

## He Who Began a Good Work

### Mark 4:26-34

**Big Idea:** God's Word will accomplish what it set out to do. It will have an effect, whether we can see it or not. It will start small, but will eventually have a great, powerful impact.

Have you ever started something, and you didn't finish it? Have you ever started something, and maybe you finished it, but yet along the way you had to make some changes because it didn't work out as you planned? And because of it, the end product wasn't what you planned?

This isn't so for God. God finishes what He begins. He is completely and absolutely faithful to accomplish what He plans and starts. There is one thing that we can fully trust in this world. It is God's sovereignty. He will accomplish what He has set out to do.

He created the world. Evil and sin broke it. However, He had a plan already in place to restore it. Mankind had chosen to be disobedient, to seek to be masters of their own destiny. They chose to walk away from the goodness of God's provision to seek something that would prove to never satisfy. Because of God's holiness, and man's disobedience, man would suffer. God didn't change. He didn't all the sudden become a God who must judge man's heart. He laid it out beforehand for Adam and Eve. He told them they have freedom to all the garden offers, just don't eat from the tree of good and evil, but if you choose to eat of it you will surely die. Eternal separation will happen. It's your choice.

Mankind made it's choice and has been ever since. God said "choose my light to continue upon you, or choose darkness." Light, in scripture represents all that is good, fulfilling, true, and life-giving. Darkness represents evil, emptiness, manipulation, and separation. Due to our choice of sin, we are separated from God. What was made perfect, is now damaged. We made our choice.

God had a plan though. That plan was for the 'Light of the world' to come into the world to bring redemption and a restored spirit to all those who would receive God's Word. Jesus is the "Light of the world" who would come to reveal sin and the plan of salvation. He would do away with the

curse of sin and darkness by making a way for those who would receive God's forgiveness only found in the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.

Jesus, as the light, came to restore life to what was made dead by sin. Jesus resurrected on the 3rd day, He came back to life. Next week we celebrate this as the Christian holiday of Easter. Listen to Jesus's reply to Nicodemus's question of how one can be saved or born again. Jesus said,

"I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

Just a few verses later, a very famous quote of Jesus says, "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." The key is believing in the Son of God, who is Jesus.

Jesus goes on further and says, "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in Him. But anyone who does not believe in Him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light [Jesus] came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil." They chose darkness over salvation.

God's character doesn't change. He is holy. There is no sin in Him. His creation chose to break the creator's law, and because of it, imprisonment happened and like any good judge worth their weight must judge. But, He is also loving and compassionate and kind. So, as the Son of God, He would step in our place and take our judgment. For those that would believe and receive forgiveness, redemption and restoration had begun.

Listen to what John recorded in the book of Revelation. This is after judgment, the separation of those who have eternal life from those who are in eternal darkness, and this is after the earth is restored. Revelation

22:4-6 says, “No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever. Then the angel said to me, “Everything you have heard and seen is trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires his prophets, has sent his angel to tell his servants what will happen soon.”

**God will accomplish what He has set out to do.** We can walk in that hope. We can trust that salvation, redemption, and restoration are the real thing. He will accomplish what He set out to do. **He [God] who began a good work will complete it.** Philippians 1:6 “ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”

Our passage this morning is about trust and hope. It’s about the faithfulness of our God. He who began a good work will see it to completion. Sometimes it seems like evil wins. It doesn’t. Sometimes it seems like God is really slow at making things right again. His timing is perfect and excellent. Sometimes it seems like God isn’t working in a situation. He is. Sometimes it feels like we are losing. We are victorious with Christ.

2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."

Listen to Isaiah 55:8-9. “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” Verse 11-13 says, ““The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it. You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands! Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up. These events will bring great honor to the Lord’s name; they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love.”

**God will accomplish what He set out to do. He who began a good work will complete it.**

In just a moment we are going to look at Mark 4:26-34. But, three weeks ago, we looked at the '4 soils of the heart'. Three of them did not choose God's redemption and the process of restoration. The fourth, the 'good soil' was a truly receptive heart to God's Word, willing to receive and follow the heart of God. Last week, we looked at the parable of the Lamp, an extension of the parable of the soils. The lamp would reveal and shed light upon the good soil. The heart that receives the Word of God, seeks to apply it, then gains understanding and the more it seeks and understands, the more it understanding it gains.

Let's read Mark 4:26-34.

These two parables, I believe, are a further extension of what Jesus taught in the parable of the soil.

**The parable of the growing seed.** (Verses 26-29)

1. unique to the gospel of Mark
2. The seed is the word of God
  1. We get this from Mark 4:14
  2. The way we understand scripture is by context. We first look at the chapter the verses are in for clues, then the chapters surrounding that chapter, and then we look to the whole of the Bible. As the inerrant, infallible Word of God we can trust it and use it to understand what it being said.
3. The point of this parable is found in what happens with the seed.
  1. The man broadcasts the seed
  2. He goes about his normal everyday stuff
  3. The seed does its thing grows and the man goes about his everyday life
  4. Why? because he doesn't have the ability to make it grow.
    1. He can put outside forces on it to help it: a greenhouse; warmth when frost arrives; water when there is no rain; BUT, he doesn't make it grow
  5. It sprouts and grows on its own.
    1. **The point is the kingdom of God grows on its own. God accomplishes the work He begins.** If He wills it, He

accomplishes it. “God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.” 1 Thessalonians 5:24

2. Verse 28 “all by itself” —Gr—automate—we get ‘automatic’.
3. We can’t manipulate anyone into the kingdom of God through emotion, bargaining, begging, or making the message of God ‘scarier’ or ‘friendlier’. God is the one at work within them. We simply are to point to the truth through our deeds and our words. The rest is the work of the Spirit of God. He convicts the world of sin. He leads to truth. He brings understanding. He points to Jesus.
4. It doesn’t matter which part of the process you are, what part you play, just play it. Do your part.
  1. 1 Cor 3:5-7 “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”
  2. We are simply His ministers in whom He works through
  3. This should give us relief, and it should squash any pride.
6. God, because of His goodness and kindness, invites us in and even prepared ‘good works’ for us as Ephesians 2:10 mentions.
  1. He invites us in to share in the blessing of seeing others find salvation and experience redemption and restoration.
  2. The result of our ‘good works’ should lead others to see God because those good works are a result of a heart of good soil. Listen to Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” Another lamp analogy.
  3. Our deeds and words mean something. Let’s choose to use them in a way that brings about life and praising of God instead of death and disbelief.
7. The fruit is in the seed. It isn’t found in the man or anything the man does. It’s found in the power of the seed.
  1. God’s Word is powerful, because it is GOD’S word.
    1. Hebrews tells us it is ‘active and alive, sharper than any two-edged sword.’
    2. In Timothy, it says it is useful for ‘teaching and correction.’ Right before that it is said to be God’s own inspired word to us.

3. Psalms 119:9 says 'if we live by it, it will keep us on the path of purity'
  4. Isaiah says it 'endures forever'
  5. Psalm 18:30 says 'it is flawless'
  6. Matthew 4:4 says it is our very sustenance
2. Notice the fruit has a rhythm.
    1. It grows from seed to fruit. It moves from immature to mature. It's a process. A process that takes time. A process that has an order. A process that sometimes isn't seen until it's obvious.
    2. The word of God is what grows the kingdom of God because it is the foundation of the kingdom of God. It is what separates us from the world. It reveals to us who the king is, who we are, who the enemy is, what kingdom life looks like, and more.
      1. As believers, we are encouraged to mature in our faith. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:20 "Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature."
      2. Paul also tells us to make sure we don't give too much responsibility of leadership in the church before they are mature enough to handle it.
    3. The ultimate purpose is the 'harvest'
      1. Jesus is using the language of a prophecy in Joel 3:11-14 echoed in Revelation 14:14-19 "Then I saw a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was someone like the Son of Man. He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came from the Temple and shouted to the one sitting on the cloud, "Swing the sickle, for the time of harvest has come; the crop on earth is ripe." So the one sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the whole earth was harvested. After that, another angel came from the Temple in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, who had power to destroy with fire, came from the altar. He shouted to the angel with the sharp sickle, "Swing your sickle now to gather the clusters of grapes from the vines of the earth, for they are ripe for judgment." So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God's wrath."

2. There is a day coming when Jesus will come back.
4. God accomplishes what He sets out to do.
  1. God's word works within us. The burden that we bear in growing in Christ is not found in the responsibility of our growth. God does the work, we respond to what He is already doing. It's our willingness to grow and be used.
    1. It's our willingness to receive the word of God. It's our tending to and preparing the soil of the heart by confessing sin, feeding on God's Word, communicating with Him in prayer, and looking for ways to be used for His service. God takes that and grows us and matures us, giving us insight and understanding, revealing to us what we need, and holding off on what we are not ready for.
    2. He is at work doing things we can't see. When we think He has abandoned us, He is working. When we think we are on our own, He is working. When we think hope is lost. He is working.

Let's move to the 2nd parable.

**The parable of the mustard seed.** (Verses 30-32)

1. The point of this parable is the Kingdom of God has a humble, small start, but will flourish into something that stretches out far and wide.
2. The mustard seed is such a tiny seed.
  1. not the tiniest seed ever, but it is the tiniest seed one would plant in a garden then
  2. it had medicinal benefits and was used for spices
  3. didn't produce a tree, but a shrub.
    1. wasn't unheard of to grow 12-15 ft tall
    2. wasn't unheard of to grow that much in a few weeks time
3. Our previous parable was about growth, this is about comparison.
  1. God would do the work of growing the kingdom. No matter what would come in the way of the kingdom, God would be at work growing His kingdom.
  2. This parable is about the comparison of its beginning to its end.
4. The kingdom of God would start small, but in just a short time would begin to grow
  1. Started with a humble beginning of Jesus and the 12, to 120, to 500, to over 3000, to the point where it growing daily.
  2. It grew from the epicenter of Jerusalem, and then outward from there.
  3. God uses events, governments, commerce, and more to grow His kingdom.

1. The structure of Rome's government, city layout, and its religious structure made it possible for the message of Christ to spread out. Rome was a major hub for commerce. Its government began to persecute Christians.
4. The spreading out of Christians because of the persecution caused the message of Christ to spread far and wide.
5. Over the last two millennia, millions of people have been reached with the gospel message. The kingdom of God has grown tremendously!
  1. Revelation 7:9 says it this way, "After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands"
5. The message started with the Jews and through Paul reached out to the non-Jewish people.
  1. Some commentators believe that the birds nesting in the tree are the non-Jewish people. The message of salvation was not just for the Jewish people, but for all of mankind.
  2. Some commentators believe that the birds represent evil. The kingdom of God will grow so quick that false teaching will find its way in along with the truth. It did.
  3. The context is God's Word and its effect.
    1. In the first parable, God is the one doing the work. He is unstoppable and growth comes in due time until maturity.
    2. In this parable, because God is an unstoppable force, nothing will get in the way of growing the kingdom to the point that many people will find shelter within it.

What a message in these parables! These two parables reveal the hidden and mysterious working of God's Word building God's Kingdom. It's interesting that Mark records these four parables. Mark's gospel is the shortest and is fast paced. Verses 33

We live in a time when it sometimes feels like God isn't working in America. He is. Let's broadcast the seed. The burden is off. The fear of rejection that maybe you feel when you want to share the gospel message is a lie of Satan to cause you to doubt God's work. The fear of not having the right words to say is a trick of Satan to doubt God's ability to work



through you. If that person doesn't get saved when you share with them, hope isn't out the window. God is at work.

We must have patience. He is at work in ways you and I cannot see. He will do it in His own time (praise God). We can be confident that He will keep His promise to work. And, we can be comforted that He is sovereign over His work. His Spirit is working in each of us to perfect our faith, to complete it. God, in His wisdom and His mercy, gives us what we need and unveils to us all that He is in His perfect timing. Maybe, just maybe if He did unveil all He is on is in one moment it would be too much for us to handle.

The caveat is this: None of this means that we share Christ once and then we can walk away. Be faithful. Be a prayer warrior. Maybe you don't feel the need to be obedient to share. Tend to the soil of your heart. It doesn't mean that we put all the work of growing in our faith on God. God has given us tools, people, and opportunities to know Him better. Respond to them.

God has begun a good work in us and through us. Nothing will stop His work in those that know Him and He knows them. We can trust it. We can hope for it. He is faithful to do it.