from the farmer. The seed grows – stalk, ear, full harvest grain.

- What does this parable tell us regarding the hidden growth of the kingdom?
- 1 Cor 3.6 is an interesting reflection on the seed sown.

Jesus will bring the process of the kingdom to its fullness in his own timing – there will be a harvest.

3. THE MUSTARD SEED 4.30-34

The mustard seed was proverbial for speaking about something that is very small, Matt 17.20. The kingdom is not just the seed sown, it is the whole process, from sowing to harvesting. The kingdom has small beginnings but what results is significantly different from what is sown.

- Think about the ways the kingdom has had global influence like a tree with its spreading branches.

The image of seeds in speaking about the kingdom underlines the fundamental truth that God is in the growth business. You may feel weak and insignificant but God’s sovereign purposes are invested in you.

Take the opportunity to pray about the seed of the kingdom that is being spread by the ministry of the church family at wbc. What are some of the encouraging signs of growth?

FOR YOUR NOTES