

God's Sovereignty, the Gospel, and Sleeping Well

Mark 4:1-20

GTY128

This is a great...great event, isn't it? We're having a great, great time of fellowship and instruction in the things that are critical for us to serve our King and to advance His glorious name in the world. I'm really blessed and honored to have one session in this very important convocation. And for that, I obviously meditate long and hard to what the Lord would have me to draw to your attention.

Where I landed, and I'm trusting the Lord on this, is in the fourth chapter of Mark. That may be because I'm preaching through Mark and Mark is dominating my mind at the time. But I want you to take your Bible and open it to the fourth chapter of Mark, I want to talk about what I've called, "The Theology of Sleep."

While you're doing that, I just want you to know that I sleep very well, just generally, wherever I am in the world, it seems, I sleep. I think that the ability that I have to sleep, to some degree, is related to my theology. That's kind of where that title comes from. If I believed that the salvation of souls depended on me, I don't know that I could sleep well. I understand the horrors of eternal hell. I understand the wrath of God. I understand eternal judgment. I understand what's at stake. It's a passion for me to reach people with the gospel. And I suppose with that kind of conviction dominating my heart, under some circumstances and within the framework of some kinds of theology, I might have a hard time sleeping because of the urgency of the issues at hand. But my confidence is in the Lord and in His power and not in me. So I can enjoy rest, refreshment physically, occasionally diversion from the task because I don't do the Lord's work. My responsibilities are very limited.

Recently somebody wrote about me. This is a quote, "MacArthur can't reach the people that the missional Christian movement reaches. So if he and his followers are successful in de-legitimizing it, the individuals who would never join the faith would hopefully be only in the tens of millions over the next century," end quote.

So, the suggestion of that fellow is that my de-legitimizing the contemporary, cultural adjustments of the gospel is going to result potentially in tens of millions of people going to hell. The next paragraph said this. "But MacArthur is reformed, so essentially he can be as ineffectual as he wants in outreach since his works have no part in people being saved anyway. How many souls should be lost to such an unwillingness to be missional?" end quote.

That's a spin on me I really hadn't read before. Somehow my reformed theology makes me responsible for tens of millions of people ending up in hell. But that is the sort of, I guess you could say neofinneyist, plagianism, that motivates so many people in evangelicalism who think that the success of the gospel is dependent upon their persuasive powers and their ingenuity. That kind of thinking inevitably ends up adjusting the gospel. I promise you that if I felt for one minute that

anybody was going to go to hell because somehow I failed to make the necessary adjustments in the message to persuade them to believe, I would have a very hard time sleeping. That's a pretty heavy burden to bear. I don't think we own that kind of attitude. I believe that all of us who are here are here because we are not motivated by the emotional rhetoric of bad theology. We're motivated by the Word of God, we're motivated by Scripture.

And for this session, at least, I want us to look at the fourth chapter of Mark because it is a kind of Magna Carta from our Lord on the issue of evangelism. This text is largely paralleled in the 13th chapter of Matthew and the 8th chapter of Luke. At the beginning of the chapter, just by way of a brief introduction, it tells us that the Lord began to teach again by the sea and such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land, He was teaching them many things in parables.

This is a daily scenario for Jesus during the year-plus of His Galilean ministry...massive crowds. Crowds that were so crushing that on numerous occasions the Lord and His Apostles couldn't even make it to a meal. They couldn't shake the people long enough to get food. The crowds numbered in the tens of thousands, the feeding of the five thousand men plus women and children would be a crowd of at least 20 to 25 thousand people, not an uncommon crowd, crushing and pressing against Him so that frequently He had to get in a boat, go off shore into the water just to put some space between Himself and the crowd. They were attracted by His power over demons, disease and death. There never was a denial of His miracle working power. No one ever denied that, not the highest leaders of Israel. Never tried to explain away the miracles, they were just too massive, too constant, too far-reaching.

But as large as the crowd was and as fascinated by the miracles that our Lord did, as they were, there were very few of them who were true believers. In fact, there were so few of them that later on, the thirteenth chapter of Luke records that one of His disciples said to Him, "Are there only a few who are being saved?" The whole enterprise didn't really look like it was going the way they had expected it to go. And they had a right to some expectation, assuming that some of the followers of Jesus were familiar with the Old Testament, which we know they were, they would have understood that in the ninth chapter of Isaiah, there is a promise about the coming of Messiah that His reign and the extent of His government would have no end, that He would come as a dominating power and presence in the world. And they may have well known Isaiah 45 from verse 22 on, in that great chapter which celebrates the singular glory of God that there is coming a day when not only will God bring salvation to the nation Israel, but to the world. Or if they were familiar with the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, it would be the same thing. The coming of Messiah was always connected with national salvation and international impact.

But our Lord has been with this now for a while. There may be a little more than a year away from the cross, so He's been at this virtually for two years. And while there is a superficial fascination on the part of people, there just are not many real followers, true believers. What is wrong? Why is it this way? Where is the national repentance? Where is the national redemption? Where...where is the fulfillment of the Gentiles and the nations coming to Israel and coming to the God of Israel? What's the problem?

Well the flesh would respond by saying, "We need a different strategy, this one is not really working." That's how flesh always responds to evangelistic disappointment, to low numbers. It's still that way even today. The response might be something like this, "Well, it's got to be our fault, we're not doing

this the right way. We're out of touch somehow with the felt needs of the people." That's hard to sell since Jesus had virtually banished illness from Israel for the duration of His ministry, dispossessed people of indwelling demons, and stopped funeral processions dead in their tracks by raising the dead person to life.

But nonetheless the fault must be ours. Maybe there are other ways to do this. Maybe we're out of touch with the trends, or the sensitivities or the style or the psychology of our time. Maybe we've got to find another way. Maybe we need to recognize that people are motivated psychologically. They're motivated materially. They're motivated emotionally, as we heard last night. They're motivated intellectually. It's that kind of thinking, that kind of fleshly thinking that essentially is behind all evangelical adjustments in the gospel that somehow we've got to overcome the sinner's resistance. And we do that by creating a message that the sinner doesn't resist as much packaged in a style that is familiar to the sinner and with which he is somewhat comfortable. And by the way, the message needs to be both friendly and it helps if it's also funny.

So the church has always suffered from a sort of parade of entrepreneurial types who offer to change the results by changing the message. And I think that must have been in the back of the minds of the disciples, are we really going about this the right way, when does all this messianic fulfillment come to pass?

So here we are, a year before the Great Commission and the Lord gives us really a whole chapter here on evangelistic instruction. It's foundational, I think, to our understanding of biblical evangelism. It's comprehensive. It's detailed. It is critical for us to understand what's in this chapter. I want to begin by having you look at verses 26 to 29 and it is from this portion of the chapter that I have drawn the title. Our Lord gives a series of parables here, this one only in Mark as the others appear in Matthew and Luke, this one only in Mark. Verse 26, "He was saying, 'The Kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day and the seed sprouts and grows, how he himself does not know.'"

The soil produces crops by itself. First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head, but when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. Our Lord spoke about the Kingdom of God, and by that He meant the sphere of salvation over which He reigns, the domain of His Lordship over believers. What is it like? It's like seed that sprouts and grows and the farmer does not know how it happens. And he's the expert, by the way. He's the agricultural expert. The wonder of the gospel is this, you sow the gospel and you go to sleep and it grows. We have no control over that. We don't know how that happens anymore than the farmer knows how that seed which is dead, or dormant in the ground, produces abundant life. The most erudite botanist and biologist and agriculturalist cannot explain the forces of life.

The only human act, our Lord is saying, is to sow and go to sleep, while the crop mysteriously grows. All the work of forces completely separated from the farmer, even the best farmer. This is the language of the Apostle Paul, some sow, some water, and God does...what?...gives the increase. This is also bound up in those very familiar words in the gospel of John, "To as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become sons of God, even to those who believe on His name who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Spiritual, birth, spiritual life, seed that grows is a divine miracle.

In John chapter 3, and I want you to look at that for a minute, there is that very, very familiar

conversation between Jesus and one of the leading rulers of the Jews, Nicodemus, and it's a fascinating discussion and I think we've got to give Nicodemus a lot of credit, he understands speaking in metaphors, the Jews did it all the time. He knows exactly that our Lord is talking about spiritual issues, not physical issues. He comes to Jesus by night, says, "You've come from God as a teacher, that's evident because nobody can do the signs that You do unless God is with him." That's what he says but Jesus penetrates behind what he says to what he's thinking and said, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he can't see the Kingdom of God." What Nicodemus really wanted to know is how do you enter the Kingdom of God? And Jesus said, "You have to be born again. You have to be born again." It calls for regeneration. It calls for new birth. That is to say it's something beyond you. You didn't contribute to your own birth and you're not really the contributing factor to your new birth either.

And Nicodemus gets it. In verse 4 he said to him, "How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" He's talking in metaphoric language. I can't do that. I'm not in charge of my birth. I can't be in charge of my rebirth. How does that happen?

Jesus further expands on it by saying, "You must be born not only of water physically, of water and the spirit." Borrowing language from Ezekiel, New Covenant language, and this is what is so amazing. In verse 7, "Don't be amazed that I said to you, you must be born again." And then this, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it comes from and where it's going. So does everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus is saying, "How can I be born again? How can I be regenerated? What do I do?" Jesus doesn't say to him, "Here's four steps, here's three steps, pray this prayer." He says to him, "That's really beyond your power. The wind blows where it wishes, you hear the sound of it, you don't know where it comes from, you don't know where it's going, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." It's a divine work. It's a divine miracle. The seed grows, the farmer doesn't have an idea how it happens. He's not in charge of the power. He's not in charge of the energy. The Spirit does His work. The Spirit blows in like the wind, transforming, regenerating a heart. This is a divine work. Even our Lord completely understands that and confirms it.

I want to show you an illustration of this, as we think about it. Over in the closing section in the gospel of Luke, there is a very familiar and wonderful account of the thief on the cross. Luke 23 verse 39, "One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us.'" This is sheer sarcasm. This is mockery. This is scorn.

But you know what? From a human viewpoint, it seems reasonable because the fact of the matter is Jesus who has claimed to be from God, who has claimed to be the Messiah, others have certainly said that about Him, is hanging on a cross on four great wounds inflicted on Him by the will of the Jewish leaders and people and by the very act of pagan Gentile Romans. He is the ultimate victim because crucifixion was reserved for the rankest of criminals, the basest of people. There is nothing convincing about His current position and posture to make anybody think other than this man is a fake. Sarcasm is reasonable. Are you kidding? You're supposed to be the Messiah?

The thief, we assume, is a Jew, perhaps raised in a synagogue, knows all the prophecies regarding Messiah about national conversion, about international influence. This is the Messiah? Certainly if the crucifixion of Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews and he's a Jew, it's a stumbling block to Him. Here is Jesus in His weakest hour a victim, for all intents and purposes, from a human viewpoint.

And the response of the thief is a very, very reasonable response. "You're a joke."

"But the other answered and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God since you're under the same sentence of condemnation?'" That's an interesting perspective. Where did that come from? This is a thief. This is a criminal, a criminal worthy of execution. And then his theology starts to come out. "We indeed are suffering justly, we're receiving what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong," and he affirms the sinlessness of Christ. Wow!

Now understand that Jesus is half virtually naked, hanging on a cross, being scorned, mocked, ridiculed, not impressive. But this man, the other thief, says, "He's sinless." He understood the sinlessness of Christ. Then he says, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your Kingdom." He understood the sovereignty of Christ, that He was a King. He understood the Savior-hood of Christ, that He could remember him and thus bring him into His Kingdom. He even understood the Second Coming of Christ, "When You come in Your Kingdom." That is a very sound theology. It's really stunning. "He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you'll be with Me in Paradise.'"

What happened to that thief? The only explanation for faith at that moment on the cross in the life of that thief was the power of God on his soul. You think somehow that your cleverness is the source of someone's conversion? The Lord Jesus, at His weakest, most vulnerable, looking totally defeated, hanging on that cross and beside him the Spirit of God brings life to a dead heart, light to a blinded soul and clear faith and understanding bursts forth, salvation comes and the very same day that thief is in Paradise with Christ.

There is no human explanation for that. In my mind, that is the greatest conversion moment in the New Testament. Look, the parable says, "Sow the seed and go to sleep," cause you're not in charge of the results.

Go back then to Mark, for a minute, and we're just going to kind of further our little Bible study here in Mark 4. Just a note of a Greek term that I think that you'll find interesting. "The Kingdom of God is like a man...verse 26...who casts seed upon the soil, goes to bed at night and gets up by day. The seed sprouts and grows, how...he himself doesn't know." Then this, "The soil produces crops by itself." See that little phrase "by itself." The Greek is *automate*, automatically, from *automatos*, automatically. That word is used only one other place in the New Testament, it's in the twelfth chapter of Acts in the tenth verse where when Peter was released from his chains, the gate to the prison opened automatically. God opened the gate. And the crop grows automatically. It's divine *automate*. Soil produces crops by itself. First the blade comes, then the head comes, then the mature grain in the head, and all the farmer can do is wait until it's fully grown, then he can harvest it.

We may be the means but we are not the power. Do we understand that? We may be the secondary agency but we are not the causing agency. We have no role but to sow the seed and go to sleep and let the work of God be done. And it will be done in the most amazing ways.

Some people have taken this parable and said it depicts Jesus as the farmer, coming back to judge. No. Let me just say that that doesn't work because this farmer goes to sleep and judgment is the product of omniscience not sleep. This is not Jesus in judgment. The farmer has been sleeping. Divine omniscience never sleeps, particularly with regard to the record of sin that leads to judgment.

So the simple principle is sow and sleep. The success of the gospel does not depend on your power, on your manipulation, on your entrepreneurial skills. Spiritual life and regeneration is divinely automatic. But there are essential elements in that automatic operation that must be there. And for us to understand some of those things, we need to sort of broaden our perspective here and pick up some of the other parables in the chapter. So let's go back to the beginning of the chapter. And I don't want to belabor this because I know you're very familiar with it, but just to make a few points.

How do we approach evangelism? Let's just...let's make a few words, kind of hooks to hang our thoughts on. The first one is humility...humility. I mean, we understand that by just what has been said. Humility, because it's really not in our power to do the work. We don't want to live under that ridiculous illusion. And that is expanded in the very familiar parable in verse 3, "Behold, listen to this," our Lord says, "the sower went out to sow, he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road and birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it didn't have much soil. Immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. After the sun had risen it was scorched because it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns came up and choked it and yielded no crop."

And you can just know that those guys, those disciples who are there with Him, are just.. "Yeah, that's right, we're very familiar with that." They're very familiar with that kind of scenario where the fields were basically crisscrossed with beaten paths. That's how they walked in and out and around and through the countryside. And our Lord's disciples were doing that and plucking grain as they went, of course, which they were allowed to do from the Old Testament when the Pharisees condemned them. So they traversed those beaten paths. They understood that. They understood there was some kind of ground that had bedrock underneath it and the seed would burst open and there would be some kind of plant that came up but eventually it would die when the sun came out because it couldn't penetrate pass the rock to get to the water and it was superficial and fruitless. And there were others that were caught up in the weeds that never were cleaned out of the soil. They were all very familiar with that.

What they weren't familiar with, the surprise in the whole deal is verse 8. "Other seed fell into the good ground and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop that produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold."

Jesus is talking here in superlative language about something the likes of which they had never experienced. Thirty, sixty and a hundred-fold? Just unheard of.

Well this had to be good news to the disciples who were beleaguered by the fact that there were so very few who were interested. Our Lord says to them in this little parable that there is coming a harvest that is going to be massive. Now you know the story. There are three kinds of fruitless soil, the hard soil, the rocky soil, the weedy soil. There are three kinds of good soil, the thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and a hundred-fold.

Now our Lord wants to explain the parable so He does that only to His followers. Verse 10 says, "He pulls His followers to Himself alone and begins to explain to them because to them it is given to know these things. It is not given to the already rejecting nation who with their hardness of heart have cut themselves off from that opportunity."

And so He begins the explanation. I love this in verse 14. "The sower sows the Word." This is so foundational, I just...I feel kind of foolish even saying it, but it should be obvious to all of us that there are no adjectives to describe the sower...the sower, anybody who throws seed...anybody. There are no qualifications for the sower. The sower is somebody who throws seed. It's that simple.

That is not the issue here. In the work of evangelism, we are not the issue. It really doesn't matter whether you have a beat-up, tattered burlap seed bag, or a designer seed bag. It really doesn't matter the style of your seed bag. Anybody who throws seed is a sower and there are no adjectives to describe the sower. So there's nothing in the story about the sower. The seed, we know what that is. The sower sows the Word. In the language of Luke 8:11, the Word of God..the Word of God. I don't know if we need to be reminded about this. Romans 10 says that faith comes by hearing the Word concerning Christ, right? Faith comes by hearing the Word concerning Christ.

While the salvation is divinely automatic and is the work of God, it cannot occur apart from the message concerning Christ, the full message. A few weeks ago at the Shepherds' Conference at our church, we went through some familiar words that Jesus said repeatedly to His disciples. He'd do a miracle and say, "Don't tell anybody." Remember? "Don't tell anybody." Do another miracle, "Don't tell anybody." Go to Jairus' house, you know, fighting His way through the crowd, healing the woman with the issue of blood. Finally gets to Jairus' house, there's a cacophony of chaos going on. The professional mourners and flute players are carrying out their drama. Throws everybody out of the place, goes in the room where the daughter is dead. Raises the daughter from the dead. Turns to the family and says, "Don't tell anybody." Sure!

Why does He do this? He even told them after things like His glorious manifestation, "Don't tell anybody." Some people say, "Well was He trying to minimize the impact on the crowd because it would excite more of their messianic fever and they would push Him out of His planned schedule? Was He trying to mitigate the hostility of the rulers who were dogging His steps and hated Him and He was trying to keep the profile as low as He could so that He wouldn't exacerbate them any further, was that what it was about?"

No. He gave the very answer Himself. He said this, "Who do people say that I am?" Luke 9. "Oh, they answered and said, 'John the Baptist. Some say You're Elijah. Others say You're one of the prophets.' He said, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter says, 'You're the Christ of God.'" Wow! And you remember Matthew records, "Jesus said, 'Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" That's by divine revelation that you know that.

And then He says, verse 21, "He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone." What? "Don't tell anybody about this dead girl I just raised. Don't tell anybody about these people I just healed. Don't tell anyone about My manifest glory. Don't tell anyone that I'm the Messiah. Don't tell anyone."

Why? Because Luke 9:22, next verse, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, be raised on the third day. After that, tell everyone."

The message is not healing. The message is not free food. The message is not simply that Jesus is the Messiah. The message is the cross and the resurrection. After that, you go into the world, you tell

everybody. That's the Great Commission. (Applause)

Those are the words of our Lord explaining that Himself. And I only draw that out to say our message is the cross and the resurrection, to confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God...what?...raised Him from the dead. That's the seed. That's the gospel seed. That's the Word concerning Christ.

Is it offensive? You bet it's offensive. Stumbling block to the Jews, foolishness to the Gentiles, that doesn't change anything. In that wonderful text of 1 Corinthians 1 where the Apostle Paul talks about that, he says, "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, to Gentiles foolishness." Listen to this, "But to those who are the called," there's a Calvinist statement for you. "Those who are the called, those who hear the divine call, those who are under the divine automatic work, those on whom the wind of the Spirit blows, this message which will always be foolish, which will always be a stumbling block to the natural man becomes the power of God for salvation. And in the end, verse 30 says, "It's by His doing you're in Christ Jesus." It's by His doing you're in Christ Jesus. So if you're going to boast, boast in the Lord.

Paul's response to this evangelistically, "When I came to you, brethren, I didn't come with superiority of speech or wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, in much trembling. My message, my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God." Paul understood it completely. You preach Christ crucified and risen, even if it's rejected, even if it looks like it's stupidity and shame, you preach Christ because to those who are the called on whom the Spirit blows, in whom life is generated divinely, automatically, this is the power of God to salvation."

But what is the parable about if it's not about sowers and seed? Can't mess with sower, it's anybody who sows the seed. Can't do anything with the seed, you don't want to create a synthetic seed and get a mutation, do you? I think a lot of that is going on. I think all over the place there are quasi-churches of mutations.

The issue in the parables is soils. The rest of the parable is simply an explanation of soil. In Matthew 13, the parallel, it says, "That which is sown in the hearts." So the soil is the heart. I can sow the seed. I can't change the heart. Are we agreed? Beyond me. I'm like the farmer. I just sow the seed and go to sleep. I'm not in charge of the heart.

It's popular for people to think that they can alter the heart. In my preaching I never purposely appeal to the human will. I never try to drive the human will. Cause I might be...I might be causing people who have certain things they wish were true to follow a path like weak-willed women, Paul referred to in writing to Timothy. I'm not interested in manipulating anybody's will. I never appeal to the emotion. I'm not interested in making anybody sentimental about Jesus. All appeals are to the mind, to understand the truth...to understand the truth. Don't appeal to people emotionally cause you'll get a whole lot of emotional response. Don't appeal to people's wills because you'll get a whole lot of self-willed responses. You always appeal to the mind.

Jonathan Edwards in the Treatise Concerning Religious Affections which he wrote in 1746, was very,

very concerned to make it known that fallen human nature is fertile ground for fleshly religiosity which is impiously spiritual, rooted in self-love, he said. High emotional experiences, gushy kind of sentimentalistic approaches to Jesus, schmaltzy musical experiences are a far cry from the genuine regenerate work of the Holy Spirit centered on a transformed soul, transformed character.

Edwards wanted to point these things out and I think the bottom line for him was, where there is a genuine work of the Spirit in a life, the result is not a kind of smug satisfaction, but a humility...a spirit of meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, mercy, brokenness, people being broken over their iniquities. In all false conversions, generally that's the issue so that what we have to do is drive the hard edge of evangelism at the issue of sin and repentance. That makes acceptance hard, self-denial, self-hate, hate your father and your mother, even your own life. Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me. This is what makes acceptance hard. That's why Jesus said when He was asked the question in Luke 13, "Are there only a few being saved?" He said, "It's hard." They can't get pass that self-will. You can't get to the Luke 18 mentality, "Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner."

It's not enough to make Jesus attractive. Jesus is very attractive...very, very attractive. Not enough to make people have good feelings about Jesus. Not enough to get people to activate their will for some personal benefit, not enough to excite their emotions. Spurgeon said, "People told to come forward in response to an emotional appeal, make a decision to accept Christ, they come forward and immediately go backward. They go...he said...in to the inquiry room and get converted in five minutes and am done with godliness for the rest of their lives. No, these are the people who have no root, the people that are caught up in the things of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, the distractions of this age as the parable unfolds, and you're familiar with that parable.

We're very aware of the fact that the hearts are the issues we're dealing with. There are hard hearts, like the hard ground. There are those superficial people who with joy receive the truth for a little while. Joy is no indication of saving faith. True repentance is not necessarily joyful. It might be agonizing. Edwards said, "True conversion is marked by humble, broken-hearted love for God."

So we all understand we're dealing with hard hearts and we're dealing with superficial hearts, and we're dealing with distracted hearts, double-minded hearts that are caught up in the things of this life and the things of this world. But the bottom line is, we have no power over those hearts. We can't give life to the dead. We can't give light to the darkened. We can't give sight to the blind. So we approach this ministry humbly. We sow seed. We know we're not the power, we're simply the human means. We sow seed.

Read Deuteronomy 30 verse 6, that wonderful statement where the Lord says, "He will give spiritual life." Read Ezekiel 36, read Jeremiah 31. It's the Lord's work to take out the stony heart and give a heart of flesh. It's the Lord's work to put the Spirit in the heart. So we sow, so we sleep.

Humility, that's the first attitude. Second attitude, just briefly, is found in the parable in verses 21 to 23. "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it? Or under a bed. Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand, for nothing is hidden except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret but that it would come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

We are humble because we know we are not the power in salvation. But we are obedient because

we know we possess the light. That's the point of that story. Look, you might say, "Well, if it's all the power of God, then I don't have any role to play." Oh, that's not so and that's why this parable is here. You don't cover up the light. You are the lamp. You don't put the lamp under a basket, under bed, put it out where everybody can see it.

We are humble because we know we are not the power to change the heart. But we are obedient because we know we are the means by which the light comes. How will they hear without...what...preacher? Go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature. Make disciples. God to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth because the Spirit of God will come upon you and you will be empowered for that.

He's saying to them, "Look, it's axiomatic. Lamps are to spread light. You don't light one to cover it up with a modion, a nine-liter basket, original language. You don't take a flat-pallet bed and put it on top of a lamp to hide the purpose of the lamp. You put it on a lampstand, on the wall or on the floor. This would have been a little oil lamp usually set on top of something with a floating wick. You light the wick and that's how the house is lit. We are to be lights in the world, are we not? We're to let our light shine. These are all simple, foundational, basic, biblical concepts.

So while on the one hand it is not within our power to change hearts, it is within our responsibility to be obedient to let the light shine. And so it's not only the message that we preach which is the pure gospel of the cross and the resurrection, but it's the life that undergirds that personal testimony...a life of light. These are axioms, all of them, nothing is hidden except to be revealed. Nothing is secret except that it would come to the light. That is to say, the purpose in keeping something hidden for a time is that there is a precise time to let it be seen. The purpose for having a secret is that it would be inappropriate to reveal it now until the right time to reveal it. The day, he is saying, of worldwide evangelism is coming, there is coming a day when I will no longer say to you, "Don't spread this around, but I will tell you to go to the ends of the earth. Scatter the seed, spread the light."

There's a third word, as we just give...I'll give you one more in a minute, but the third word would be diligently. We go humbly, we go obediently, we go diligently. Some people say, "Well, if you're going to believe all of this and you're going to believe it's all the work of God, that takes the motivation out of evangelism." That's the big criticism that people in Reformed Theology always hear. But I want you to look at verse 24 and 25. "Take care," this is another little axiomatic analogy, "Take care what you listen to, or how you listen by your standard of measure it will be measured to you and more will be given you besides."

Now let me just stop there and say this. Look, folks, you are not the cause of anyone's salvation. But you are the means. We are humble about the cause, we are obedient as the means. We let the light shine. Just how diligent should we be? Here's the motivation. Right here, "By the standard of measure it will be measured to you and more will be given to you besides."

Here we come right back to the fact that this astonishing promise, truism, axiom is this, usefulness in gospel evangelism is proportionate to the seed sown and leads directly to eternal reward. Sow sparingly, reap sparingly. Sow bountifully, reap bountifully.

So you sow the seed, you sow it diligently because you know that your usefulness is proportionate to your sowing. And that leads to divine blessing. That leads to eternal reward. That's how you

purchase friends for eternity.

On the other hand, for whoever has, to him more shall be given. Whoever doesn't have, even what he has will be taken away. Now there are some fake evangelists, there are fake Christians who think they're going to get a reward. They're going to say, "Lord, Lord, we did this...we did this." "Depart from Me, I never...what...never knew you." What they think they're going to get, they're not going to get.

But the true believers who did the true seed sowing, you're going to receive more. More of what? More of everything, more of all the grace and goodness and kindness of God. Matthew 13:12 says, "He will have an abundance. Your life will overflow and your eternity will overflow."

One more word. We sow and we sleep humbly, because we're not in charge of the results. Obediently because it's the very nature of being the light that we shine. Diligently because our usefulness is proportionate to our faithfulness to sow. And it will be rewarded forever. And finally, confidently...confidently.

I love this. Verse 30, "And he said, 'How shall we picture the Kingdom of God? How shall we picture it?'" And, you know, if you were a skeptic you would say, "Oh, yeah, a tiny little group of beleaguered people over here in the corner somewhere. That's it, that's the Kingdom. Got to revamp our whole approach here."

No, here's how we need to think about it. "It's like a mustard seed which when is sown on the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are sowed on the soil, not all the seeds in the world, but all the seeds that were sown typically and annually in Israel, and when it is sown, however, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade."

Guess what. We sow confidently because we know that God has determined an exponential outcome. Isn't that marvelous? An exponential outcome. What's going to be the final outcome? What should we expect with this little tiny seed kingdom and these little men? At one point the whole kingdom is in a boat in a storm. It all could have drowned right there. What could they have possibly expect? Like a mustard seed, explosive growth, this tiny little seed that produces, you know, a bush as high as fifteen feet and as wide as five or six feet, out of that tiny little seed. The Kingdom is going to rise like that. Small beginnings, no one could ever, ever, ever imagine that very soon they would be saying about this little kingdom, "These people are turning the world upside down."

And by the way, I love the fact that dropped in to the end of verse 32 is a reference to Ezekiel 17. "So that the birds of the air can nest under its shade." I know a lot of commentators talk about, "What does it mean the birds nest in the mustard seed?"

I'll tell you what it means. All you have to do is read Ezekiel 17. The birds represent the nations of the world. And you have the same thing in the illustration of Daniel chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar's view of his kingdom was that the kingdom was made up of his people and the birds were all the nations who nested in his great kingdom. Ezekiel gives us a picture of Messiah's great Kingdom, the birds are all the nations of the earth coming into the Kingdom. The very thing that they thought should happen, consistent with Old Testament prophecy, would happen...would happen. That sums up the final

explosive growth of the Kingdom is that the gospel spreads across the world and the church spreads across the world, ultimately culminating in the glorious, final reign of Jesus Christ over the whole earth.

One final thought. We can sow the seed humbly, obediently, diligently, confidently, and leave the results to the Lord. Just closing illustration. Jesus fed the 25 thousand people, according to Mark 6, at the end of the feeding, this is hard to believe, it says, "The disciples got in a boat, the wind stopped, when Jesus got in the boat, the wind stopped, they were utterly astonished." This is the night after the feeding of the 25 thousand or so. They get in a boat, they're going back to the other side, the western side. And the storm comes. Jesus meets them in the middle. And something amazing happens. An incident with Peter takes place. Jesus gets in the boat. And they respond by saying this, "You are God's Son." They said that in the middle of the lake, four miles from the shore in the storm, when Jesus stepped inside the boat and calmed the storm.

Why did they all of a sudden come to that conclusion? Mark says this, "They had no insight, they had gained no insight from the incident of the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." They just came from a hillside from the town of Bethsaida where Jesus had made food. I mean, He was making crackers, flat crackers from grain that never grew. He was passing out pickled fish that never swam, creating food, schew...schew...schew...schew. And they're just getting the baskets, they've got people sitting in groups of 50 to 100 and they're firing all this food everywhere. And then He says, "Collect everything that's left." And they come back with how many baskets? Twelve. The precision is as staggering as the power. I mean, it's not...you can't just be creating supernatural fish and let it lie around. It was all consumed, gone. And it says they didn't get any insight because their hearts were hardened. What is that?

I would have said, "I believe, Lord, I believe. I've got no more questions. What in the world?" After He fed them, He put them in a boat, sent them out. He went up in the hill, it says He prayed. I think He prayed for them. I think He prayed for them. And that night when He came to them in a boat, He stepped in the boat, the hardness was gone and they said, "Truly You are God's Son."

How did that happen? I think the Father in that moment on the lake in Galilee that night answered His Son's prayer for them and opened their hearts. That was the great transforming.

Was there something about the walking on the water that was more impactful than what He had done the day before? Or what He did for all the times before? That was the moment in the most unlikely circumstances, in the most unlikely ways, automatically life...hard hearts are shattered. I tell you what, it's pretty exciting to be a part of this. The burden is not mine, except to sow the seed.

Father, we thank You for a wonderful text of Scripture, rich, full, blessed. We love You. We love Your Word. We exalt You. Be exalted through us as we faithfully sow the gospel seed for the glory of Christ. Amen.

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