

Morning Church family take your Bibles out with me if you would please turn to Mark chapter 4 Mark chapter 4 We're going to finish up Mark's parables today in this section of the gospel So we're going to be looking at Mark chapter 4 verses 26 through 34 Mark chapter 4 26 through 34 So turn there if you would And once you've found your way there, if you would please stand with me in honor of the one who gave us this word, as we read it this morning. Mark chapter 4, verses 26 through 34, it reads, And he was saying, the kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil. And he sleeps and rises night and 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 grain is ripe, he immediately puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. And he was saying, how shall we compare the kingdom of God or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the soil, though it is the smallest of all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes largest of all the garden plants and forms large branches so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade. And with many such parables, he was speaking the word to them, and they were able to hear it. And he was not speaking to them without a parable, but he was explaining everything privately to his own disciples. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the opportunity to come and gather this morning. We thank you for The safety of those that are here, we lift up those who are not due to illness or travel or whatever the circumstances may be. We do miss our members of the body that aren't able to join us. I pray for healing and safety, whatever the case may be for those who are not with us this morning. I pray, Lord, that you would help all of us to look intently at your scriptures today, see what these parables mean, meant then and how they apply to us now. I pray, Lord, for me that you would remove any distractions from me, remove any nerves or misspoken words or anything that could take away from your perfect word and from your explanation of your word. And I pray the spirit would apply to each one of us your word exactly how you intend. We love and praise you and thank you for all that you are and all that you've done for us, for your grace, for your redemption. And we look forward with an eager anticipation for when you come to take your bride home. We love and praise you in your holy name. Amen. You can be seated. All right, the title of today's message is The Kingdom of God. And as we read through this passage, you'll see that it's a recurring theme. He's a little bit more straightforward about speaking about the kingdom of God. If you recall, over the last

few parables, we kind of got the idea about the kingdom of God, got the idea about salvation as Jesus was teaching these parables.

And in these last two that Mark has attached here, to this teaching. Again, very likely that this

is not at the exact same time that he taught the other parables.

This is Mark bringing in, of course, on the influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We're bringing in these parables to teach us something specific. So as you recall, we would then interpret these parables together and understanding them based on the original parable that we saw back in verse 13 and following for the soils and the sower and seeing how those would apply.

So when we think about, or excuse me, from the beginning of the chapter was that parable. So when we think about what Mark is doing here, essentially he is giving us, as we wrap up these last two parables of these five, he's been giving us a synopsis of Jesus's teaching. Now, of course, as we all know, Jesus taught much more than this. In fact, the Gospel of John says if they were to try to record everything that Jesus taught, there wouldn't be enough books on earth to house everything that Jesus did. And so this is simply a synopsis.

And so understanding that Christ's primary purpose, but what Mark is teaching us is that Christ's primary purpose of these parables was to reveal to us the kingdom. Reveal to us salvation. Reveal to us who God is and who he has sent to redeem us. And so this parables that we're going to look at today are going to be no exception to the other three that we've looked at. It's going to go right in line with them. In fact, the first parable of the two that we'll be looking at today, the parable of the seed, is found in no other gospel. This is the only gospel it's found in. And so Mark is doing something very specific here.

He wants us to learn the kingdom of God and what that means. And so we're gonna wrap up Mark's small section on parables today, and we're gonna look at, we're gonna learn at several things.

We're gonna learn that he is sovereign. that God is the source of all, the reason for all, the sustainer of all, and that really God is the center of everything. Now you may go, how do these parables say that? Well, we're gonna look at it together, and I pray that the Spirit will show us in this text today exactly that God is at the center of all. But we want to make sure that we understand when we walk out of this room today, that everything that we are, everything that we are created to do, everything we are as a church is all for God and His glory and nothing more. And so we want to make sure that

we dig into that truth that is found here in scripture. So let's begin. Number one, kingdom growth. We'll be looking at verses 26 through 29 first together and looking at kingdom growth. So let's reread that text together,

the parable of the seed found in verses 26 through 29. And he was saying, and of course he being Jesus, he was saying

the kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil, and he sleeps and rises night and 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 grain is ripe, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." Now we've heard about the seed casting, being cast in the soil earlier in Mark chapter 4, right at the beginning of the first parable. In fact, if you recall, it was about the seed being cast on the soil. But this is going to be a slightly different variation using the same idea. So if you remember, parables are a comparison, right? It's not an analogy. Jesus is comparing farming, if you will, the growth of crops to the kingdom of God. And so before we dig in here, I want to make sure that our minds are not stuck in the Western, which we often do. In the days of Jesus, the Jews were looking to the kingdom of God. specifically how the Old Testament would speak to it quite often, but their view was skewed. So in the Jewish mind, the kingdom of God was going to be established by a great conquering. There would be an extended son of David, someone in the line of David that would come, And he would come and he would conquer the Romans in the context of Jesus's life, conquer the Romans, give Israel back their land. They would rebuild the temple or keep the temple, excuse me, sacrifices going forever. And ultimately, the Jews would become the primary and only nation on earth ruling all others. And so from a Jewish mindset, the kingdom should be described with grandeur. It should be described as the most ultimate thing that God can bring and have happen on the earth. But as we'll see today, that is not at all what Christ is comparing it to. In fact, he's comparing it to something that is rather insignificant in their culture. This is not what they had in mind when they thought about the kingdom of God being established. the Jews would have honestly balked at this. There's no way he can talk about the kingdom of God like this. Farming was the most minuscule, and a seed was the tiniest part of farming. This is not grandiose. There's no grandeur in this. Where is the kingdom of God? Where is the army? Where is the conquering king? Where is the Messiah that will set us free? And so when we read this, one of the primary things that we have to understand is that God does things differently than what people expect. He does things differently, and we're gonna see this throughout these parables. God doesn't act in a way that is comprehensible to man. In fact, God's wisdom is foolishness to man, as Paul tells us, and we'll look at that shortly. But here, the kingdom of God, in verse 26, is like a man who casts seed upon the soil. Now, the kingdom of God has been said to mean several different things. Scripture teaches us several different things. It could be about the final coming

of Christ, The kingdom of God could be new heavens and new earth. Often kingdom of God is referenced in the gospel specifically about salvation being brought to man, Christ establishing the kingdom of God, the plan of redemption being brought about. And so in this context, we would interpret the kingdom of God in that third way in salvation, how salvation has come to man and the kingdom of God in the already not yet sense. So the kingdom of God is already here, but not yet consummated. So what that means is that Jesus brought the kingdom of God about on the earth. He established it, but it is not in its complete fulfillment yet. So we have a phrase that we like to use, the already not yet aspect of the kingdom of God. And so when we think about the grandiose idea of the Jews having the kingdom of God is about this conquering, Christ is telling us, no, it's something small. It's something insignificant. It's not what you think it's going to be. It's this tiny thing like a seed being thrown on the ground. Something as common as a farmer casting about his seed. But notice that when we look at the mundane task that the farmer has completed, he goes on about his life. In verse 27, it says, and he sleeps, referencing the farmer, he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows. How? He himself does not know. So now we know with this being interpreted from a salvific viewpoint, We know the first parable of the sower, the difference between the seeds. We learned earlier in Mark chapter four that the one that made the difference in the ground was simply the farmer. Which one did he make good soil? Which one did he not work? And so now we can get the same idea here of the farmer. He's likely worked his soil. He's ready to cast the seed. He's cast it. And now he lets it grow. But he doesn't understand how it grows. In this parable, Jesus is attempting to make the kingdom accessible to man. He's trying to compare it to something that a man can comprehend that we today can still comprehend in regards to something as simple as growing. So let's think about anybody here have a garden or ever farmed before? Okay, I think a lot of us probably have. And so when you put the seed in the ground, yes, there's things that you have to do, right? You're supposed to do things. to it, water it, get sun and things like that. But ultimately, do you control the growth of the plant? No. Do you understand? I mean, if you're really scientific, you might get the concepts of how it grows and how things change and those kinds of things. But ultimately, we are man. That is beyond our comprehension. We simply watch it grow. We go on about our lives. We plant a seed or or if you think about the natural cycle of nature, a tree sprouts, There's things that fall, you know, the helicopters when you play with them as a kid, you know, the helicopters, they fly around or birds eat the seeds and they go and and spread the seed from their waste. And everything just kind of does

its own thing, doesn't it? We go about our lives without truly understanding how this process works, that we don't have any control over it. Man has no control over it. And how many of us have had the frustration of planting a seed, watering it, letting it grow, giving it the adequate sunlight, taking all the science and it does absolutely nothing. Anybody in here? I kill

things a lot when I try to grow stuff. I do not have a green thumb. Dave is my rescuer. But when it comes to growing things, does man ultimately have control? No. Not at all. And that's what Jesus is telling

us. He's using something insignificant and small, something that's small

at the beginning, beyond comprehension, to tell us that God himself brings

the growth. In verse 27, he says, how? So referencing the farmer, how? He himself does not know. He doesn't know how the growth comes. All he knows is it happens. It happens. We do get growth. We do get harvest.

We do get new seed. But as farmers know, you can do everything you possibly can, but if the Lord doesn't bring the growth, the growth doesn't come. So it is with the kingdom of God. If we are spreading the seed, as we learned earlier in these parables, that Christ has commanded the disciples to also spread the seed, to spread the gospel, we don't know. It's as if we're spreading seed

in darkness, right? We don't know where the good soil is, where the bad soil is, but we take the word of God, and follow his command to spread it. And so we're spreading the seed. We don't know anything about it, but then we go on about our lives, don't we? We sleep, we rest, we rise up in the mornings, and then we see growth. How many of us have seen growth in those around us who we've worked with day and night? We've worked with, we planted

the seed, we spread the word, and suddenly we look back at them, possibly our children, possibly our spouses, or even ourselves. We look back and go, look at the growth. Look at the growth. Where did that come from? I have

no idea how this works. How? He does not know. How this growth comes about, we do not know. But what we do know is that we can trust a sovereign God. Who is at the center of this growth? God. In verse 28, the soil produces

crops by itself. First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. The soil produces the growth by itself. What a fantastic way of describing how truly nature works, doesn't it? It just grows by itself. The births happen, new animals

are brought about, new plants are seen, and the growth seemingly happens by itself. But there's one thing the farmer looks forward to. He knows exactly what to do.

He knows what will happen when it comes. And he trusts that the seed will produce its promised worth. Verse 29. But when the grain is ripe, he immediately puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. Throughout this entire process, the farmer, as we can see reported here, goes about his daily life. He lies down and gets up. goes about his daily life, and he simply observes the miracle, but the entire time, he is trusting that this insignificant small seed is going to bring about a harvest. And he has to trust it. He can't ultimately make it do anything. He has to trust that it will grow. and he's there for the harvest, he's there ready to bring in the fruits of the seed, but ultimately he has no control over those fruits coming or not. Now, I hope that you can see where this might be going. When it comes to spreading the word, which we're commanded to do, which is referenced as a seed, We have to understand that the kingdom of God is pictured as something so insignificant, so out of our control, that it's something we cannot understand in and of ourselves. We don't understand where it grows, how it grows, where it takes root, who's going to hear it. Charles Spurgeon once said, oh, that the elect would have a yellow stripe on their back or indicator on their forehead that we could work with them. That's a loose quote. But his point is, oh, that we can understand those who would bring about a harvest. And yet we submit to the one who controls the harvest, because God is truly at the center of what occurs in the building of the kingdom, because the kingdom will be built. Do we trust that God will bring about his prophecies? I think that we all would shake our heads adamantly, yes. We trust that God will bring about what he has promised to do. So when we share that word, when we are spreading the gospel, when we're spreading the seed that we're commanded to spread, who do we trust? Who's at the center? Are we trusting ourselves? Are we trusting our programs? Are we trusting how much we can work the soil ourselves? Are we trusting about how we get people in the building? Are we being entertaining enough? Do we have enough fog machines and laser lights and gold dust from the ceilings? or do we trust the one who can bring about the harvest? Because God is truly at the center of it all, isn't he? This kingdom, from a man's perspective, how can the kingdom of God start as something so insignificant? How can the kingdom of God start with a man from Nazareth, born in a manger, born in a stable and put in a manger? How does that happen? From a man's perspective, would God ever enter the world in time and space from a completely human perspective the way that he did? Never, never. It's incomprehensible. That's why every false religion out there has some grandiose thing about how their particular God or deity or how they communicate with an angel and there's golden plates and there's all this grandiose

things about God entering time and space or whatever deity they're worshipping, and yet the one true religion, the one true God entered time and space in a way that would completely obliterate the thoughts, plans, and mindsets of humanity. Why is that? Why is that? Why does God choose to do something and use something so insignificant as a seed to represent his kingdom? Because if there's only one person that can make this happen this way, if there's only one deity, if there's only one true God that brings this about, where does the glory go? If it's unfathomable for man to comprehend this kind of entrance of God himself into humanity, as someone who didn't own his own home, remember he says, foxes have dens, Birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head. The King of the universe laid aside His glory to come and put on flesh." That is an insignificant entrance into the world, isn't it? The Kingdom of God was established, we know from Matthew, because Matthew's focus is on the Kingdom of God. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Christ came to establish the Kingdom of God. That's His focus throughout the entire Gospel. We know that the kingdom of God was not established until Christ walked this earth. And he chose a carpenter's son from a no-name backwoods town. Nazareth was not even, they didn't even think it should be part of a map. To come live the life of a servant and to ultimately give his life as the perfect lamb for the redemption of his enemies. That's unfathomable from a human perspective. Oh, I said that word. Did you catch that? I always struggle with that word. That's unfathomable from a human perspective. It's unfathomable. Men cannot fathom that God of the universe that created all things, that sustains all things, came to this earth in something as insignificant as farming in a comparison. The kingdom of God entering this world in such a humble manner. But what that does is it keeps God at the center of it all. God is at the center of establishing his kingdom. God is at the center of casting the seed. God is at the center of the crop growing, becoming a blade, and then getting a head, and then becoming mature grain. God is at the center of not only the salvation and establishment of his kingdom, but he's at the center of the growth of the plant. He's at the center of the harvesting of the plant. God is at the center of everything. And it's completely intentional. Jesus is revealing something that is completely outside the human concept of how it should work. And Paul echoes this same idea. Turn with me, if you would, to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 1 through 10. 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 1-10. I'll read this for us. It's Paul speaking. And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with superiority of word or of wisdom, proclaiming

to you the witness of God, for I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my word and my preaching were not persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature, a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being abolished. But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages to our glory, which none of the rulers of this age has understood. For if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But just as it is written, things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him. But to us, God revealed them to the spirit, for the spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. So Paul is echoing this same idea that the wisdom of God, which was hidden down before the foundations of the earth were even laid, God had this hidden wisdom waiting for Christ to come. Man couldn't come up with it. The rulers of man couldn't come up with it. The wisdom of man is not persuasive towards it. And all of this, all of this was for the glory of God. All of this, please hear me reiterate, all of this was for the glory of God. If God had done it any differently, man would have found a way to take glory for it. Man even still to this day tries to take some, even a minuscule amount of glory for himself, does he not? Well, no, no, I chose God. He knocked on the door of my heart and I chose God. No. No, as we talked about a few weeks ago, Christ doesn't stand at a door waiting. He kicks the door off its hinges and rescues the one who is enslaved to sin. God comes and is for His glory and His glory alone. Because ultimately, it's all about Him. The kingdom is about Him. Man was created for Him to give Him glory. This whole plan of redemption was ultimately set in motion to glorify himself, because God would have been perfectly righteous and perfectly just in saving Noah. And yet, by his mercy and grace, through his plan of redemption, him being at the very center of it, using something that was beyond human comprehension, something that would be comparable to such insignificant as a seed, he chose to use that way of bringing about his redemptive plan. So when we think through these first few verses in this first parable, think about God. Think about Christ, who was at the center of doing all of this? Why use something so insignificant so that we as humans with our fallible, sin-stained minds can take the focus off of ourselves by the Spirit's power to look to the One who ultimately does all of this? And the application is simply that. Do you trust God and look forward



to Him and His harvest? Do you look forward to His growth? Do you trust what He's going to do when we spread the seed in the darkness, not knowing what soil is good or bad? We must look to Christ and what

God is doing and trusting the Lord of the harvest, trusting the kingdom of God to grow as He sees fit. We trust and live life, sleeping, rising, the days passing without an understanding of how, without understanding the growth, without understanding where it comes from, without having a true comprehension, but looking to the one who does know. Looking to the God of this world, not as the, lost my train of thought, excuse me, looking to the God of glory, the Lord of this kingdom, to bring about the harvest that He has promised. Because His Word, what does He tell us? His Word does not return void. Doesn't He tell us that? His Word does not return void.

He does exactly as He intends. His Word will always do one of two things. Harden the heart of those who

will not come and soften the heart of those who are His. His Word never returns void. So we trust the Lord of the harvest. Because as a farmer, we can be confident in nothing else. We can't be confident in anything. Did we prepare the soil enough? Well, that's that's not really our job in this regard. Did we give enough water? Did we give it too much water?

Are we trusting the one who simply says pass the seed? Everything else is up to me. And in thinking, if you think to prevent any sideways thinking here, I'm not saying that we even have the power to sow the seed without the Spirit's work. We learned that earlier in a parable, didn't we? We interpret everything

here from the previous parables because that's how Mark lined it out. So in the first parable of Mark, chapter four, we learned that he has commanded his church to continue to take this out and to continue to spread the word. And he empowers them with the Spirit to do just that. And all of this is for His glory. All of this is for His glory. It's been said, the faith that Jesus requires of disciples is to sleep and rise in humble confidence that God has invaded this troubled world, not with the crusade, but with the seed that will grow into a fruitful harvest. God has invaded this world not according to human expectations, not according

to the Jewish ruler's expectations, not with a crusade but with a seed. Does that not make you stop and look to God? That the God of the universe does things his way so that we stop and look to him? Can you imagine an army coming to conquer another kingdom with seeds? God did. God did. God conquered the enemy's gates with something so insignificant that it could be compared with a seed. That is mind-boggling that the God of the universe would do that. Number two, kingdom purpose. Kingdom purpose. So we're looking

at verses 30 through 32 for our kingdom purpose. Verse 30 reads, and

he was saying,  
how shall we compare the kingdom of God? Or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the soil, though it is the smallest of all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes largest of all the garden plants and forms large branches so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade. So we've seen the kingdom growth and the seed used to show that God is responsible for that growth. Now we'll see another seed used to explain the contrast between what it begins, how it begins, and what it becomes for its ultimate purpose. Anybody ever seen a mustard seed before? I eat a lot of mustard, so I see it in the bottle form. Anybody ever seen a mustard seed? how insignificant it is. I mean, you can have a whole pot, you can have a hundred seeds in your hand, it just fits right there, right? Tiny, tiniest seeds. And Christ is comparing the kingdom of God to this. And of course, the kingdom of God, the same reference that we had on the first point, salvation, looking to the kingdom being established, his church growing, those who are his being called in and converted. And again, this is entirely antithetical to what humans would think. Jesus is using not only a seed, which is insignificant enough, but he doubles down and now says, not only is it a seed, it is a mustard seed. It's the most insignificant of the seeds. It's the smallest of the seeds. And yet from a garden standpoint, it becomes the largest bush or shrub in the garden of that day. Think about all the different things that they would grow in Palestine, the different things that they would eat. And the tree of the mustard seed would become the largest one in the area. In fact, it would be something that would house birds. And we'll talk about that more in just a few moments. But I'm stressing the insignificance of the comparison that Christ is using, so that our focus goes to God. Because we as humans, sinful humans, consistently pull the focus back to ourselves, don't we? Over and over and over again. Oh man, that was the best I've ever shared the gospel. Oh man, I have to make sure that I have just the right bumper stickers in the back of my car. Have I put my obligatory servant Facebook post recently? You know, where you snap a selfie while you're doing something like feeding the homeless. Everybody know what I'm talking about, right? How quickly do we turn something good, something for the glory of God, and turn it back to ourselves? This entire message is about God and not us. The kingdom of God is not for us. We are simply benefactors of it. The kingdom of God is to bring glory to himself and nothing else. We have to take our focus off of ourselves. Every time you have that temptation, every time that we have the idea that we can put the spotlight

back on ourselves, think of the seed and how insignificant it is. God's methods are insignificant so that he receives the glory and we do not. So in choosing the smallest seed, he's making a statement. He's making a statement that this Nazarene who came did not come on a conquering white horse to break down the gates of Jerusalem and kick out the Romans. No, he entered his final week of life on the back of a donkey. No fanfare from any royalty, no significant difference in the city, other than a few people putting some palm branches down. And even that was not an appropriate welcome for royalty in those days. He lived an insignificant life and had to rent out a room for his disciples to have a meal with him. And yet God did this to keep himself at the center. Because the wisdom of God ultimately and truly is foolishness to man. We're going to go back to 1 Corinthians again. If you would turn there, we're going to be in chapter 1 this time. Chapter 1, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 20 through 31. Paul is again talking about the wisdom of man, but he uses slightly different language here. He's going to, as in normal Pauline fashion, tell it like it is. Paul doesn't pull punches very often. And so he's going to tell it like it is. And we're going to see here the summation of what these parables are teaching us. That this insignificance is so that God stays at the center, so that no man can boast. 1 Corinthians 1, verses 20-31 reads, Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? So he's first starting with, Paul is starting with all the men of renown of those days. Where are the smartest people? Those who are supposed to be in charge, having it all figured out. Then his next question, has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God. God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Paul is calling the message foolishness from a human perspective. Does that sound like something as insignificant as a seed being the semblance of the kingdom of God? The message that Paul is saying that actually saves is foolishness in the eyes of the world. Next verse, for indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified. To Jews, a stumbling block, and to Gentiles, foolishness. But to those who are called, those who are chosen by God, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers,

that they were not, excuse me, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things

of the world to shame the things which are strong. And the base things of the world and despised God has chosen the things that are not, so that he may abolish the things that are, so that no flesh may boast before God. But by his doing, you are in Christ. Did you catch that? By his doing, you are in Christ. who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, so that just

as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Paul doesn't pull any punches,

does he? everything that man thinks he can conjure up, all the wisdom that this world has to offer, God intentionally opposed it with his choice of redemptive plan. God intentionally went against what man thought would happen so that only one thing could remain. He stripped everything else away

so that one thing could remain. God being at the center. Christ being the only way to truth. God had hidden himself for so many years and only revealed himself fully in Christ. Fully as far as we could comprehend. The wisdom of God is seen in Christ. The antithesis to human wisdom

is Christ himself. What God would submit himself to its own creation's torture for their own benefit? What God does that? Think with

your human mind for me for just a moment. What God does that? The one who loves a sinful creature

for his own glory. Let's walk this back for just a minute. God who needs nothing, who's all, who's self-sustaining. He is a seity, the self-sustainment. He needs nothing to survive.

He said, I'm going to show my glory and love to my creatures. And so he speaks the world into existence. And he gives these creatures control, a portion of who he is, a soul like him, made in his image, the pinnacle of his creation, And he gives them a portion of his power.

He gives them control over dominion over this world. And he says, all I ask is that you have a relationship with me and do what I say. That's all he asked. And this

creature from the dirt that received this gift from God chose not to do that. The one time that a human could make the decision, he made the wrong one. Plunging all of his descendants

for all time into sinful depravity. And yet God, before that happened, said, I know that these creatures that I'm going to create are going to do this, and I'm going to allow it, and I'm going to decree a plan to redeem them. Not only am I going to let them become my enemies, I'm going to bring them back to myself. And so he does. The transcendent

God steps into time and space in which he's not bound, but he brings himself to this world, telling us he would come, promising us, covenanting with his people, choosing whom he would save, the nation that he would use, And the son of David came and walked this earth, putting on flesh to do what the first Adam could not, to step on the head of the serpent. And he comes and lives a life

antithetical to what humans would think the God of the world would do. And he establishes this kingdom with you and I in mind. We are already on his mind. From

before time began, brothers and sisters, we are already on his mind. And this servant that is comparable with the seed, a mustard seed, is how he entered this world, came and lived that life of servanthood perfectly when we could not. And he entered that gate on a

donkey. He was taken captive. Arrested. Tried against the law. We will go into that today, but the entire trial was against Jewish law. And he was whipped and beaten. Mocked. and led up a hill to be crucified for us. And as bad as all that is, because all that is very, very bad, I couldn't imagine the things that he went through, the lashes, the beatings. He then, once he was hung on that cross, was there for three hours taking the wrath of a holy God that you and I could not take. He took that for us. He sacrificed himself, the God

of the universe came and sacrificed himself for his enemies. What God does that? What God does that? Why would

humans, we can't even comprehend that. It just leaves you going, I don't understand, why? There's nothing that I can do, there's nothing that can be done. He did it. He had to do it. And he did do it. And yet all of that is foolishness to us, isn't it? All that is foolishness. Would

we sacrifice ourselves for our enemies? How many of you in here can think of the biggest enemy you've ever had in your life?

A boss, friend who betrayed you, whatever the case may be. Would you sacrifice yourself for them? That's foolishness to humanity, isn't it? Man to man, that is foolishness. And yet God did that. And he did that all for one specific reason. One specific reason. So that no man can boast. Because

God is at the center of salvation. No man can boast. God kept himself at the center of everything by starting the kingdom in the most obscure manner, bring about growth in a way that man could never understand, bring about the tree that would one day harbor the birds of the air nesting in its shade. And the significance of the birds

nesting in the air is absolutely beautiful. I think I can say with some confidence every person in here is a Gentile. The bird of the air, many of

you may have it in A way in your Bible is that it shows it's a reference from a different verse. The reference is actually from Ezekiel 17, 23. You can write that down or turn there if you'd

like. But every reference, there's multiple references, a couple in Ezekiel, one in Psalm, one in Daniel. And the references to those, if you go back and dig in, is in reference to the Gentiles being brought in to the family of God. We are here because that mustard seed turned into a tree that could house us. Ezekiel 17, 23 reads, On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may lift up bows and yield fruit and become a majestic cedar, and birds of every kind will dwell under it. They will dwell in the shade of its branches. Now remember, Mark is writing this passage to Romans. He's writing in Rome to Romans. How comforting would it be to the Roman believers to read this passage, understanding that Christ is teaching in reference to a prophecy that the birds of every kind would come into the family of God, the kingdom of God. Remember, the tree represents the kingdom of God. We've already established that the kingdom of God is salvation. but that the Gentiles would be brought in to the kingdom of God. And Jesus teaches this same concept all throughout the Gospels. We know he speaks of the tares among the wheat, when the harvest has come, when the judgment comes. We already know in verse 29, that the harvest is going to come, the sickle, of course, being a reference to God's judgment. You can look all throughout, Joel specifically, Joel chapter three, verse 13, will tell us that the sickle is the harvest of God, the judgment of God. So we know in this coming that the birds of the air will be able to hide in the branches of the kingdom of God that Christ himself is establishing. You and I will not face the judgment of God without the shade of Christ's righteousness protecting us from his wrath. He's already taken it. He's already taken that wrath. And so in application for this second point, we must find our rest and comfort in the shade of Christ's kingdom. Look to Christ. He's at the center of it all. It's all for him. He's already done the work. This person that came, second person of Trinity came in such an insignificant manner that God himself compared it to a mustard seed to establish his kingdom. But regardless of how insignificant it is, we are benefactors thereof. So we can rest in what Christ has done. We may not understand it, We may not see its growth working beneath the soil, but we can ultimately trust that God is growing his kingdom in his way for his own glory. And the church ultimately grows because of that. Here at Grace Covenant, we don't trust as best we can through our human fallibility. We don't trust the methods of man to build his church. We don't trust the wisdom of man to build his kingdom. Scripture gives us clear lines of how a church should build itself, how a church should conduct itself. It should conduct itself by singing

God-honoring songs, reading of Scripture, prayer, and the preaching of the Word. Those are the four things that we find in Scripture outlined very, very clearly. And to the best of your elders' abilities, we attempt to structure Grace Covenant in that manner. Because everything that God does to grow his kingdom is antithetical to human wisdom, isn't it? This church and how it functions, I pray, is antithetical to human wisdom. That's my prayer. That we trust God for who he is, to do the growth, to build his kingdom, and to build his church. so that he receives the glory. Because when we look around here and we go, human wisdom says we need all the flashy, we need all the programs, we need all the stuff, we need all the things, we need the high budget, we need the big buildings. I pray, my prayer is that God gets the glory from looking and going, look at all these amazing people growing with one another, looking to Christ, loving with each other. And they go, God, God did that. Because people can't. People need entertainment. People need different things. But God does exactly how he sees fit. He's laid out the plan, right? I pray that we will follow that. Resting what Christ is doing to build his kingdom. And we will trust that he will glorify himself in his people. Number three, kingdom ruler. Verses 33 and 34. the kingdom ruler. And with many such parables he was speaking the word to them as they were able to hear it. And he was not speaking to them without a parable, but he was explaining everything privately to his own disciples. You may remember verse 34 was referenced earlier when we were just getting into chapter 4. to remind us that Christ taught everything in parables because only those who are on the inside can understand the parable. An allegory can be understood from the outside. You can look at it and make the connections, but a parable is simply a comparison. If you don't know how the speaker is comparing it, you'll never understand truly the parable itself. And so Christ is teaching in parable form so that he can reveal the meaning to those who are his. And so He was revealing it to them as they were able to hear it. And that He kept Himself as the focus of the ministry. Look at verse 34. And He was not speaking to them without a parable, but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples. The disciples were able to gather around. He would give these parables, which if you don't understand the context of and you don't have the spirit explaining it, this would mean nothing to someone who just heard these words. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. You plant it and grow. It grows into something big and the birds hide it. Would that mean that have any significance to us? And yet God making sure that he receives the glory, explains his redemptive plan, antithetical

to human wisdom so that no man can boast. And we today have the grace of the Spirit indwelling us so that we too can understand through his work in us, through his body, to understand this, the teachings that he has given us. And so we are to be completely reliant on the work of the Spirit in us to understand the Word, to comprehend it, to apply its meaning, and to grow in grace, renewal, and sanctification. So again, who is at the center of everything? God is. Who is at the center of all of these parables that we've looked at, all five of them? Every one of them has a recurring theme, and I hope you're not tired of hearing it. God is at the center of everything. Creation, salvation, sanctification, glorification. God is at the center of it all.

And so we rely on Christ and look to Him for understanding. And we find comfort in the fact that He is at the center of everything. Think with me, believers, what would happen in our world today, the turmoil that we see, the economy, the world, the world wars that are on the brink of occurring any day now, if you watch the news. If God was not the center, if we did not trust a sovereign God, we would have nothing to hope in, would we? Because God being at the center is our greatest comfort. It's our greatest relief. We can put our head down on our pillows every night knowing that God is at the center of everything. He did not speak the world into existence, spin it off like a top and say, I hope it works out. The sovereign God of creation is in control of everything. And we look to him for comfort. When our families are sick, when our loved ones get cancer, when our homes feel like they're in shambles from broken down equipment, when it feels like you're getting battered and beaten in every possible way, Christ is our comfort and we rest in Him. Christ is who we look to. We don't pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We don't try to conjure up more faith. We look to Christ and we pray for more grace. That he would work in us through his spirit to carry us forward. Because the kingdom growth is not up to us, it is up to him. The kingdom, I'm gonna say it again, kingdom growth, if there's nothing else you walk out of this sermon today, Walk out with this phrase at the center of your mind. Kingdom growth is from God, not from us. Stop relying on yourself. The spirit will work in you as he promised to, to bring about the good works that he promised to bring about. Ephesians. We've looked at that as a church. The spirit will work in you. And when things seem tough, when things seem like they can't get any worse, when all we're looking for is comfort, and we look to all the wrong things in this world that human wisdom has to offer us. I would challenge us, I was challenged this week in an elder meeting to look to this passage, and



it was so impactful, I wanted to share it with you. We must look to Christ for our comfort. Second Corinthians chapter two, turn there if you would. Second Corinthians Chapter 2 verses 3 through 7. Second Corinthians Chapter 2 verses 3 through 7. And this is the very thing I wrote to you, Paul, speaking to the Corinthian church again. And this is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice. Having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all, for out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears, not so that you'd be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have abundantly for you. But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree, and or not to say too much to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment, which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary, you should rather graciously forgive and comfort him, lest such a one be swallowed up by excessive sorrow. So Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church, saying that the Issues of his ministry the issues of this church are to be comforted by the gospel with much prayer and verse 8 He picks up and goes therefore. I encourage you to reaffirm your love for him For to this and also I wrote so that I might know your proven character whether you are obedient in all things but one whom you graciously forgive anything I graciously forgive also and For indeed would I ever graciously forgiven if I have graciously forgiven anything I did it for the sakes for your sakes and the presence of Christ So that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan for we are not ignorant of his schemes The next verse he says he came for the gospel of Christ and So through all the afflictions, through all the heartache, through all the sorrows of his ministry, through all the issues at Corinth, and the issues at Corinth were insurmountable, it would seem. Through all the hardships, he points everyone back to Christ. He encouraged them to pray for one another, to comfort one another, and to direct each other back to the gospel of Christ. And that's what I would do for you today. God is at the center of everything. Our sovereign God controls it all, and He builds His kingdom. In conclusion, these parables that we have looked at this week and over the last few weeks have taught us something. Man is not the center. God is. In our humanistic world that has infiltrated evangelicalism, in America, man continues to be hoisted up as the center of everything, doesn't he? My challenge to us from these scriptures, from these parables, is to recall that God is in control and at the center of things, man is not. It is not about you. It is not about me. It is about Christ and His glory. So let us go into this next week remembering that the kingdom of God is completely other than what man can conceive or fully fathom, and it is all for him and his glory alone. Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father,

we thank you for revealing to us that you are at the center of everything. I know how quickly and easy it is to be overcome by the wisdom of the world, to get our eyes drawn from you, to the things around us, or to ourselves, or to even things that would seemingly be good, and yet we raise them up with our idolatrous hearts and place them above you. And I pray, Lord, with these parables today and over the last few weeks, that our gaze is drawn more securely on you, that we rest in the finished work that you have done on the cross so many years ago, and that we would look to do all that we do for your glory, knowing that you're working in us for good works, unto that fact. We love you and praise you. And I pray that you are glorified by this body today in this week. In your holy name I pray. Amen.