

## 神在福音工作上的主权—马可福音 4:21-34(下)

### God's Sovereignty in the Work of the Gospel – Mark 4:21-34 (2)

#### *Introduction, outline*

- Scripture reading: Mark 4:1-34, 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

#### **Mark 4:1-34** (NASB 1995)

1 He 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. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 “Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” 9 And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” 10 As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. 11 And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, 12 so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.” 13 And He \*said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” 21 And He was saying to them, “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? 22 For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” 24 And He was saying to them, “Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25 For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” 26 And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” 30 And He said, “How shall we picture

the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, 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.” 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

**1 Peter 1:22-2:3** (NASB 1995)

22Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24For,

“All flesh is like grass,  
And all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
And the flower falls off,  
25But the word of the Lord endures forever.”

And this is the word which was preached to you.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

- The kingdom of God is the deep desire of every kingdom citizen. The beginning of the Lord's Prayer is "Your kingdom come", which entails all citizens entering the kingdom. This is what every Christian longs for. The gospel preached by Jesus Himself is that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (1:15), and he called his disciples to "become fishers of men" (1:17) for the kingdom of God. What exactly should the disciples do? This is the mystery of the kingdom of God, which is the focus of the parables in this chapter.
- Summary of previous content: **the parable of the four kinds of soil**—Key Point: all we can do is to sow the seed. The seed that is sown, God will make some of it fall on good soil. **The parable of the lamp**—Key Point: Christians are lamp by nature, so it is only natural to put the lamp on the lampstand to spread the mystery of the gospel they have received. **The Parable of the Measure**—Key Point: When we faithfully carry out our responsibility of sowing the gospel seed, God will give us more opportunities to sow and more reward for us to receive in heaven.
- Some Christians feel discouraged by failures in evangelism. Sharing the Gospel never seem to bear fruit. Seekers they invite to church come and go, and they become discouraged and lose enthusiasm. What to do? If you truly understand the last two parables, you will never again be discouraged and lose enthusiasm in evangelism!

- Outline:

Title: God's Sovereignty in the Work of the Gospel

1. Parable of Seed Growth—Sovereignty Is Beyond Human Comprehension (vv 26-29)
2. Parable of the Mustard Seed—Sovereignty Guarantees Success (vv 30-32)
3. Summary of the Parables—How Much Are You Able to Listen (vv 33-34)

## **Parable of Seed Growth—Sovereignty Is Beyond Human Comprehension (vv 26-29)**

- "The kingdom of God is like...": The focus of the parable is on the "kingdom of God" rather than personal salvation. The disciples have already received salvation, and now their desire is to see the kingdom of God fulfilled. One of the important signs of their salvation is their longing for the kingdom of God. Jesus asks his disciples to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness". How should we seek it? We need to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.
- "a man who casts seed upon the soil": The parable starts with sowing the seed, but the focus is neither on sowing nor on the soil. The assumption here is that the seed falls on good soil, because they all bear "full grains" in the end. This is an expanded description of the good soil, and the focus is how the seed grows on the good soil. How does it grow? Answer: I don't know!
- "how, he himself does not know": the growth of the seed is a mystery, unfathomable to man! All we need to know is that the seed contains the life of a whole plant. Remember the first time you found out as a kid that those towering trees all come from tiny seeds? Remember the sense of wonder you had at that time?

**1 Peter 1:23** "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God."

**【Meditation】** Not all Peter's readers are mature fruitful Christians. Some have just come to faith and are not spiritually mature at all. How does Peter have so much faith in them that he'd write the above words to encourage them? It is the teaching of Jesus Himself in this parable! Peter also has first-hand experience of the power of indestructible life that is contained in the seed of the gospel through his obedience.

- "he goes to bed at night and gets up by day": redundant detail? Who doesn't know people sleep at night and get up for the day? If the focus of the parable is the growth of the seed, why does Jesus even mention the farmer's sleep at night? Just to emphasize that the farmer does not need to figure out the mysteries of seed growth, nor can he!

- "The soil produces crops by itself": Literally “automatically”. It is determined by the nature of the seed itself. No farmer will lose sleep at night worrying about how his seed will grow. What a farmer needs to do after planting the seed is go to bed, because he knows the life is in the seed, and it will grow automatically, as determined by the nature of the seed.

【Application】 When Christians sow seed for the kingdom of God, as long as the seed they sow is the gospel seed, they should sleep well.

【Application】 We often try hard to create the best external environment for the gospel work. These efforts are not without value, but sometimes we rely too much on some specific method or strategy, as if the growth of seeds depends on these external environmental factors.

"first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head....": There is a process of growth, not a one-time thing! You don't get a fruitful plant immediately after the seed falls on good soil. In the growth of spiritual life, we often forget this most basic common sense of life. As soon as the seed is sown, we immediately expect to see a fruitful life, that somehow the new believer immediately overcomes all of his sins. Don't rush to harvest your crop when you just see a tiny leaflet coming out. Trying to promote growth by pulling up the seedling is always counterproductive!

【Application】 Doing evangelism requires a firm grasp of God's sovereignty. Otherwise, we will think that success or failure is all because of us. If it works well, it is our own credit; if not, it is the fault of our co-workers. This results in a lot of ungodly boasting or accusations.

**1 Corinthians 3:6-7** "6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth..”

【Key Principles】 Patience - Know that growth is a process with different stages; Confidence - Know that this will definitely happen. When the seed of the gospel meets the good soil prepared by God, immortal spiritual life will surely grow.

【Other References】 Acts 13:48; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 8:30.

- "when the crop permits.....": The purpose of this line is to focus our eyes on the future harvest. The disciples must sow the seed with this vision in mind, focusing on the future harvest by faith, rather than focusing on various obstacles by sight.

### **Parable of the Mustard Seed—Sovereignty Guarantees Success (vv 30-32)**

- “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?": Feel how emotional Jesus is here! He is so excited about His own kingdom! Are you excited?

- "A mustard seed . . . it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil": At the time when Jesus spoke this, the kingdom of God was just Himself plus twelve rednecks.

【Background knowledge】 Mustard seed has a diameter of ~1 mm, and the mature plant can reach a height of three to four meters. Compared with other vegetables, its seed is the smallest and the plant is the largest. There is no need to argue that there are smaller seeds and larger plants in the world. The scope of Jesus' comparison is all kinds of vegetables people planted in the field at that time. The saying was obviously accepted as true, and no one would object.

- "it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants": The key is the sheer contrast of the sizes of the seed and the plant. This is a mystery people can't explain at all. Perhaps God had this metaphor in mind when he created it in the first place.

【Key Point】 God's sovereignty. The work of God's kingdom is completely unexpected, and it could never be designed by man, nor can we fully understand it. Two thousand years of church history has clearly proved the accuracy of this metaphor. The kingdom of God is still growing, until the final harvest when God will show us how powerful this kingdom is!

【Application】 Sow the seed with fullness of faith! God's will to perfectly sanctify every believer in the church will surely be accomplished. God's will to use the church to advance the work of the gospel is sure to succeed. The only way you can truly understand these truths is by faithfully sowing the seed!

- "The birds of the air...": This picture comes from the prophecy of Ezekiel 17:23. The birds refer to Gentiles who turn to Yahweh. The fulfillment of this prophecy is in the millennial kingdom as described in Revelation 20. At that time, Israel would be a blessing to all nations and peoples, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all peoples (Genesis 12:3).

【Application】 Actively participate in the gospel work with full confidence and joyful hope. If you truly believe in Jesus, how can you not be thrilled to see that God's plan to accomplish His kingdom is so amazing?

### **Summary of the Parables—How Much Are You Able to Listen (vv 33-34)**

- "so far as they were able to hear it": Everyone's ability to hear is different. The crowd is unable to hear the mystery of the kingdom of God, because they hard-heartedly rejected the King of the kingdom. So Jesus used parables to teach these things that they could not understand. What they need now is to respond to the basic message of the gospel, to repent, to believe in Jesus, to admit their completely sinful and hopeless situation, to fully trust Jesus' identity and His teachings, and to believe in Him as the Savior of sinners.

**【Principle】** Wise teaching should be individualized. Not all biblical truth is for all people to receive in all situations. Before a person comes to saving faith, do not give him too much teaching on Christian living, or about spiritual blessings. This won't do him much good. If I have the opportunity, I'd rather preach the gospel to him again.

***Summary:***

**Psalm 126:5-6** "Those who sow in tears shall harvest with joyful shouting. One who goes here and there weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

*May God help us to be faithful sowers.*