

**Kingdom Operations**

**Mark 4:26-34**

Currently, there is no shortage of political chatter taking place these days with an election right around the corner here - plenty of opinions - plenty of analysis - plenty of talk that's going around regarding all of this. And what's going to happen to this great nation? What's going to happen to America? What does the future hold? ...and lots of speculation that is being put forth - a lot of skepticism - a lot of cynicism. Even Christians, many Christians, almost giving up, losing hope, moving to Canada (Whatever you want to say, right?), saying, oh, man, this is terrible! This is so bad! ...almost as if they have this tone that God's not in control. ...almost as if God doesn't know what He's doing. We obviously know better. We know what Scripture teaches, that God has declared boldly that He sits on His throne in the heavens, and He does whatever He pleases. God is in complete control of His universe, specifically, our nation, no question about that. However, we do know as believers, in this time we are called to pray, obviously, for our government, pray for our leaders, pray for our nation. But also we know that there's a model that Jesus gave us for how to pray, and that is that we would pray that His "...kingdom [would] come, [and his] will [would] be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We've been commanded to pray in such a way, that God's "...kingdom come, [his] will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Well, we face a dilemma, don't we? Because, obviously, it doesn't take very long to look around, to consider our everyday experiences, to look at what is being broadcasted and made known, and to recognize it doesn't appear like God's will is taking place in abundance. It doesn't appear like we have God's kingdom reigning on this earth. We have that dilemma. It's confusing. It's discouraging even, as we look around and consider what's taking place around us. And so, we have to come to grips with this question - what's happening? Why is this? Is God's kingdom really still happening? Is God really still in control? Is His will, actually, truly being done? It's a question that we have to deal with, and it's confusing at times as we just look at the reality of what's around us. This reality of confusion that we face is not too different than what the disciples were facing in the time of Christ. They'd spent time with Jesus. They witnessed and watched Jesus do miracle after miracle. They've heard Him teach. They've seen the authority that He displays in His ministry, and they were convinced this man is the Son of God, and thus they gave up their lives. They gave up their tax collecting. They gave up their fishing business. They said no to family, to go follow this

man, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, completely convinced He's the Messiah. But what was the reality for them? When they observed mankind around them, when they looked around, what did they find? ...rejection, confusion, opposition. What a discouraging time for the disciples as they considered and looked around and thought here's the Messiah, God in human flesh, and yet this is the response of the people. It's very similar to what you and I encounter today, a longing for God's kingdom, but looking around and seeing that's not the reality. So, too, for Christ's disciples, seeing the King right there in front of them but not seeing the reality of God's kingdom coming to life in front of them. ...discouraging, confusing.

We praise God for the teaching of Jesus and where we find ourselves in Mark chapter 4 because in our text, today, we see these two parables that Jesus gives about the kingdom of God - two specific parables teaching us about the kingdom of God and what God is doing, so that it can encourage the disciples and by default encourage us as well, even exhort us in the work of the Lord. Let's look at our text this morning in Mark chapter 4:26, and we'll read through verse 34; "And he said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.' And he said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything." This is our text for the morning. We'll begin by looking at this first parable that we find, starting in verse 26, and I call it the parable of the sprouting seed - the parable of the sprouting seed or the seed that's growing here - this simple picture that Jesus gives.

Before we get into it, just want to remind you where we find ourselves in this ministry of Jesus. We've seen Him working as we've already discussed and doing miracles and teaching and having followers even, but most significantly the way we saw chapter 3 end was with some incredible opposition. We saw religious leaders, that had their time to witness and

observe Jesus and His ministry, come to Him and make a decision about what they thought of Jesus. The disciples were all in. They were convinced this man was of God; but the religious leaders, what would they say? ...and they made the bold claim that Jesus' work, supernatural as it was, was the work of Satan and not God. For that reason, Jesus accused these religious leaders of rejecting Him and blaspheming the Holy Spirit and His ministry among them. Jesus then turned His attention to those that were around Him that were actually seeking to do the will of God. And at this point in Jesus' ministry, it's understandable that the disciples would be befuddled by what's happening; convinced that Jesus is the King, yet seeing such rejection and opposition in the people among them.

Thus, Jesus turned to this teaching in parables and that first parable that we saw in the beginning of chapter 4 is one of the most well-known parables, the parable of the sower and the seed and the different soils. So, Jesus taught in this parable and explained why. Why it is that you have such rejection taking place around Him? Why it is that you have people responding the way that they are? The reality is there's nothing wrong with the seed. The word of God is going forth and Jesus is teaching and casting this over and over amongst all the people coming to Him. The issue is with the people themselves. Their hearts are reflecting these different types of soils as He's described. Some aren't even listening to any of it. Some listen for a time and then they fall away. Some listen and embrace it, but then get enticed by some other desire or choked out by some trial and tribulation while others, actually, listen and receive and obey and produce, "...and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." This was Jesus' explanation for why the disciples were seeing what was happening around us, and we recognize that that's still the case today. This is still what happens when the word of God goes forth.

Why is there such rejection? Why such hostility and opposition to Jesus? Why are there these theories and these people with PhD's that make it their aim to debunk Jesus and everything of Christianity? ...because of the parable of the soils. It's simple. Certain people are not good soil, and they're not interested in hearing the word of God or receiving any of what it says. This is the case in the disciples' day and in our day, and notice that Jesus says why He's actually changing to this new technique, this strategy of teaching in parables. He says it in verse 11 if you remember, in chapter 4:11, He says, "To you..." (to His disciples those following Him) "To you has

been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables...” And we see that Jesus presented this twofold reason why He’s teaching in parables. In one sense, because of the rejection of the religious leaders and the opposition and their blasphemy, Jesus now teaches in parables to conceal and hide the message from them, from the opponents, the antagonists, the adversaries, if you will. And then on the other side, on the other side of the same coin, Jesus is speaking in parables to reveal and show and help this message of the kingdom be understood to His followers.

This is the technique Jesus is using, these stories with a point, drawing from everyday life to explain more about the kingdom of God. And those that were sincere in their following of Christ, they understood more, and they wanted more. And those that were rejecting skeptics, enthusiasts not, really, there to receive what Christ had to say, they became more and more veiled to the truth and hardened and put off by what Jesus was saying and doing. Jesus encouraged and even commanded His disciples to pay attention. The measure with which the responsibility they had to come to what Jesus was saying and to take it seriously, the effort with which they put in to understand what He was saying would correspond directly to what they got out of it, to what they, actually, did understand and take away. Still, at this point, we have a question. We understand why everyone’s responding the way they are. We understand now why there’s different opposition taking place - because of the parable of the soils, but we still need to know, what about the kingdom of God? The disciples need to know, what about the kingdom of God? This is promised in the Old Testament, God Himself coming and establishing His Messiah and reigning on the earth. What about that? Has that been thwarted? Has it been stopped? Is it done? And Jesus tells these two parables to try and answer and encourage His disciples.

So, we turn to our first parable, the parable of the sprouting seed, and as we work through it we see a very simple story unfold. The first thing we see is the scattering - the scattering. The kingdom of God - this is Jesus’s aim to explain about the kingdom of God. He says it at the beginning of both parables; that’s why we know that’s what the point is, the topic, the obvious theme, that Mark is addressing as he records this parable. And just to remind you, Jesus was speaking openly and publicly and bluntly about this kingdom of God back in Mark 1:4-15, and now He’s speaking in parables for reasons we’ve already discussed, but this has been mentioned. This has been stated

before. So, Jesus isn't stopping His teaching on the kingdom. He's continuing it, just in a different strategy and technique. And the picture that unfolds for us is simple. Once again, we have a farmer or a sower, someone... a job or a task very familiar to first century Israel and Palestine. Someone going out, throwing their seed as we've already seen even in the parable of the soils. That's it. It's a simple picture, a man scattering seed upon the ground. We're kind of reminded a little bit of what the seed meant back in the parable of the soils in verse 14. The sower sows the word. The seed is the word of God that doesn't change, that's going forth and being scattered along the ground. And so, we have another mention, another picture, of a similar man scattering and sowing seed once again.

What next? We see the sleeping as Jesus continues to unfold this picture. There's a man, a sower, a farmer, scattering seed on the ground. Verse 27; "He sleeps and rises night and day..." ["He sleeps and rises night and day..."] It's interesting. Jesus doesn't take pains to discuss and describe how diligent this farmer's been, how much work and effort and how much time he's put into his task, his job here, of sowing seed and making sure and cultivating it, so that it might grow and produce the most fruit possible. Jesus says nothing of that. In this picture, all we have is a guy that threw some seed, and then he went to bed - very limited contribution on his part, just throwing seed, going home and going to sleep, rising night and day, going about his everyday business. That's it - not all the extra work of plowing the field and what it takes and how to prepare the soil also to cultivate with watering and different techniques, none of that, none of that at all - a contribution of simply scattering seed and going to sleep and going about his business

You see, the farmer's not the emphasis of this parable. The farmer's not the one that we spend all our time looking at. Jesus is just painting a very simple picture. The emphasis, really, comes in what's next - the sprouting - the sprouting. And what comes next is where you find emphasis. While this farmer "...sleeps and rises night and day..." "...the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how." ["...the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how."] Not only do we have a very limited contribution of the farmer already seen, but we even have... when the sprouting comes, when you have the growth coming out of the ground from these seeds, you have the farmer saying I don't even know how that happened. I'm not even sure. This is just what I do. I mean, don't get all scientific on me. I just throw seed out there, and

stuff grows; leave it at that. He doesn't know. He doesn't understand the scientific reality of everything that's taking place here. He can't explain to you all the details of what goes on in germination. He can't. He just throws the seed, and it grows - an amazing concept - one of these natural phenomena that we get so accustomed to, and we kind of take for granted even, much like how our human bodies are amazing, their anatomy and their physiology, and what they can do and how God created them. It's amazing, and in the same way, how fascinating it is that God has created this design where a seed can go in the ground, and it can have some moisture and all of a sudden grow roots and then sprout and come up and show a blade of grass. It's an amazing thing.

If you've ever watched a time-lapse video on You Tube and just watch this happen over a few days or a week, it's fascinating. It's amazing that God created such a design as this. In fact, it's incredible that seeds can be dormant; they can have life in them, but they can be dormant for 4,000 years. We can find seeds from tombs of the Egyptians, these seeds that we know are 4,000 years old, and you can plant them, give them some moisture, and you have life; you have growth. A fascinating thing that we're so accustomed to, and we don't even realize what's taking place. This is the point of what Jesus is getting at. There's a farmer who's just going about his everyday job and business and not, really, paying attention to everything that's taking place. He just throws the seed, and what do you know? ...there comes some sprouting and growth. This is the kingdom of God. You throw the seed, and then there's growth, and it's amazing. It's fascinating. It's miraculous how this happens. It's almost mysterious even. The farmer can't tell you everything that's happening underneath the surface where the seed is planted.

That reminds us a little bit of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. When Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, this religious leader, and talking about what it means to be born again, and how no one can see the kingdom of God or enter into the kingdom of God unless they're born again, and Nicodemus is initially confused. He starts to state, what does it mean born again? Jesus, what're You talking about? I can't be physically born again, can I? And Jesus has to clarify, no, I'm talking about being spiritually born again by the Holy Spirit. And Jesus describes an interesting kind of imagery of what this looks like - the Spirit, which is also the same Greek word for wind, they're interchangeably used. He says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you

hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Jesus’s point is when people are born again, it’s the most mysterious and fascinating thing. It’s miraculous in how it takes place. You can’t predict it. You can’t fully understand it, exactly, what’s going on, but the Holy Spirit goes much like the wind and comes, and you see the effects of the Holy Spirit and bringing people to life and causing them to be born again through the word of God. This is the amazing process of regeneration; people being born again. It’s mysterious. It’s amazing. It’s like this farmer that throws seed, and he just takes a step back and goes this is incredible. All I do is throw some seed, and it grows. Wonderful! This is an amazing thing, and this is the kingdom of God; the Holy Spirit goes forth, and people come to life as they hear the word of truth, as they hear the word of God, as they receive the seed that is thrown.

Jesus elaborates a little bit more on how this growth goes and describing some of the steps of what happens, further showing the emphasis is not on this farmer but on the growth, the steps. Look at verse 28; “The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.” It’s an amazing thing, and where is the farmer in this process? ...nothing, not doing anything. Not only have we sprouting, but now we have “...first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.” ...to actually bear fruit and a harvest. Right? The whole process here unfolding, and you don’t have the farmer’s hand involved. In fact, the way verse 28 begins, it says, “The earth produces by itself...” The Greek word there is *automata* (αυτόματο). That’s where we get the word automatic. It’s an automatic thing. It’s just this natural default that happens in life. When you throw the seed in the soil, this is what’s going to happen. There will be not just sprouting and growth, but then even a bearing of fruit and grain that comes. This is in keeping consistent with how God works; His Spirit goes, using the word of God and bringing people to life, causing growth to take place.

This is what God has stated in other places in the Scripture, perhaps most specifically and clearly in Isaiah 55. In Isaiah 55:10-11, we have similar kinds of illustrations used; “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I

sent it.” This farmer throws out his seed, and he expects - he’s taking it for granted. He expects that something’s going to grow, and something’s going to come forth. In the same way, God speaks. He sends forth His word, and He expects, and He knows that there will be growth from that. There will be life. There will be people being born again. There’ll be spiritual maturity and growth that takes place.

There’s a simple understanding here; if this is how the kingdom of God works, then what does that mean for you and I? If this is how the kingdom of God works, this simple process that’s profound in how it works because it has nothing to do with human ability of the farmer and everything to do with the seed, the word of God, what does that mean for you and I? It’s a simple application. Do you have the word of God? Do you have the seed that God uses to bring people to life? Then what should you do with it? Why would you hesitate? Why would you delay? I really need to study and understand this seed better. I just... I can’t throw it out, yet. It’s too precious to me. It’s just for me, and I want to mine all the gems in it. You have the seed; throw it! You have the word of God; make it known. Proclaim it. Declare it. Why? ...because through that, people come to life, people are born again. Now, do you have the luxury of looking underneath the surface and watching the seed and seeing it start to grow? No, you don’t, but you have a promise from Jesus that this is how the kingdom of God works. Either you trust that promise, and you will throw forth the word of God, expecting results and praying for those results; or you’ll be so fixated on the tangible and wanting to see things, that you’ll get discouraged, that you’ll shrink back, and you’ll say, wow, our nation’s going down the tubes anyway. Just let it go. Why even try anymore? We try because it’s the design of God. It’s how the kingdom operates.

This is the picture that Jesus gives us, and it’s undeniable. It’s simple, and our application is necessary. What’s the result? The result is simple; it’s the harvest that comes. We see in our picture here, that Jesus gives us, of the sickle that’s being used; “...when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” [“...when the grain is ripe...”] When the full growth and maturity has come, then the farmer shows up again. I’m here. I’m here to reap all the benefits. The guy that just threw the seed and went to sleep and waited and waited. And then he shows up months later and says, alright, here we go - we have a business - and gathers it all. This is the kingdom of God. It is God’s sovereignty. It is God’s mysterious and

supernatural working in peoples' lives through His word; that's how the kingdom of God operates. God takes His word and uses it, and it will not return empty. It will not return void. So, notice once again, the farmer is nothing in this, and this a reminder for all of us. There's no sense in any of us having this good feeling about ourselves or pride in this process.

It's absolutely foolish to think such a way - much like what Paul actually had to tell the Corinthian church and their issue of trying to identify certain leaders and humans that they would hang on to. They thought Apollos was amazing, or Peter was a great leader, or Paul, even, himself and what he wrote - but Paul says perfectly clear, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." So, neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. I love that. That's a clear picture of you and I and how we operate in the kingdom. Does God need you? No. He doesn't, not at all. God's the one who causes the growth, but God's delight - He takes pleasure in using you as that messenger that spreads the word, that scatters the seed in the lives of those whom He will save and cause growth. God Himself causes the growth. This is the privilege that you and I have had as 1 Peter 1:23 states, "...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God..." That's how you were saved, "...through the living and abiding word of God..." And you can now turn around and take that same "...living and abiding word of God..." which will accomplish exactly what God desires, and spread it and send it forth, proclaim it, declare it. This is how the kingdom of God operates.

The disciples were with Jesus watching this rejection, watching the opposition that would come to Him regularly, frequently, and it would continue in Jesus' ministry as people would challenge Him and continue to rise up against Him. But what could the disciples take encouragement in? ...the preaching that was taking place. Was Jesus declaring the message of the kingdom? Absolutely! In fact, Jesus would tell the disciples, now it's your turn. You go, and you go to Israel and declare, and then at the end of Jesus' life, He would say go even farther, go to the nations and keep declaring this. This is how the kingdom operates; the word goes forth, and if that's taking place be encouraged, that's faithfulness. That's actually success - mission accomplished! This is what God desires. This is how He works. This is the kingdom of God. So, you might look around, disciples, and see

that Rome is still in charge of Israel. It might feel like there's still a lot of opposition to the Messiah, but is the word of God going forth? ...and their answer has to be, well, absolutely! Jesus, you keep preaching - then mission accomplished. The kingdom of God is growing. It's the same thing for you and I. We don't feel like it is. We look around, and we start to take assessment and think, umm, we want to see numbers. We want to see some visible results. But the reality is, underneath the surface, either there's seed there or there's not, and God is using it and growing it. Are we faithful to cast that seed, to throw out the word of God?

Not only through this parable does Jesus encourage His disciples and do we have encouragement that the kingdom is growing, but we find even more encouragement about the future and the promise of the kingdom of God in verses 30-32, and that's where we find the parable of the small seed, or the mustard seed as is commonly known - the parable of the small mustard seed. Once again, just read it because it's really short; "And he said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' " Once again, the primary goal is teaching about the kingdom of God; "...what can we compare the kingdom of God...?" How else can I put it for you, disciples? How else can you understand what the kingdom of God is like? Not only is it growing, but maybe I'll use this example, a grain of mustard seed. The small grain is what He uses as His example, the small grain, this tiny mustard seed. He describes it as "...the smallest of all the seeds on earth..."

People get a little in over their heads and start to argue about this and say, actually, Jesus, there's some orchids in the tropical rain forest, and they have, really, tiny seeds, even smaller than mustard seeds. Well, once again, Jesus isn't in the tropical rain forest right now. He's in first century Palestine. He's in Israel. And what are they aware of? ...mustard trees, more specifically, mustard plants, really, they're not really these massive trees. There's these mustard plants. They're garden plants. That's what they have around them. They use their leaves. They use their seeds, actually, even for some type of, you know, condiments, even, and medicinal benefits and eat them as vegetables. This is what was known to the people. So, Jesus takes what is known, the smallest and tiniest and insignificant seed possible, a

mustard seed - this illustration that they could relate to, that they could understand. To them, first century Jews, it was the smallest even in the world. It's interesting, even, it looks tiny already, but about seven hundred and fifty of these will get you one gram, weighs one gram. And just so you know, you need twenty-eight grams for just one ounce. This is tiny. It's insignificant. It's small. This is the kingdom of God - looks like this tiny mustard seed - this tiny, humble, insignificant beginnings of God's kingdom. This is how He sets it up.

The point of the parable comes in this contrast that He shows in what's next, in the surprising growth - the surprising growth that results; "yet" as He says in the beginning of verse 32; "...yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." It's larger than all the other garden plants. So, of all the garden plants that would dominate the different gardens that were there in first century Israel, people knew that the mustard plant, if you will, was largest - once again, not talking about cedars and oaks and massive trees. These garden plants (something that started from this tiny, little, insignificant, little seed) could grow to something like twelve to fifteen feet tall in a matter of a few weeks. It'd be quick, and it'd be massive, and it's all in comparison. When you compare its humble beginnings to its final product and result, it's impressive. It's large. This is the kingdom of God; something that would start out small and look humble and tiny - especially after the disciples looked around and realized there's so few of us, so many of them that don't believe You, Jesus - and yet this promise that it would become great and grow largest of the garden plants.

There's a phrase here that Jesus uses, and it's intentional I think. He says, so it "...puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." He's drawing on some imagery from the Old Testament and how foreign nations used to be described as trees as well, these large trees. And then, we also have in the prophets' descriptions of God's kingdom... which will also be a tree. So, let's look at Ezekiel, real quick, and see what he has to say about this, and see and watch how Jesus pulls from this imagery in this parable. Ezekiel 31:3-6, this is all in reference to the great nation of the ancient near East, Assyria. Assyria, this massive nation, that did its fair share of damage; "Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches and forest shade, and of towering height, its top among the clouds. The waters nourished it; the deep made it grow tall, making its rivers flow

around the place of its planting, sending forth its streams to all the trees of the field. So it towered high above all the trees of the field; its boughs grew large and its branches long from abundant water in its shoots. All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young, and under its shadow lived all great nations.” This amazing picture of Assyria - it’s picturesque as a tree, this massive tree, where all the nations came as animals and enjoyed the shade of Assyria since Assyria dominated the known world.

Well, we know that Assyria did not last long. In Ezekiel 31:10-12, here’s what happens; “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. Foreigners, the most ruthless of nations, have cut it down and left it. On the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land, and all the peoples of the earth have gone away from its shadow and left it.” This proud, amazing, massive beginning that turned into a chopped-down devastation - this isn’t just a case for Assyria - a similar terminology is used for Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom in Daniel chapter 4. This happens often where there’s this massive tree that had all the nations of the earth, signified as these birds and animals coming and enjoying its shade, but because of its pride, God chops it down.

And what we have in our parable - Jesus says there’s this tiny seed that grows into a large garden plant. It puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can “...make nests in its shade.” And that’s it; nobody’s chopping this one down. ...Assyria chopped down, Babylon chopped down by God. How about this? ...still remains. Ezekiel actually talked about this as well; “Thus says the Lord God: ‘I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.’ ” ...prophesied by God in the Old Testament that He will establish His kingdom as this massive tree, and

what will happen? Birds of the air will come and nest and enjoy its shade. Animals will come and stream to the kingdom of God.

What is Jesus telling His disciples? ...take heart. You look around, and you don't see this picture now. You don't see the nations streaming to Israel when enjoying the shade of this massive tree. You don't see this amazing kingdom being ruled by God's Messiah over all the earth, but this is what will happen. Something that starts tiny, insignificant, humble, and small, will expand like this mustard seed into a mustard tree. It will expand and become massive. The nations will come, like these birds, and they will "...make their nests in its shade." And it will not be chopped down like Assyria, like Babylon. Could the disciples be encouraged? Absolutely! If they remain fixated on what they could see and what they were experiencing and the tangible results, then they'll be discouraged. They'll lose heart, but if they could remember what Jesus taught here as He affirmed what the prophets had said, what God Himself had promised, that He will establish His kingdom, and it'll be greater than all the kingdoms of the earth; if they could remember that, then they could have courage, then they could be bold, then they could proclaim the truth. This is the reality of Jesus's teaching. The kingdom of God has not been thwarted. It is going forth. It is growing, and it will be dominate over the entire earth.

Finally, Mark gives us this summary statement here, the strategy, summarized in verses 33-34; "With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything." Just a reminder and a wrap up of this kind of teaching that Jesus was doing. First, in verse 33, you see the commitment to parables. Jesus continued to speak in parables. Mark tells us that there's clearly far more parables that Jesus spoke than what we have here. Even in Matthew 13, you have several parables on the kingdom of God, but even that isn't exhaustive. There's more, more that Jesus taught, more that Jesus did and said in reference to the kingdom of God. Notice how Jesus's teaching is described as "the word." Jesus' teaching was not some cute anecdote and story, something you can kind of feel fuzzy by and go, that's nice, I appreciate that uplifting. Jesus' teaching was the divine truth of God. Jesus' teaching was the infallible, inerrant - the true, inspired, word of God. There is no question of it. When He taught in parables, when He taught directly, it was the word, the word of God.

Notice that He was even patient with His audience; "...he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it." ["...he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it."] ...not overwhelming them, and this led to Him bringing His commentary in private with the disciples as verse 34 tells us - the commentary in private; "He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything." While Jesus continued this strategy of concealing the truths of the kingdom from those that had rejected Him, He continued to reveal truths of the kingdom to His followers, and He privately would explain to them everything regarding the kingdom. Could Jesus' disciples have been discouraged? Absolutely! Absolutely! They had found the Messiah. They thought this is the time; let the King reign and let the kingdom come. But that's not what they were experiencing. Reality for them was opposition, hardship, and it would stay that way for most of them their entire lives. They would feel that hardship in opposition. They would even get the persecution as we see in the book of Acts. But what helped them continue? What allowed them to look beyond the visible and see into what is unseen, into the eternal, the truth, Jesus' teaching about the kingdom? They knew that there was more taking place than what was visible on the surface. They knew that the kingdom of God was, in fact, growing, so long as the word of God was going forth, and they knew that the kingdom of God will dominate and consume and rule over this entire earth - no question about it. They were just privileged to be those proclaiming these truths.

Can we be discouraged? Can we lose heart? We think, yeah, we have the Bible; I know what I'm told to do, but you just look around, and don't you just want to give up sometimes? You ask yourself what's the point? I mean, I've talked to this person probably ten times now, tried to tell them about the truth, tried to explain Christ to them and the word of God and nothing's happening. I mean, the nation's becoming more ungodly. What're we doing here? Well, what truth do you know? Either God is in fact growing His kingdom through His word, or He's not, and either you are a part of that in scattering His word, or you're not. And you'll realize the significance and importance of this when, in fact, His kingdom is established and "...every knee shall bow ... and every tongue shall confess..." And there will be people who are not in the kingdom who are cast out and punished forever. We have the burden. We have the necessity laid upon us to bring this message to those people. They need the message of pardon for their sins,

forgiveness for what they've done, in Jesus Christ; "...repent ... believe in him..." that you may be in the kingdom with Christ reigning.