

Mission 2021 – Patience and Hopefulness

Mark 4:26-34

Stuart W. Bryan

I. Festina lente! (cf. Rom 15:4)

II. Metaphors of the Kingdom

A. Introduction

God's Kingdom is His _____ manifest in human history in His Messiah. Jesus' parables routinely challenged prevailing notions of God's Kingdom. Many believed that God's rule would be like a swift, militaristic conquest.

B. The Growing Seed (26-29 cf. Ex 28:29-30)

²⁶And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. ²⁸For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mk 4:26-29)

This parable reveals that *the Kingdom is not like a swift militaristic conquest but a gradually growing crop*. Hence, God's rule involves three phases:

- First, _____. In Christ, God's Kingdom intruded into human history. "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God *has come upon you*" (Mt 12:28).
- Second, _____. During the present time, we live under Christ's rule. Peter declares "that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). He is, presently, *the Ruler of the kings of the earth* (Rev 1:5).
- Finally, _____. Jesus shall continue to reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet. We pray, "*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

C. The Mustard Seed (30-34 cf. Ezek 17:22-24)

³⁰Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; ³²but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade." ³³And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. ³⁴But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples. (Mk 4:30-34)

So how fruitful will the kingdom be? Remarkably fruitful. While it has a humble beginning, it will have a glorious end: the mustard seed becomes a massive tree. As Ezekiel prophesied:

Thus says the Lord GOD: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it

on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it.” (Ezek 17:22-24)

III. Application

A. Patience vs. Silver Bullets

The parable of the Growing Seed teaches us the principle of _____ and encourages us to patience and steady plodding. Hence, we need to beware relying on or anticipating some type of silver bullet that will make our problems disappear. A “silver bullet” is a metaphor for a simple, almost magical, solution to a difficult problem. The evangelical hope for the _____ is just such a silver bullet.

Gradualism characterizes both the history of the world and God’s work in our lives. God works slowly and steadily to sanctify us. While God occasionally intrudes in a remarkable and surprising manner to help us overcome some sin, the solution to our problems is most often patience, unflagging zeal, and steady resolution:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

B. Hopefulness vs. Black Helicopters

The parable of the Mustard Seed teaches us the principle of _____ and encourages us to look forward in hope – the long-term future of the Kingdom of God is bright. The kingdom shall be like a great tree in which the birds of the air make their nests. It shall be, Ezekiel tells us (17:22-24), a majestic cedar acknowledged by all the other trees of the forest. It shall be, Daniel tells us (2:44), a great mountain that fills the entire earth. Jesus will so reign that all nations shall serve Him, all kings bow before Him, confessing that He is Lord (Ps 72).

All these pictures of the future of the kingdom of God help dispel the mist that has clouded our vision for the last century because of doom and gloom prophecy.

¹God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us, Selah ²That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. ³Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. ⁴Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Selah ⁵Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. ⁶Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. ⁷God shall bless us, And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. (Ps 67)

IV. Conclusion