

Lake Cities Community Church  
Pastor Craig Schill  
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**“The Kingdom of God”**  
Mark 4:21-34

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Joshua Bell is, according to the Boston Herald is, “The greatest American violinist active today.” The Seattle Times raved, “The sound just flows from that fiddle, as close to perfection as anything on earth.” The Evansville Courier said, “Joshua Bell is without doubt the violinist of the century.” If you are into classical music – Joshua Bell’s name is familiar to you. He is the Tiger Woods of classical music. Tickets to his concerts are coveted – Joshua Bell is simply the best – and he is a good sport.

Bell was approached a few years ago to take part in a social experiment conducted by the Washington Post. Gene Weingarten a staff writer for the paper asked Bell, “Would you be willing to set aside your fame and notoriety, dress up like street musician and play your music during rush hour at a Metro subway station in Washington D.C.?” He said, “Let’s see if the music that people will pay hundreds of dollars to hear in a concert hall will make a splash on busy commuters.” Bell responded, “Great - It sound like fun.”

And so during rush hour, on January 12, 2007, Bell went incognito. He set up at *L-enfant Plaza* – wearing blue jeans, a long sleeve t-shirt and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. He has put his open case in front of him, and has seeded it with a few dollars and with pocket change. He played for 43 minutes, and during this time 1,097 people passed in front of Bell. Would they stop and listen? Would a crowd form? Would anyone recognize the beautiful music? How much money would the best violin player in the world generate from busy bureaucrats? (source: [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), 4-8-07)

Very few people were attracted by the music – only one woman recognized him. In 43 minutes, Bell played some of the most beautiful and difficult violin music. In the whole time only 7 people stopped to listen, and all less than one minute. 27 people gave money. Counting for overlap – there were 1,070 people passed him by without a thought. He collected a total of \$32.17. Even Bell was shaken by the experience – he said, “I’m not used to being ignored.”

When Tammy shared this story with me, I immediately thought of Jesus Christ and our study through Mark. Jesus who set aside his glory and came incognito to earth. Would people recognize Him without his great power and attending angels? The central question in the gospel of Mark is: “Who is Jesus?” It is a good question – because Jesus, like Joshua Bell in the subway – looks very much like a regular person. The prophet **Isaiah said – He had no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him (Is 53:2)**. But yet – like Joshua Bell – he played beautiful music, and while most did not want the interruption there would be at least some who would stop for a while and listen to Him. And there was Peter, who would eventually come to the conclusion – “You are the Christ – the Son of the Living God.” This morning as we open God’s word – let’s slow our stride, and turn our heads, and notice the street preacher who is beginning to teach us about Himself and His kingdom.

Take out your Bibles and turn to Mark 4:21-35 –pause - We have four parables - the first two are about the identity of Jesus (Who is Jesus?) and the second two are about the Kingdom of God. The first two parables are about a lamp and measuring cups. The second two are about a patient farmer and a mustard seed. As Micah taught us last week – Parables are both windows through which we see God, and they are mirrors in which we see and learn about ourselves. Let’s begin with the first parable – the parable of the lamp, verses 21-23.

## Parable of the Lamp: 4:21-23

Look at verse 21: [Mark 4:21](#) 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?* To understand this parable – we have to delve into some grammatical issues. This is an example of where our English translations sometimes fall short. In the NIV and many other translations the subject of the verse is “you” NIV: “Do you bring in a lamp...” (subject = You). However in the Greek – the subject of the verse is the lamp – a literal translation would be something like Greek: “Does the lamp come...” (subject: Lamp). In addition the Greek has the definite article: not “a lamp” but “the lamp.” In other words – we Mark is personifying the lamp – it is not a what but a who. Who is this lamp that has come? His readers would have said, “God.” God is pictured as a lamp in the Old Testament. [“For You are my lamp, O LORD; And the LORD illumines my darkness. - 2 Sam 22:29.](#)

And so I take it that the arrival of the lamp is a reference to Jesus coming into the world (and in passing – this is a subtle affirmation of Jesus being God). And Jesus is not going to be put under a basket or under a bed. Who has tried to dampen Jesus’ light so far in the story? His family, the Pharisees – the Scribes, the Herodians. Jesus will not allow His light to be diminished.

Now look at verse 22-23. [“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.”](#) Here we observe that even though Jesus’ light is shining – there are still hidden things and secrets. Garland writes: “For the present, secrecy abounds, not because there is anything wrong with the lamp, but because God intends it. God’s glory is revealed indirectly.” I try to

make sense of this by picturing Jesus (at this time in progressive revelation) as a 40-watt bulb – he is shining – but all is not clear. There are still shadows in the room. Now when we get to Mark 9 and the transfiguration - there Jesus' 40-watt bulb is replaced with 100 watt bulb – and more light is evident - and we look still forward to his second coming – there His full glory will be revealed.

**Summary:** In this first parable – the parable of the lamp – we have a picture Jesus comes and is shining His light – refusing to be silenced He is revealing many things – yet there are still mysteries and things hidden – that is the parable of the lamp.

### **Parable of the Measuring Cups 4:24-25**

That leads to the second parable - I call it the parable of the measuring cups. Verses 24-25: **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. For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."** Jesus is saying - the light has revealed some truth to you – and whatever amount that is for you – take care to act on it – to appropriate it to your life – and not to ignore or squander it.

Some people have been given a large measure of Jesus' teaching – through a Christian family, attending church – Great – take care to act upon and use what you know. Others have received very small measures of Jesus' teaching – you only know a little bit about the Bible and Jesus. That is fine, too - take care to act upon and use what you do know. The verse says that if you use what you have – whether much or little – you will receive more and more from God. But if you squander what you have been given, whether much or little – even what you have will be taken from you.

I found an interesting statistic this week. In 2003 a survey was done by the Soap and Detergent Association. The survey revealed that nearly ½ of US consumers have never read the laundry instructions on the back of laundry detergent bottle. The revelation is there – but it is ignored. The information is there but is often ignored. In other words – if you fade your colors. If you compromise your whites. If you pill your sweaters and tangle your delicates – you cannot go before the great Laundry God and say that you didn't know any better! God will say – “You may not have had the full laundry manual, but you had access to some revelation and choose not to act or use them.”

The point of these first two parables is that Jesus has come as a light in a dark world. And his light has revealed truth to us –which puts an obligation on you and I to respond to that truth and to seek to follow it. Whatever measure of truth we understand from Christ – start there and build from that point onward.

### **Parable of the Patient Farmer 4:26-29**

We have looked at the parable of the lamp and the parable of the measuring cups. Now we move to the third parable – the third word picture. Christ now turns his attention from himself and his revelation to His Kingdom. He wants us to begin to understand what His Kingdom is like. The parable of the patient farmer – it is only found in the Gospel of Mark. Look with me: [Mark 4:26](#) And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; [Mark 4:27](#) and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. [Mark 4:28](#) “The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. [Mark 4:29](#) “But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Jesus says in the Kingdom of God you have two jobs to do: First, to plant seeds, and second, to work when the harvest comes. That's it – that is our job. What is God's job? God's job is to create life and growth. That is the distribution of duties – and it is important in God's Kingdom to not mix them up. In this parable, it is emphasized that the farmer does not produce life. The seed sprouts and grows—*how, he himself does not know...* The soil produces crops *by itself...*

If we can understand these roles in the Kingdom of God, we will have much less stress, more joy and more contentment. Often we stress ourselves out by trying to force spiritual growth – from ourselves or someone else. We want things to happen quickly, but they are occurring slowly. We can plant and harvest, but we cannot and never will be able to create life and spiritual growth. Only God does that.

Let me give you an example. When we moved from the movie theatre to the childcare center (Feb 2008), many of us thought that perhaps we would now grow and have more visitors because we were in a permanent facility. We had a new sign that could be seen 24 hours a day. The church planting books said – “Yes – this is good.” But that growth didn't happen. In that 6-7 month period we have very few visitors, and I admit to being a little disappointed and many of us wondered, “why?”

Then, we found out we had to move out – back to the Bowling Alley for a month, and then to this school. Moving 5 times in 18 months would not be considered a great plan – according to the church planting books. But the first Sunday we were at the bowling alley – Ross and Bunnie visited us. I asked Ross - “How did you find us” He said, “Well the other day I was waiting in line in Rockwall at 3:30 in the morning for an i-phone, and started talking with

the guy next to me. He knew about your church and told me you were meeting at the bowling alley so here we are!” How does a stranger – whom I have never met – know we were moving that Sunday, and happen to communicate it at 3:30 in the morning to a stranger? Because God brings growth and we do not. I’m not saying we don’t do anything to do – we plan, and water and pray – but only God brings life. He is at work, even if it doesn’t seem like it – our just is to trust Him and to be patient – and he will bring the harvest.

### **Parable of the Mustard Seed v 30-35**

We have had three parables so far – the parable of the lamp, the measuring cups and the patient farmer. Now – the fourth parable – also teaches us about the Kingdom of God:

Mark 4:30 And He said, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? Mark 4:31 “*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, Mark 4:32 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.*”

This parable provides us a contrast – between the very small mustard seed and the very large tree that it grows into. Jesus is saying – that when it comes to the Kingdom of God – be aware, take note – that I always start small. So small, you might miss it. So small, it seems impossible that the promised outcome will occur. The kingdom of God is about the small, the last, the weak – from that beginning a great kingdom will be built.

Jesus did not come to earth as a man, but a tiny baby. He has compassion on the large crowds, but centered his work around a small group. Jesus rebuked the powerful religious leaders and spent time with the notorious sinners. Jesus warned the rich movers and shakers, and aligned with the poor. Jesus said the gentle would inherit the earth. Jesus loves starts

small – he loves the underdog. And perhaps that gives you hope this morning. Maybe you feel insignificant, small – what can I do, I’m only a child? Can God use me with my checkered background? Yes – God always starts with the humble and the small.

## **Lessons**

I would like to suggest a few lessons that I believe we should take away from today’s passage - from our four parables. First,

**1) Slow down and pay attention to Jesus.** Jesus said to his followers – “he who has ears, let Him hear.” Pay attention. I know that you are a busy person – you have a busy schedule and many appointments to keep. But we are all in danger of ignoring the non-descript street preacher playing the beautiful music. We need to slow down, and open up our Bibles more. We need to pray a little longer. It is not enough to throw a dollar in the offering plate and move on your way. This week join me in paying a little more attention to the street preacher playing the beautiful music - Slow down and pay attention to Jesus.

**2) Let your light shine** –As Jesus came to show forth his light – as Christ followers, we are also called to let our light shine – not allowing others to snuff out our light. It means being a public Christian Do people know you are a believer, at work? In your neighborhood? A father I know tells his kids every day as they go off to school, “Remember – it’s dark out there.” Congregation – it is dark out there – and you are the light of Christ in your sphere of influence. Let your light shine by speaking truth and by showing love. Obey what God has revealed you to do – and show love to everyone. Let your light shine this week.

**3) Be Patient while God works.** Some of you are waiting upon God, and our text this morning would encourage you to keep waiting patiently. Don’t try to force God’s hand – you

can't manufacture life and growth in your own power – or if you do, it will not be from God. Again this doesn't mean to be passive – but to trust in God to do His work. Plant seeds, water seeds – but wait on Him to generate life. Be patient while God works on your behalf.

**4) When God Works – Grow!** Finally, When God works – grow. The Kingdom of God is about a little bit of revelation – and having more added! Growing knowledge. The kingdom of God is about a plant sprouting and bearing fruit and a tiny seed turning into a great tree. The Kingdom of God is about growing and changing from small to big, from unfruitful to fruitful, from knowing little to knowing much. If you submit to God – He will grow your faith and make you more mature. God starts small, but he grows a small thing into a big thing – that that is what He wants to do with you. So when God works – grow with Him into the man or woman God wants you to be.

In closing, there was once four mountain climbers – one was experienced and the other three were fairly new. They were climbing in the snow, in a treacherous area. The experienced climber said, “Everyone stop – listen!” They stopped and listened carefully and heard a low rumble. It is an avalanche! “Quick – into this cave.” The four quickly detoured into a natural cave, just in time as tons of snow collided down the mountain. Soon they were in the pitch dark. “Who has a light,” the leader said? Two had lights and quickly the light dispelled the darkness of the cave. “Who has the emergency pack?” The leader asked, “Give me the shovel.” The fold-up shovel they brought in case of emergency was quickly handed over. “We will need to take turns digging our way out. But only one can dig at a time – the rest will need to wait patiently in the back of the cave for their turn.” “Is there anything we can do while we are waiting?” one asked? “Rest and pray,” was the reply. They dug through the night and the lights were beginning to dim when finally they broke through the snow. The work is done!

The leader cried – “Quick now is the time for action – everyone out now, before the tunnel collapses around us.” And they scampered out to safety.

Notice - they stopped and paid attention – then they lit their lights in the darkness – and they each waited while the work was being done by another – finally, when the work was done – they quickly moved to freedom. Pay attention – to Christ. Shine your light in the darkness. Do your work and let Jesus do His work – and when that work is done – grow and change into the person God has called you to be. Let’s pray.