

## **New Power – Mark 4:30-32**

We are on a journey with Jesus. It started with an invitation by Jesus to “Come walk with me.” We have found that it is essential that we are ready to change our ways, our affections, our desires, our practices to match those of Jesus, or we will be new wine in old wineskins. We discovered that on this journey we have a new family, composed of all those who put their faith in Jesus for salvation. Today we discover that we have new power through our relationship with Jesus.

Braxton read our text for today, but keep your Bibles handy because there is so much more we need to see in this chapter and beyond. So before we look at this brief parable I want you to do a quick survey with me of what Jesus does in chapters 4-7. For Mark, Jesus reveals who is by what he does, so each miracle is important.

- Jesus calms the storm, leaving the apostles asking, “Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him.” (4:35-41)
- Jesus sets a man possessed by demons free (5:1-20)
- Jesus heals a woman with a bleeding condition (5:21-34)
- Jesus raises a dead girl back to life (5:35-43)
- Jesus feeds 5000 with just 5 loaves of bread and two fish (6:10-44)
- Jesus walks on water (6:45-56)
- Jesus honours the faith of a Syrophenician woman and casts the demon out of her daughter (7:24-30)
- Jesus heals a deaf and mute man (7:31-37)

If we had time, each of these miracles tells us a story of who Jesus is, the Son of God, Saviour, Messiah and Deliverer. I again challenge you to read these stories and pay attention to what each tells us about who Jesus is.

Today we return to chapter 4, verses 30-32. Here we find Jesus telling us a parable about what the Kingdom of God is like. Chapter 4 contains three parables, stories Jesus told to describe what life is like for those who walk with him, who live in his Kingdom.

Now the kingdom of God is not a place, not a country, it doesn't even have buildings. The kingdom of God is where God is working, where God is present and reigns. Remember all those miracles that we quickly read through? Those were signs that the kingdom of God had come in Jesus. They were displays of the power of God through Jesus declaring who Jesus was – God incarnate. Where Jesus was, there you would find the kingdom of God.

In Luke's Gospel we read in 17:20-21:

“When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God will not come with observable signs. 21Nor will people say, ‘Look, here it is,’ or ‘There it is.’ **For you see, the kingdom of God is in your midst.**”

Did you hear what Jesus said? Don’t look for marching armies or royal banners as signs of the coming kingdom of God. That is what the Jewish nation expected in Jesus’ time. They expected the kingdom to come through the Messiah who would free them from Roman oppression and establish a throne in Jerusalem. Jesus said, “Do not look for this.”

Where should they look? Was the kingdom near? Oh yes, very near. In fact the kingdom was in their midst – he stood right in front of them. The kingdom of God comes in the person and presence of Jesus. Those who were walking with Jesus were walking in the kingdom of God.

What is it like when the kingdom of God invades a place? What happens when Jesus shows up in our lives? This is what the parable of the mustard seed is about.

First let’s look at the details of this parable. Most parables Jesus spoke included everyday items or situations that people could relate to – and remember.

In this parable, the central character is the mustard plant. What does Jesus tell us about the mustard plant?

1. It starts from a very small seed. Jesus calls it the smallest of seeds on the earth. Though there are smaller seeds, few garden plants are as small as this 1-2 mm seed. It takes nearly 800 seeds to weigh a gram! It is a very small seed.
2. The mustard see plant grows rapidly. Jesus says it becomes the largest of all garden plants. How true that is! The mustard plant can grow 8-12 feet a year, and some suggest even up to 30 feet! That is a lot of growth in a short time.
3. The full-grown mustard plant can provide shelter to the birds of the air. It provides shade for them, according to Jesus in verse 32. When the hot Judean sun beat down on everything, the birds knew there was a place of refuge under the branches of the mustard plant.

So we get the picture of a plant that starts incredibly small, grows quickly and becomes a very helpful, benevolent plant in the garden. Is that it? Was Jesus teaching a horticulture lesson, “Gardening 101” or DIY home projects?

Of course not. Remember Jesus starts with this phrase, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?” (v. 30) This is to help us know what the kingdom of God is like – it is a parable.

We learn first of all that the kingdom of God started very small. How small did the Kingdom of God begin on this earth? It started when the “Word became flesh.” You could say the kingdom started in a baby, and we know the life of a baby begins before birth. Our daughter is expecting her first child – Lise and I will soon be grandparents – and she gives us updates on how the baby

is growing within her – the size of a pea, a walnut, a plum, an orange, and so forth. Jesus also started as a baby within the womb of Mary. That is as tiny as it gets.

“But Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,” according to Luke 2:52. He did not stay a baby, not even a boy. As a man he walked the roads of Galilee and Judea sharing the message that God had come to deliver his people. Jesus was the embodiment of the kingdom of God. But is that as big as it would get?

No, for Jesus called 12 men to be his disciples and apostles. They would be carriers of the kingdom, carriers of the presence of Jesus to this world. They were not very successful until the Holy Spirit came on them at Pentecost and then they found God had given them power from on high. They had a boldness, and an authority with power to see the kingdom of God break upon the people in miracles and deliverance and salvation.

That is not the end. By Pentecost there were 120 believers gathered from the one seed planted, who was Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit came on the disciples and that day the church added 3000 people and from there people were being added daily. The kingdom grew. Persecution scattered the Christians, and soon new seed was planted and new churches began to spring up in Asia, Greece, Ethiopia, Egypt and all around the Mediterranean.

By the third century the plant had grown so much, it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. But God was not done yet. The plant continues to grow to this very day. By 1910 there were 600 million Christians in the world. Today there are over 2.2 billion. The kingdom of God cannot be stamped out, or destroyed. Jesus told a parable of a farmer who sows his seed and has to wait for it to grow – and the growth is God’s part. So it is today. Christians sow the seed but God gives the increase.

But what about that piece about birds finding shade in the branches of the mustard plant. What does that mean?

Wherever God’s people go, God is able to do good through them. I know some bad things have been done in the name of religion, even Christianity, but those were not the things Jesus asked his people to do. Quite the contrary.

But if you want to search the origins of hospitals and clinics, public schools for children and orphanages, rescue missions for the homeless with shelter for men and women, or even summer camps for kids, you will usually find Christians involved.

Dr. John Phillips, military man, banker and pastor says this about the influence of Christianity in our world:

Everywhere the kingdom of God has gone, it has brought with it hospitals and schools; truth, morality, and ethics; decency and compassion; and, above all, salvation. Wherever the gospel has gone, it has abolished cannibalism, child sacrifice, the sacrifice of widows, polygamy, demonism, slavery, and a thousand other such ills. It has built orphanages and asylums, cared

for the sick, comforted the bereaved, and helped the infirm. In many lands, even secular governments have taken color from its creeds. Even the unsaved have found shelter beneath its branches and found comfort and a better lifestyle in its shade.

Praise God for that little mustard seed!

I can imagine Peter saying, "I am just a fisherman. I can maybe share a fish with someone. I will never be a tree others find shade under."

What story follows the parable of the mustard plant in Mark's Gospel? (Remember, Peter is the source of the material for Mark's Gospel). It is the story of Jesus calming the storm. Mark starts the story, "That day..." Right after Jesus teaches about the mustard tree this event happens.

Jesus takes the disciples across the lake in a boat, and in his exhaustion, Jesus falls asleep in the stern of the boat. While he sleeps, a huge storm hits the lake and the disciples were terrified. They think they will drown. They call Jesus who calmly rebukes the wind and waves and all is peaceful again. There was no doubt this was the hand of God at work, extended through Jesus.

I can almost hear Jesus say, "Pay attention Peter." Then Mark records several more miracles Jesus performs, for Peter has not forgotten them. They all have something to do with becoming shade others can find shelter in...

Jesus made a promise to his disciples, those who would walk with him. Jesus said,

**<sup>12</sup>Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)**

After the Holy Spirit filled the lives of the disciples, we read of Peter and John going to the temple to pray. They meet a lame man by the temple gates who is begging for money. Peter, prompted by the Holy Spirit, stops and says, "Silver and gold have I none. But in the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk!" The man was healed that day and went walking and leaping into the temple.

The secret to providing shade, help to others, was not in what we have to offer, but who we have to offer. We offer Jesus to those in need. His power will flow through us to bring help, hope, even healing. Peter was still a penniless fisherman, but now he could share Jesus. That would be the life-changing gift that would provide the needed shade for weary souls.

As you journey with Jesus through life know that you are part of something much bigger than yourself. You are a part of the kingdom of God. Jesus is your king and he reigns and rules in your heart. As his Spirit lives within you the fruit of his love will start to be evident. You cannot live just for yourself, your life will be poured out helping others, in whatever way you can.

Jesus said some would understand the parable. Some would not. Those close to him would understand, and those far from him would not. I pray today you are close enough to Jesus to understand His parable of the mustard plant.