

Varied effectiveness and its causes

The Kingdom of God has varying effectiveness. Even the preaching of Jesus was not one hundred per cent effective.

What causes this varied effectiveness? God's Kingdom is a secret available to many but known to few. It requires responsiveness, persistence and a willingness to put God's Kingdom first. The *pathway* people of *Mark 4:15* showed no responsiveness. The *rocky ground* people of *Mark 4:16-17* showed no persistence. The *thorny ground* believers¹ allowed other matters to take priority in their lives. In these cases there was no fruitfulness.

¹ 4:18-19

1. The kingdom is to become manifested eventually

1. The kingdom is to become manifested eventually. The next unit is a parable of its own, the *Parable of the Lamp*¹. A lamp is brought into a room in order to give light. Yet you do not bring a light into a dark room and then put it under a *bushel* (the large bowl that was used to measure out grain). You do not put a lamp under a bed. Similarly, God has brought His King with His royal power into this world to illuminate it. Its progress might be slow to human eyes, yet the offer of the kingdom is sincerely intended and God has plans for His royal power to bring light to the world amidst darkness. The apparently uneven progress of the kingdom is not due to any lack of purpose on God's side. He has not brought out the illumination of the kingdom and then hidden it under a bed. He has plans to manifest His royal power in this world. The *weak* progress of the kingdom is due to a hardness in men and women, and not to any inadequacy on the part of God.

¹ 4:21-25

Kingdom blessings: more given to those who receive them

The parable is followed by some sayings that add weight to the previous point. The saving sovereignty of God yields its blessings to the extent that we seek it. It is the complete reversal of normal *welfare*. In human society we feel the need to give to those who are deprived and we feel no need to give to the wealthy. But in the experience of the kingdom things are altogether different. Those who are given the things of the Kingdom of God and receive them, are given more. Those who are impoverished get even more impoverished. The rich (in the kingdom) get richer and the poor get poorer. (I refer to the blessings of the kingdom, not to money.)

Everyone will perceive eventually

The parable makes the point that the kingdom will be manifested eventually. The question is, who will be able to perceive the coming of God's royal power, in the person of Jesus, now? Jesus is referring to His own ministry. He has come into this world as a light and lamp. God does not plan to hide the light of Jesus, His Son, under a bushel or under a bed. The time will come when everyone will see that Jesus is God's King.

Who will see that Jesus is God's King now?

Yet the question is, who is able to perceive God's lamp now? Who is able to see God's King in the person of Jesus? It is this thought that leads Jesus to say, "**Pay attention to what you hear.**"¹ The kingdom requires attentiveness; it requires thought. The greater the responsiveness, the more further revelation is given². The person who responds and comes into the experience of God's Kingdom will be given more³; the person who hears the message of the kingdom but gets nothing from what he hears will begin to lose even the little he has⁴. No one stays stationary in the Kingdom of God. Everyone is either going backwards or increasing in the blessing of God.

¹ 4:24

² 4:24

³ 4:25a

⁴ 4:25b

2. The kingdom will grow despite varied responses

2. A further parable makes the point that the kingdom will grow despite varied responses^{Ⓜ1}. A man scatters seed on his fields. He then gets on with other matters. Sometimes he is asleep; at other times he is attending to other parts of his business. While he is up and about doing other things, the seed is quietly and steadily growing. The farmer does not have to keep on looking at his seed or digging it up to see what is happening to it. It goes on steadily growing. The sun and the soil will be doing their work.

Ⓜ1 4:26-29

God's Kingdom will grow because God puts life into the seed

This is an encouraging parable. It is not the responsibility of men and women to get the Kingdom of God to grow. The sunshine and the rain, and the nutrients of the soil, will produce the growth. The growth will come. Despite the varied responses that the kingdom gets, it will go forward. Its various stages will come; the final harvest will come. There is no stopping it; the Kingdom of God will go forward. The farmer may work hard, yet it is not his job to make the sun shine or to get the rain to rain. He is not the one who puts life into the seed. These things happen in and of themselves.

The kingdom is unstoppable

The kingly power of God is certainly destined to be brought to bear upon this world. It is not a question of whether God's Kingdom will come; it is only a question of who will be its beneficiaries. The kingdom will grow *of itself*. God's royal power is, by definition, royal power. It will be brought to bear in our world. Nothing can stop it.

Strong yet weak – a tension

There is a tension here. The kingdom is strong, yet the kingdom is weak. The kingdom is resistible, yet no one can stop its coming. The seed may fail in the lives of particular people because of human hardness and deafness, but it cannot fail.

3. Great results eventually

3. A further parable makes the point that the Kingdom of God will finally be great in its results^{Ⓜ1}. A tiny seed is sown. It seems so small. One cannot imagine that much will happen through such a tiny seed. But eventually that seed will result in a mighty tree, famous for the richness of its foliage. Jesus wanted His apostles to grasp these things. When He was with His disciples He explained what the parables meant^{Ⓜ2}.

Ⓜ1 4:30-32

Ⓜ2 4:33-34

From small beginnings

The Kingdom of God often has small beginnings. The birth of a carpenter's son from the despised province of Galilee in the equally despised land of Israel at the eastern end of the Mediterranean sea. How insignificant it seemed alongside the mighty Roman Empire and the powerful philosophies of Greece. Yet great events in God's Kingdom may have small beginnings.

Study 8

Responding to the Kingdom

Read: Mark 4:21-34

Read: **Preaching Through the Bible: Mark**, Chapter 8 (or Mark Slice 8)

A. Review

1. What three things are required for the message of the kingdom to have a positive effect?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. Match a, b, and c. with the three groups:
 - The 'pathway' people
 - The rocky ground people
 - Thorny ground believers
3. **True or false?**
 - a. Jesus' preaching was always 100% effective.
 - b. Even Jesus' preaching failed to change some people.

B. The kingdom is to become manifest eventually

1. The next parable is the parable of the l..... .
2. Lamps are brought into a room to g..... l..... .
3. What are two places where lamps should not be put?
 - a.
 - b.
4. Similarly the kingdom message is intended to give l..... to the dark w..... .
5. God has plans to show His r..... p..... to the w..... w..... .

6. The weak progress of the kingdom at that point was not due to the i..... of God but to a h..... in m..... .
7. The time will come when e..... will see that J..... is God's k..... .
8. **True or false?**
 - a. We need to balance confidence about the future with responsibility in the present.
 - b. We need to pay attention.
 - c. We need to actively think.
 - d. The person who responds will be given.
9. What happens to the person who does not respond?
.....
10. No one stays st..... in the Kingdom of God.

C. The kingdom will grow despite varied responses

1. The next parable concerns seed that g..... without constant attention and action by the farmer.
2. The s..... and s and the r..... do their own work.
3. It is G..... and not the f..... who puts life into the seed.
4. Underline the correct word. This particular parable is a parable of:
warning encouragement
5. Although individual people may r..... the Kingdom of God through hardness or deafness, ultimately it c..... f..... .

D. The Kingdom of God will finally be great in its results

1. A third parable teaches that the final results will be g..... .
2. A t..... seed will produce a m..... t..... .
3. Jesus e..... these things to His d..... .

