

God at Work

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 4, we were gone last week, about a year ago, a young lady that grew up in the church! text me and said, is there any way that you could do our wedding next January?

And I said, sure. And then it came and it was time. And so we were in Mississippi last week, did that wedding.

And I don't do 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Saturday weddings and drive all night and then preach twice on Sunday morning anymore. So anyway, so we worshiped with the church that I pastored for 15 years there on Sunday morning and back in place.

And I hated not being here. I'm not good. Don told me God called me into ministry so I didn't have to sit in a pew. And because I'm not very good at it. But I'm thankful for Jeff Rafferty, who's faithful to bring God's word.

And I was blessed by him and thankful that I can rely on him like that to be faithful and you not miss a beat when I'm gone. I appreciate him. People love a good story. We connect with stories.

[1 : 25] And nobody knows that better than Jesus. Jesus knew that and he used stories often and some were very simple on the surface.

Yet the meaning behind those stories was anything but simple. We call these stories parables. And the gospel writers use that word to remind us that Jesus is not reporting on events when he tells these stories.

They're not news stories. They're truth teaching stories. The word parables means to place alongside. So Jesus places these stories alongside a truth that he is teaching to give further explanation.

I've often heard it described as earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. Well, that sounds kind of trite to me, just to be honest with you. The reality is they were earthly stories.

They were very relative stories. Stories that met people where they were and they told deep spiritual truths. And here's the thing about parables.

[2 : 39] Is they don't just communicate truth. They also reveal the heart of the listener.

Because the same story that brings clarity to one person can also cause confusion for another. It's not the story that creates the difference.

It's the heart and the mind of the listener that makes the difference. And as we look at Mark chapter 4 this morning, Jesus explains the purpose of parables to the apostle.

And then gives some parables to show how God is at work in the world. And we're going to look at several of those this morning. We're going to take it piece by piece. I'm going to begin in Mark chapter 4, beginning in verse 10.

And it says, when he's speaking of Jesus, When Jesus was alone, those around him with the twelve. In other words, what he meant was, There was a lot of people with him before this passage. And when they dispersed and left, There were just the apostles and a few others.

[3 : 49] And when he was alone with them, Those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, To you have been given the secret of the kingdom of God, But for those outside, everything is in parables.

They may indeed see but not perceive, And they may indeed hear but not understand, Lest they should turn and be forgiven.

God's at work. And this passage and the parables that we'll look at this morning Tells us how God's at work. God is at work relationally. In Mark chapter 4, verse 1, Jesus tells the parable of the soils.

It's often called the parable of the sowers, But that subtitle that's been placed in your Bible Was not in the original Greek. That's been added by editors along the way. And I believe that when you look at that parable, What you see is not the focus on the sower, But the focus on the soils.

The difference in the soils. He then, he tells that parable, And then he explains that parable, And we looked at that weeks ago before Christmas.

[5 : 06] Between the parable and the explanation in Mark chapter 4, Jesus quotes Isaiah to explain why he teaches this way.

His parables are effective. They are thought-provoking. They are life-changing. Yet sadly, Everyone did not get it.

And sadly, Everyone is not going to get it. He speaks to where we understand it. He speaks on our level. He uses familiar images.

He makes truth accessible. And many will be convinced. And many will be strengthened. And many will be changed by the truth of these stories. However, All will not be changed.

Some will even grow hardened. Some people are raised in church. But it never clicks.

[6 : 11] It's hard to understand. And some can read the Bible through again and again.

But if they never apply that truth, It's like reading a novel and forgetting it as soon as you close the book. Some hear the hope of salvation again and again.

And never surrender their lives. The scribes and the Pharisees are listening to Jesus. And they were like that.

In almost all of these conversations that Jesus has with a large group of folks, There's scribes and Pharisees there. And in my sanctified imagination, That's fairly accurate.

They're normally standing in the back there. Now sometimes it actually says they're sitting up front. But normally, You know, I just see them kind of, You know, A little peanut gallery in the back.

[7 : 09] Scornful. Like some of you. No, I'm not. They just grew hardened As he spoke. I mean, There were exceptions.

Nicodemus came to him in the night. Because he was ashamed to come to him. But they just grew hardened as he spoke. And here he quotes Isaiah.

And he is referencing a moment when God sent Isaiah to confront a rebellious and hardened people. Isaiah chapter 6 may be one of the, Besides the book of Revelation, May be one of the best worship passages in all of Scripture.

I believe it kind of sets a model for us of how, What worship ought to be in Isaiah chapter 6. But what leads to Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah 1 through 5, Talks about the hardened nature of a people that Isaiah is to confront with the truth.

And the reality is that a lot of them ain't going to get it. Still got to share it, But they're not going to get it. The truth was given, But their hearts were closed.

[8 :12] And here's the hard reality. We can put truth out there, But we cannot control what happens to somebody else's life. We can't do that. We can try, But we can't. And God does not coerce faith. He does not override our will. He confronts. He calls. He commands. Repentance. And he often does it through simple everyday stories. Now, I want to be clear. We are saved only by the sovereignty of God. We can only come as God calls us to come. But get this as well. The sovereignty of God never removes the personal responsibility for the unbeliever. It also never removes the responsibility for the believer to share. We must do all we can to reach as many as we can for the cause of Christ, While we are aware that all of them will not come. And that tension is hard to grasp.

[9 :22] Charles Spurgeon. Wonderful Baptist pastor. In London years ago said this. That God predestines. And that man is responsible. Are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory. But they are not. It is the fault. Of our weak judgment. He presses us further. When he says, and I quote. If sinners be damned. At least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they perish. Let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees. Imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled.

[10 :24] Let it be filled. Let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions. And let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for. End of quote. Folks, we have a responsibility to share. And we have a responsibility to respond. Do you know what makes both of them work really well together? A relationship with the Lord Jesus. The reason Christ spoke in parables. And the reason why you and I ought to share as consistently. And compassionately. And convincingly. As we possibly can. Is because God is at work relationally. I will tell you ahead of time. All will not get it. Some will draw near. Some will draw near. Some do not. But it is never because Jesus failed to make the truth known. May it never be because we refuse to share it effectively.

[11 :30] Because God is at work relationally. After he shared the parable of the soils. He shares more parables and more truths about how he works. Not only does God work relationally. But God also works openly. I want you to see this in verse 21. It says. And he said to them. Is a lamp brought in. To be put under a basket. Or under a bed. And not on a stand. For nothing is hidden. Except to be made manifest. Nor is anything secret. Except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear. Let him hear. Light is a blessing. It is wonderful to walk in a dark room. Be able to flip the light on. And to know what is in front of you. My wife calls me a lover of darkness. Because when she cuts on a lamp.

[12 :25] I cut it off. Unless I have stubbed my toe three times in the same room. I never cut a light on. That is just the way I am. However when you leave a room. Turn the light off. A light left on. That no one is using is useless. And I say that a lot at the house. Right before worship. One Sunday evening. In another place of ministry. I went into a restroom. That had no windows. And when I left.

I did like my mother taught me. I turned the light off. And I went into worship. And about ten minutes later. A fellow walked into worship. Real sheepishly.

He sat down next to me. And said. I have been in the bathroom for ten minutes. Trying to find a light. Somebody turned the light out on me.

[13:27] And if you see Brett Turner. You remind him of that. Who cuts a light on in a room. That will not be used.

And then shuts the door. I mean who does that. Who lights a lamp. And then puts it under a basket. It's useless. Christ. Christ. Is the light of the world.

And when we come to him. He encourages us. To shine before others. What good would it do. To shine in your heart. Before God. And not let it show in your life. So don't hide your flame for God.

Let it burn. Don't bottle up the power of God. In your life. Burn brightly. Let your light shine. Jesus says one day secrets will come to light.

In other words. People may hide their need for God. But they can only hide it for a season. It will be known. But before the end.

[14:26] When all the evil of the world is exposed. Let us expose. The hope of Jesus to the world. Because God works. In the open.

He reveals to us. And he reveals through us. God works.

Openly. Not only that. But God is at work generously. Verse 24 says. And he said to them. Pay attention to what you hear.

With the measure you use. It will be measured to you. And still more will be added to you. For the one who has. More will be given. And from the one who has not.

Even what he has. Will be taken away. When we respond to him. He blesses us. By revealing more of himself. The measure that we bring.

[15:26] And what I mean by that. Is our devotion. Our openness. To the Lord. Our obedience to God. Is the measure that God uses. To pour into us.

It is true. When it comes to God's word. Put your time. Into God's word. And you will dig out. The nuggets of truth. That bring value to your life. If you just glance.

And skim. You will find the word of God. About as deep as you are. And about as deep as you read. But it's also true for worship. What did you bring to worship today?

And I don't mean exteriorly. I mean inside. I mean in your heart. Did you come merely to get something? I've seen a many a time in a congregation.

Of course never here. Somebody come into worship. With their arms crossed. With an attitude on their face. Well I dare you to bless me.

[16:36] Looking judging. The whole time. And the reality is. Those same people sometimes leave and say.

I didn't get fed. Well I got news for you folks. We have a self-feeding program around here. Most of the folks.

If not all folks in this room. Can feed yourself. And. Maybe you don't need to be spoon fed anymore. Maybe it's time to dig into God's word.

And then walk. Into corporate worship. In the overflow. Of what God has already done. In your life. To take in God's word.

Before. We even get here. The other question I have. And I try to. Build this up a little bit on Saturdays. With a text. But do you come with expectation?

[17:37] I mean. More than just a habit. And listen. If you come here. Strictly. Strictly. Habitually. I'd rather you come out of habit. Than not come at all. But it'd be a lot better.
If you came out of hunger. Hunger to see God work. And move in your life. Hunger for more of God. And if you are. Did you come prepared? The Jewish rabbis.
Used to teach. They pray best together. Who first pray alone. Prepare your heart for worship. Before arriving. And when you arrive.
It'll be so much better. As Jesus told us in these verses. God will never leave us short. And he will always give us more. Than what we give. He always will.
God's at work generously. He's also at work patiently. And he said. The kingdom of God. Is as if a man.

[18:39] Should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps. And rises night and day. And the seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. The earth produces by itself.
First the blade. Then the ear. Then the full grain. In the ear. But. When the grain is ripe. At once he puts in the sickle. Because the harvest. Has. Come.
One of the most exciting things. That ever happened to me. In kindergarten. Was pizza day. We ate a rectangular piece.
Of pizza. With some type of abstract meat. On it. That I have never seen before. And never since. But man.
It was good as a five-year-old. I'm just telling you. It's fine. The second most exciting thing. That ever happened to me.

[19:33] In kindergarten. Was when my teacher came in. With eight ounce styrofoam cups. Half full of soil. She told us to take our finger.
And. Put them in the soil. And make a hole in the soil. And then she gave us a bean. And we put that bean.
In the soil. And covered it up. With just a little bit of water. And surely she didn't let us pour it. But. It was just a little bit of water. We. Put water.
In that soil. And set that cup. In the window seal. With a high anticipation. That we were going to grow.
A mess of beans. Y'all know what a mess of beans is. Don't you? You look like you do. Next day.

[20:37] I was jacked. I came back. And looked in that window seal. Nothing. Came back the next day.
Nothing. Nothing. I went into the weekend. Knowing the lady was a fraud. So set up. Done got us jacked up for nothing.
Came back after the weekend. On Monday morning. I had no confidence whatsoever. I decided to look anyway. And I saw a green hook.
Coming out of the soil. That same bean had sprouted. The next day. That hook.
Was standing up. And every day after that. We could see growth. I don't remember us getting a mess of beans out of it.

[21:46] That's the way God works. He works. He works. He works. In our lives. Patiently. Some of you need to hear this this morning.
He works. In our loved ones lives. Patiently. He's so much more patient than we are.
I never wanted to be one of those pastors. That stood up on a Sunday morning. And had to confess something. But I will. I'm not gifted with patience.

I know it's a fruit of the spirit. And I struggle with it. And I know what some of you are going to say. And don't tell me. Don't pray for patience. God will make you miserable. Okay. I tend to disagree with that.

But a long line never hurts. Every now and then. We pray for God to move. And then we get upset.

[22:53] When the next day. Things have not changed. But you see.

They have. At least they might have. Because that Monday morning.

When I saw that hook of green. Coming up out of that soil. That wasn't the first day. There had been movement there. For I assume. And I'm not good at biology.

But I assume. The next day. That beam began to change. It was all under the soil. We couldn't see what was happening. But there was change. That was taking place.

There was movement. That was happening. Below the surface. And I want you to know. That whatever that prayer burden is. That you have. God could be moving under the surface.

[23:52] Not only in other people's lives. But in our own life. He could be quietly transforming us. He could be moving in our loved ones. He could be moving in our prayer burdens. And our maturity in Christ.

God is at work. And thank God. He's patient. He's patient. God is at work. He's patient.

And in case you're doubting today. God is at work surely. He says.

With what can we compare the kingdom of God? And what parable shall we use for it? It's like a grain of mustard seed. Which when sown on the ground.

Is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet when it is sown. It grows up. And becomes larger than all the garden plants. And puts out large branches.

[24:51] So that the birds of the air. Can make nests. In its shade. The mustard seed. Was the smallest known seed. Of that time and culture.

It was about the size of a seed tick. I mean it was small. Now somebody will Google it. And come back and say. You know there's a seed smaller than the mustard seed.

You missed the point. Okay. However it grew into a large bush. Almost a small tree. Sometimes as high as 10 to 12 feet tall.

And who would have thought. Such a small seed could grow so large. So it is with the kingdom of God. Many things that the Lord start.

Just small. Jesus incarnation. At least with his birth. Began in a cattle stall. In a manger. But you just wait.

[25:51] We ain't seen nothing yet. Excuse me Dr. Butler. For poor English. For poor English. What started small.

And what. Some believe still is. Is the growing kingdom of God. When you look at the end of. Of Genesis.

And the first of Exodus. What you'll see is the kingdom of Egypt. Thriving and strong. Ruling the world. But it is no more. Then you see the Assyrians.

Ruthless. Horribly destructive in battle. But they are no more. Beat by the Babylonians.

They were strong for a season. But they are no more. Then the Persians. And they are no more. Then the Romans. Even the Roman Empire. No more. Then the Aztecs. Then the Mongols. Then the Ottoman Empire.

[26:49] All great at one time. And all gone now. What about the United States? We need to be great again.

In a lot of different ways. What will happen. To this great experiment. Of democracy. That we're living in. I tell you this.

It will not last forever. Empires rise. And fall. But the kingdom of God.

Will never die. It's much bigger than we think. It is more lasting. Than we can imagine. It is more sure. Than we could ever be.

About anything else. The kingdom of God. Was planted like a small grain. Of mustard seed. On the bloody soil. Of a hill. Soil.

[27 : 48] On a hill. Called Galgotha. And it is growing. Relationally. God is drawing people. To himself. It is beaming. Openly. Like a light.

On a hill. It is growing. Generously. None of us. Deserve salvation. Yet he gives. To all. That will surrender. To him. He is at work.

Patiently. Keep checking. The soil. Where you flung. The seed. Keep checking. The harvest. Is coming. And have no doubt.

My friend. God. Is at work. Surely. The little movement. That started at Pentecost. Is growing large enough.

To house. Every tribe. Every tongue. Every nation. And every people. I don't know.

[28 : 46] All that's going on. In your life. I don't know. All that you're burdened. About today. But I want you. To know something. God is at work.

God is at work. Don't be discouraged. God is at work. With every head bowed.

And every eye closed. I ask you this morning. If there's been a stirring. In your heart. About a matter. That you've never taken care of.

If there's never been a time. In your life. When you've surrendered your life. To the Lord Jesus. It could be. That he's stirring. In your heart today. If there's never been a time.

When you've confessed. Your sins to him. And told him. How much you need him. To forgive you. And to come into your life. And to save you. And to change you. He could be knocking.

[29 : 50] At your heart's door. Today. To use an illustration. That Jesus used. If you've never given your life.

To Christ today. We're going to stand. And we're going to sing. In just a moment. When you come. And say. Pastor. I need to be saved. I've never surrendered. My life to Christ. Been to church.

Numerous times. Know a lot about it. Never surrendered. My life to Christ. I really don't have a relationship. With the Lord. Maybe you have done that.

But you've never acknowledged. That publicly. And whoever told you. That private faith. Is a good thing.

Did not read. The passages. We just read. Because the reality is. A real faith. Is a very public faith. And Jesus. By his commission. And by his example. Show us.

[30 : 50] That the first step. Of obedience. In that. Is baptism. Public baptism. If you've never been. Baptized as a believer. I encourage you to come. We won't do that. This morning. We'll line it up.

But you come. And say. Pastor. I need to be baptized. Maybe you're here. God's drawing you. To Pickens First Baptist Church.

You visited it with us. And you felt like. That God is. Working and moving. In your life. And drawing you. To this place. 2025. Was a wonderful year.

In the life. Of Pickens First Baptist Church. In so many different ways. It is fun. To worship with you. If God's drawing you.

You come. I'll guide you. In what it means. To be a member of First Baptist Church. For the rest of us. Maybe today.

[31:53] We just need to acknowledge. That God's at work. We need to lay that burden down. Before the Lord. We need to give him. That thing in our life. That we want to own. And don't want to give up.

We need to trust him. With an area of our life. That we're struggling with. We're going to stand. And we're going to sing. In just a moment. Some of you. May just need to drop your head. And give it over to God. Or you may need your pastor.

To pray for you. And with you. Or you may want to come. To this altar. Lay your burden down. Before the Lord. Lord. Oh God. Remind me.

That you're at work. Show me. Let me see a sprout. Lord. And let me trust you. In the meantime. I have no idea.

What God's saying to you. I just know. We'll never be satisfied. Until we're completely obedient. To follow him. In every way. Lord Jesus. Help us to have the wisdom.

[32:49] The courage. And the boldness. To be obedient. Right now. Father. In Jesus precious name. Amen.