

Message Transcript

SMALL MOVES, BIG KINGDOM | THE URGENT KINGDOM

AARON BROCKETT | MARK 4:21-34 | MARCH 21 & 22, 2026

Hey, where are my Rooted grads at? Any Rooted grads? Hey, we have seen over 5,000 people go through Rooted in our church since we started it. Tuesday night we had a Rooted celebration. This place was packed. I think we had over 100 baptisms that night. It was amazing to see.

Man, can I just say this? If you have not been through Rooted or if you've been contemplating it, consider this your loving, pastoral urge to do so. You can go on the app and sign up for the next session. It does exactly what the word says. It will root you in your faith, which is a really great connection to our passage today.

If you have a Bible, go ahead and find Mark, chapter 4. We're going to continue to talk about this parable of the seed and its root system and how God is at work in our lives through that.

It is really, really good to be back with all of you after getting back from Kenya this last week. I'm going to tell you more about that trip here in just a moment. And, I'm going to answer the question that so many of you have been wondering. Yes, my son-in-law made it back. He made it back in one piece. He did a great job. It was good to have him on the trip.

As you are turning in your Bibles to Mark, chapter 4, as your campus pastor has already said, in two short weeks Easter is coming. If this is your home church can I just ask you to do three things:

Pray for and invite your "one"

Attend a "non-prime" hour

Serve as a Difference Maker

Continue to pray for and invite your "one more", attend a "non-prime" hour, and clear the way by making seats possible for our guests, and then serve as a Difference Maker in a service that you do not attend. And then, the weekend after Easter we've got something very, very special planned and we'll be telling you more about that in the weeks to come.



If you've been with us from the very beginning of the year, we are in a year-long study of Mark's gospel. And one of the things that hopefully you know about Mark by now is that he doesn't have a whole lot of time for words. He is the guy who focuses more on Jesus' movements. However, in chapter 4, he departs from that action for just a bit to record for us a handful of Jesus' words. Now, more specifically, stories that Jesus told called parables.

And many of these parables borrow heavily from agriculture and the laws of nature for this reason—to help us understand the way God works in our lives, to help us understand what this urgent Kingdom of heaven is like.

We're going to pick it up in verse 21 and go through verse 32 or so. And what Jesus does in this passage is He gives us an example to follow and then He gives us two more parables about seeds to help us to understand the way that God works.

Now, I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life where I just had this question, "God, I don't understand how You are working right now. I don't understand where You are. I don't understand what You are doing."

And not only that, some of the seasons in my life feel like God is better to me than I deserve. And I am like, "God, I don't understand the way that You are working here. You feel so close. I don't know that I deserve that."

"God, you brought that friend, that relationship into my life." "I got the job." "I got the promotion." "Finances have come in and anxiety has gone out." Man, aren't you grateful for seasons like that when they come?

And then there are other seasons, though, that are not like that. And maybe that's where you are kind of at right now. Maybe you're going, "God, You feel so distant and far away. And I'm trying to come near to You but it doesn't feel like You are there. And the prayers that I am praying not only do they go unanswered, but it feels like the exact opposite of what I pray for happens."

The friend leaves. The relationship falls apart. Or, "I lost the job." Or, "I got demoted. The finances go out, the anxiety comes in. And you are left going, "God, I don't understand the way that You work. I don't understand where You are."



And if you've ever had those questions, (and I want you to know that we all have, you are not alone) then our text is going to bring some understanding and some encouragement to you and to me. Look with me in your Bible at verse 21, Jesus is teaching:

"He said to them, 'Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed?'"

That is a rhetorical question. The answer is, of course, no. And He says:

"Instead, don't you put it on its stand?" (NIV)

Now, one of the things that we need to know about what Jesus is talking about, is that the lamp that he was talking about would have looked something like this [an oblong, pottery vessel with two holes on top, one to pour oil into and one for wick for the flame]. It was small enough to fit into the palm of your hand. It was like a first century flashlight.

In the first century they didn't have electricity where you could just flip on a light switch and turn on the light, they would need a lamp.

And it held about one to two ounces of oil, which was just enough to last from sundown to bedtime. And Jesus is saying you never light this lamp that would illuminate your steps around the house and immediately hide it under something. That would defeat the whole purpose.

Now the light that the lamp gives off symbolically represents two things. It represents the person of Jesus, who is the light of the world. It also represents the gospel message that comes into our lives.

A couple of passages that reinforce that: John, chapter 8, verse 12. Jesus says:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (NIV)

1 Peter 2:9:

"...declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (NIV)

And Jesus says, "Don't take this light that has come into your life and hide it," and He gives us two things. He says, "Don't hide it under a bowl."



Now, understand a bowl in the first century served very similar purposes as a bowl today. But I want you to think about a measuring bowl. If any of you are baking anything in the kitchen you've probably got some measuring bowls out. And so Jesus says, "Don't hide this light of the lamp underneath a measuring bowl."

And symbolically, that could be anything in our lives that we use to measure the effectiveness of our lives. So, maybe your bank account or your career or your status or your appearance. And none of those are bad things, but we have a tendency to get so wrapped up in the things of life that we use to measure the success of our lives, that maybe we intentionally or unintentionally hide the light of Jesus under that. He says, "Don't do that."

He said, "Don't hide it under a bed." That could symbolically represent rest or leisure or hobbies or maybe comfort. Once again, not bad things. But sometimes we can allow the light of Jesus Christ to get covered up by our desire for comfort or to be liked. Jesus says, "Don't hide the light."

This analogy, I think, really helps us to understand the way that Jesus is at work in our lives and the way the gospel message works because when light comes on in a room it does not discriminate. It provides sight to everyone in the room regardless of who you are.

The gospel is an open invitation of revealed truth that is available to anyone and everyone

See, the gospel is an open invitation of revealed truth that is available to anyone and everyone. That is one of the things that is distinctly different about what Jesus came to offer than every other world religion and belief system. Every other world religion or belief system, when you look into it, says there is a series of steps that you've got to take that will reveal knowledge to you as you climb the ladder.

Not Christianity. It is revealed truth all at once. The truth is not hidden behind a pay wall. You don't need to know the combination to the lock. You don't need to know the secret handshake, because there isn't one. It is an open invitation to anyone and everyone who would receive it. For God so loved the world that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

Matthew 5 says that when the light of Jesus comes on into your life then that light should refract through you to other people. You don't hide it, but you actually live it.



Now, I want to try just a little bit of a visual experiment across all of our locations right now. Here, in a minute, I'm going to turn off the lights in the room where you are sitting. Do not panic. Do not mug your neighbor. Alright? Security has got eyes.

The next thing I want to ask you to do is go ahead and pull out your phone and open it up to the flashlight app. This next part is really important. Do not turn the flashlight app on yet. Just be ready. Okay? This is the third service where I have tried this and everybody ends up turning their flashlights on too soon. So don't do that.

We're going to turn off the lights right now in the room. Now, if you gave your life to Jesus at Traders Point, regardless of when it was, go ahead and turn your flashlight on. Wow, isn't that so cool? This makes me emotional. That's incredible. Now, if you gave your life to Jesus because a friend, a parent, a teacher, or a coach led you to the Lord, go ahead and turn your flashlight on. Wow.

Now, if you gave your life to Jesus at another church or maybe a campus ministry or a conference, go ahead and turn your flashlight app on. Look at that. Isn't that amazing? Take that in for just a moment. That is such an incredible visual of the light of Jesus coming on in our life. And it's so cool because we do this at Christmas. Now we get to do it in March. This is good.

Alright. Go ahead and turn the lights back on in the room. I want you to keep that visual on in your mind. When the light of Jesus comes on in your life, you let that thing shine. Why? Because the world is a really dark place. And it needs the light of authentic Christians—doesn't mean that you are perfect, doesn't mean you aren't going to make any mistakes, but you are authentically living out the light of Jesus, unapologetically. You're not embarrassed by it.

And as we get into verse 22, remember Jesus is keeping His identity partially concealed. That's important to understand because these next handful of verses, as we read them, are going to require a little bit of interpretation. So He says:

"For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear." (NIV)



Now, I want to read verse 22 out of the New Living Translation for additional clarity. It says this:

“For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” (NLT)

Now, I don't know about you guys, when I read that I get a little nervous. You might read that and be like maybe God is kind of like mildly threatening you because He knows what you did last summer. He's eventually going to out you and everybody is going to find out what you've done and it's going to be really embarrassing. And I just want you to take a deep breath because, at least here, that is not what He is talking about. Jesus is primarily talking about Himself, who He is, and what He came to do.

Now, if you remember last week, the parable of the seed and the soil, the seed represents the gospel, the soil represents the heart. And in order for the seed of the gospel to take root, it's got to spend some time hidden in the darkness of the soil, but eventually it bursts forth and reveals produced fruit.

And Jesus is saying that many did not recognize who He truly was (that's been a theme so far in our study in Mark) until He was buried and hidden in the darkness of the tomb. And in the same way a seed is hidden in the darkness of the soil. But then, as we're going to celebrate in two weeks, on the third day, man—on the third day Jesus sprang forth. On the third day Jesus was resurrected and what was hidden had been revealed.

And then He goes on in verse 24 and He says:

“Consider carefully what you hear,” and then He uses this very common phrase in the first century, “...With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.” (NIV)

So, Jesus is talking about hidden or revealed truth in who He is and in the gospel message and He uses this very common phrase, “The measure you use it will be measured to you.” Basically, this is like, “What you sow is what you get.” That's kind of the idea.

And typically that phrase would be used in association with generosity and in giving. And if you've heard it used that way, that's because Luke, in chapter 6, use the phrase that way. You can look that passage up later today.



When he's talking about generosity he says, "Give and it will be given to you," and then he uses this visual, "shaken together, pressed down—it's kind of this idea if you are filling up this bag full of sand and every now and then you're going to take the sand bag and shake it because there will be more room for what it is that you've invested.

In Mark 4, Jesus is using the phrase, not in association with generosity, Jesus is using the phrase in association with spiritual growth and maturity. Are you tracking with me on that? He says, "If you come ready to learn and to hear and to receive and grow, with the measure you use it will be returned to you. Your spiritual growth is in direct connection to the hunger that you have for it.

Giving — Receiving

Listening — Spiritual Growth and Maturity

If I could say it this way: What giving is to receiving what spiritual growth and maturity is to listening.

So, here's an example. In the first century if you went to the market or the grocery store you would take your own bag or container, not unlike Whole Foods and Sprouts where you've got to bring your own bag or buy a bag. And it would only make sense if you were going to go to the market in the first century the number of goods or items that you could bring home was determined by the size of the container you went to market with.

Jesus is saying the same thing is true when it comes to spiritual growth. So, the measure you use in coming to the Lord to grow spiritually will be what is returned to you.

Let me give you this visual. Hopefully, this will stick. I don't know if you can see this or not. This is a thimble. And so what Jesus is saying is the measure you use will be measured to you. Some people come to Jesus with a thimble sized attention span, a thimble sized sense of curiosity or spiritual hunger.

So, you come to church but you are pretty casual about it. And you are kind of here but you wouldn't necessarily say that you're leaned in and hungry. You'll come to church, but when you come you're kind of checked in and checked out. And you don't really bring a Bible with you and nothing to take notes. You're not really expecting an encounter. You do want to get something out of it, but you are kind of causally observing things.



And maybe when the sermon is over, the thing that you'll remember is the joke or the illustration more than the principles or the truths. You may jump on social media and make a comment about my shirt or Landon's skinny jeans. That's what you'll remember about the sermon.

It's a thimble. You're like, "Hey, church was cool today." With the measure you use it will be returned, and then you wonder, "I'm not really getting a whole lot out of it." Now, listen. I'm not throwing shame. It is better than nothing. But if that's what you are bringing to it, then you can expect the return will be similar.

Others of you, you're not bringing a thimble. Others of you have your thermos. You are coming into church with Bibles open, notes out—this is what we mean by come ready. Listen. I'm not saying everybody who wants understanding takes notes. But I am saying everyone who takes notes wants understanding, because I talk fast and I talk a lot—if you haven't noticed.

And there is far too much for me to cram everything that I've prepared for you for you to digest it. You're going to have to write it down, go back look at it, process it. It is an attitude that says, "I'm going to wring everything out of this that I can."

And I cannot promise you a home run sermon every weekend. That would be unrealistic. What I can promise you is I will never give you C- effort. I will study myself full. I will write myself clear. I will preach myself empty. And there are plenty of times, the team knows this, where when I get done... Sometimes I get done and I pray and I call it the walk of shame, "Well, God. I tried. No, I tried."

But it's this idea where you say, "Hey, I'm leaned in and I'm ready." And guys, we are in a spiritual battle. And in a spiritual battle, you cannot be casual. You have to be prepared. If there was a cruise ship and a battleship parked at a harbor and one set of people are getting on the cruise ship to go on vacation and another set of people are getting on the battleship to go off to battle—those lines look different. So, this is the idea that you are coming ready. Even like right now.

This last week I talked to more people in our church who have more things happening in their lives—like darkness and relationship stuff, and challenges, and trials. Why do you think that is? And it's not because God is not a good God, it's because we have a very real enemy trying to derail us.

So, man, can I just say this? This is going to be for somebody. Exchange the thimble for a thermos. Come ready every single week and say, "God, I'm listening. Would you please feed me?" With the measure you use, Jesus said, it will be returned to you.



Verse 25 is going to continue that thinking:

“Whoever has will be given more;” it’s talking about knowledge, “whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” (NIV)

Let me read from the New Living Translation for clarity:

“To those who listen to my teaching, more understand will be given, But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.” (NLT)

This is both a promise and a warning. Now, in order to apply the Bible to our life today, we have to first interpret who the original audience would have been before we can accurately apply it to our life.

The original audience Jesus was talking to were the Pharisees. The Pharisees were listening, they alluded to understanding, they were students of the law of Moses, but the one who they claimed to want, the Messiah, was standing right in front of them and they couldn’t see Him, they couldn’t receive Him. So, what little understanding they had was taken from them.

So, how does this apply to us? I always want to be super, super careful that I never confuse you, you cannot earn your salvation. We are saved by grace through faith through the finished work of Jesus on the cross. The only thing you bring to it is your sin. And you give Jesus your sin and He imputes to you His righteousness.

Listen. You are saved by works, just not yours—His. However, when you give your life to Jesus the baptistry is not a finish line, it’s a starting line. So, when you come up out of that water, you’re a spiritual infant and now you’ve got to lean in and grow. And your growth is determined by your work. Now, your salvation is not tied to that but your spiritual maturity (and I can even say reward in heaven?) is.

So, if you are not actively growing you are atrophying. There is no such thing as middle ground. You don’t accidentally grow in understanding, discernment, and righteousness. You’ve got to pursue it.

And in this cultural moment if you are not following after Jesus, formed into His image and likeness, you are being deformed whether you know it or not, because the current of culture as well as your own and my own personal desires of the flesh, that current is working against you.



Get this visual in your mind. You give your life to Jesus. You get into a boat. You push out into the river and if you don't put oars in the water you drift. Spiritual growth is putting oars in the water and rowing upstream.

And the spirit of the age is actively sowing seeds—sowing seeds of confusion and deception. We live in a world where knowledge is always increasing. There are new discoveries. Technology is always advancing. Guys, we just can't keep up. Have you noticed that the world is growing more complex and complicated, is it not? The advancement of AI, international conflicts, conspiracy theories, political division—I just can't even keep up.

Guys, there are more ways for bad ideas to spread now than any other time in history. And you've got to put oars in the water. You've got to pursue truth. Grow in knowledge and in understanding.

It is possible to become a Christian with just a little bit of understanding, the faith of a mustard seed. And I'm grateful for that. But some of you have just enough to get you to Jesus, which is great. But if there is nothing more, that knowledge will atrophy and you will drift. It's like a small plant in a garden that gets overgrown with weeds.

2 Peter, chapter 3, verse 18 encourages us to:

"...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." (NIV)

Guys, that's what Rooted is all about. It is designed to help root you in the faith when we live in a society that wants to erode your trust in Jesus.

As we come to verse 26, Jesus comes back to this concept from last week of seeds. This parable is only recorded in Mark. And the big idea behind it is how God is always working even when we don't always see or understand it, kind of like if you plant a garden—something is happening under the soil before the thing comes up whether you realize it or not. So, Jesus says in verse 26:

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." (NIV)

Now those three little words, you might underline them. All by itself the soil produces grain. So, it's very simple. Jesus said the gospel message is like seed, too good to keep to yourself, you're not going to have a garden if you keep seed in the bag. You've got to sow it out into the soil.



But when the seed goes out, if any of you have ever done gardening, you can't know, initially, if it's working. You put the seed into the soil, cover it up, and you just kind of sit there and look at it waiting, you've got to trust that something is happening underneath the surface whether you can see it or not.

Just because you can't see the gospel working in someone's life doesn't mean it isn't

Guys, can I equate that to the gospel message? Somebody you know and love in your life... Just because you can't see the gospel working in somebody's life doesn't mean that it isn't. You've got to trust that God is doing something underneath.

Now, listen. Often, they might not let you know that there is something happening, but there is something happening. Why? Because you're so good at planting the seeds that you sow? No. Because God is so good and He promised if the seed could be sown, let Me be at work.

And like a seed in the ground, just when you think that there is nothing happening, there is all of this activity going on and all of a sudden, boom, something comes up above the surface.

And in verse 28 it says the seed comes up all by itself. That is a little phrase that comes from a Greek word, which is really fun to say, automato, and if that sounds familiar it's because it is where we get our English word automatic. So, Jesus basically says the seed automatically comes up on its own.

That word automato is only used twice in the New Testament, in our passage today in Mark 4, the other time is in Acts 12. And in Acts 12 Peter is in prison, and the Angel of the Lord comes to release him from prison, tells him to get out of there. He's running out of the city but there is this large, iron gate that is going to keep him from escaping and that's when Luke uses this same word. He says that the iron gate automato(ed), meaning that it automatically opened. Now it didn't just automatically open on its own.

Both times that word is referenced in the New Testament it is in reference to a supernatural act of God. In other words, God opened the gate. And here Jesus is saying God brings about the effects of the seed from the soil. And that is true when it comes to sowing seeds. Guys, never, ever, ever grow weary of continuing to sow the seeds of the gospel into people's lives. And it is not up to you if they respond or how they respond. Jesus says, "That's a supernatural thing that I do."



There have been times in my life when people have come up to me and just said, "Hey, I don't really understand this." They give me an open door to explain the gospel to them. And, guys. There have been times when I eloquently communicated the gospel, I was like, "I nailed it," and they look at me and they go, "Cool," and change the subject. And then there are other times when I fumble my way through it and they end up saying, "Look. There's water. Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?"

Why? Because it's not up to the way that you sow the seed.

We do the sowing; God does the growing

Somebody needs to hear this because you've been investing into somebody you love for a long time and you are not seeing any results. Even if you haven't seen the signs that you are looking for, be patient. Believe that God is working under the surface, the root system is being developed.

Now, here's what you do. You keep the environment conducive, just like the gardener. The gardener can't force the seed up. Well, what can the gardener do? Prepare the soil. Make sure that it's been watered. You do that by living an authentic life. You live out what you say you believe. You show kindness and joy and humility and sacrifice and generosity. You are not trying to win a debate. You are trying to love another person.

And in verse 28 it says:

"All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (NIV)

Really, what Jesus is doing there is He is just describing the process of growth. And if you notice, He talks about it in steps. He says, "Hey, we're all in process making progress." So, when you give your life to Jesus, you are not a full, spiritually mature Christian. You are a spiritual infant who now needs to grow. And you will grow if you continue to submit your life to Jesus. Philippians 1:6 says that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

And that's one of the things that I love about our church. We have people who are in every stage of their spiritual journey in their life. There are some of you who are spiritual giants. You've been following after Jesus for decades and we need your wisdom. You are sage warriors in this church.



Others of us are spiritually middle aged. You know, we've got a little bit of maturity but we still have a long way to go. Others of us are spiritual adolescents and we know just enough to be dangerous.

And then there are others of us who are spiritual infants. You just gave your life to Christ last Tuesday and you are running around making spiritual messes in your spiritual diapers. And we love you. We love you.

That's why church is messy, guys. Spiritual growth is a process. We're gracious with one another. And Jesus said, "Hey, in process one day the planting time will be over. I'll come back to produce a harvest" That is a reference to His return. The theological term for that is eschatology. There are different millennial views like when will Jesus' return, how will He return. Fun to talk about. An interesting thing to study. Not saying you shouldn't study, it's not something you should get into a debate or an argument about. It's a secondhand issue.

Here's what Jesus said... Always be leery of someone who says they know for sure how the end times will unfold, because Jesus, Himself, said He didn't even know for sure when He would return.

I remember in 1989, I was about 12 or 13, there was a book that came out Eighty Nine Reasons Why Jesus Will Return by The End of 1989. Spoiler alert. It didn't happen. Right? Then 1990-Ninety Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1990. Right?

Jesus said He didn't even know. Interesting, subjective study. Why we should not be caught up in it is because we end up getting so caught up in how He will return that we forget about the mission that He gave us to prepare for His return. Guys, we are on the welcoming committee, not the planning committee. He's coming back. There will come an end to the planting season. But we plant and we say, "Maybe today. But you know what? I'm going to continue to sow seeds."

The final parable in our text today is that of a mustard seed. And we learn that even when things start off small, they have a big impact. Look with me at verse 30:

"Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants,'"

Now, Jesus is talking about this mustard seed, which is the smallest of the seeds that they would have handled and planted. And it is sort of hyperbolic language, "What I want you to know is that something that is very, very small can actually spread out and grow pervasively and bring about a tremendous amount of change."



And in an interesting twist, He describes the Kingdom of God like a mustard plant. And I would think of maybe some other things that might sound more, I don't know, influential like a large Cedar tree. In Ezekial, chapter 31 it talks about a Cedar tree. And I think a lot of people would have expected the Kingdom of God to be like a Cedar tree.

But Jesus says, "No, it's more like a mustard shrub. It's more like a mustard plant, which if you know anything about a mustard shrub it's that it grows out and grows pervasively and it can get quite large—10 to 15 feet high or so. And Jesus says, "In the same way the gospel spreads like a mustard plant and it cannot be extinguished."

One of the things that I want you to know starting in the book of Acts going through every stage of history—when the church gets persecuted seems to be when it grows the fastest. It cannot be stamped out. People have tried.

In the 1950s communist China made religion illegal and they took away Bibles, they kicked all of the missionaries out, they tried to close down churches—that was the 1950s. And you would think by the 1960s the church was done in China. Yet today they estimate that there are over one hundred million Christians in China, via the underground church, despite threats and persecutions.

That's one example. In Iran right now, lots of eyes on Iran, there are at least five million Christians in Iran. Some even estimate maybe as high as nine or ten million in that kind of environment.

Guys, the gospel, the Kingdom of God, is like a pervasive mustard plant. You can't stop it. And Jesus says in verse 32 that it grows out:

"with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." (NIV)

And I love this imagery because He says that the Kingdom of God branches out and it provides for society. This demonstrates how the Kingdom of God benefits those outside the nation of Israel. We know from Ezekial 17 and Daniel, chapter 4, that this represents the Gentile nations who find shelter in the Kingdom of God.

And in the same way, Jesus is saying, through this analogy, that when the gospel message spreads it benefits all kinds of people through the ethics that Christianity provides. It transforms lives, families, communities, cities, nations, and continents all over the world.



When Jesus says that birds perched in its shade, that means even non-believers who never come to church, never give their lives to Jesus will benefit from the shade that the gospel provides within society.

I want you to see this. I don't know if you knew this but several other foods that we all eat and that are good for us come from the mustard plant [Broccoli, Cabbage, Brussel Sprouts, Cauliflower]. I don't know if you knew that or not. That doesn't necessarily mean that you like them, although Brussel sprouts with broccoli and maple syrup—that's good, That's good. Alright?

But the mustard plant produces other foods that benefit you and have good nutritional value. Like Christianity everywhere it goes, or at least it should. It should produce goodness and righteousness because it comes from the Creator of the universe.

Guys, this is so important. We do not hear this enough. In fact, at times, I think, within this cultural moment you may kind of feel that you need to hide your life. Maybe you feel a little bit ashamed to be a Christian.

Or, maybe you see people... I've said this before, just because somebody follows Jesus poorly doesn't mean that He isn't worth following. So, maybe you kind of keep your life hidden because you're like, "Well, I don't know if it's really a good thing to be a Christian in this society."

I want you to know that the concept of universal human dignity, meaning that every human has intrinsic worth regardless of social or economic status because they are made in the image of God, guys, that idea was an early Christian development.

Where the gospel takes root, it doesn't just save souls, it changes whole societies. Meaning, if you live in the western world, even if you don't believe in Jesus, you probably want to live in a place where His people do. They provide shade for society.

I want to move through these really quickly. Here are a few examples. If you want to investigate this further, historian Rodney Stark wrote a book called The Rise of Christianity. There are other sources as well. I just want to give you eight things that the early Christians gave society. When Jesus says, "The shade of the mustard plant," this is what He means.

How Has Christianity Benefited Society?

1.Christianity created a culture of radical generosity



Christians created a culture of radical generosity. In the ancient world organized charity did not exist the way that we think of it today. Christians were known for caring for the poor, orphans, and the sick. Historians tell us during the plagues when the pagans would run away, Christians ran in.

Author Arthur Brooks records that Christians give on average 30 percent more to charities within every income class. They are more likely to donate blood, and more often. He even says this. If everyone in America gave blood the same what that conservative Christians do, the blood supply would jump by 45 percent.

They are twice as likely to volunteer to help the poor. It should not be surprising because God loves a cheerful giver. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

1.Christianity launched first hospitals and healthcare

Christians launched the first hospitals and healthcare. The Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. directed for hospitals to be built. The Red Cross, St. Jude, among others were Christian founded organizations.

2.Christianity elevated the status of women

Christians elevated the status of women. Women had a higher status in early Christianity than in Roman society. They were active in the church. They were treated with greater dignity and protection. The first witnesses of the resurrection and the proclaimers of that message were women. In a world that discarded them, Christians dignified them.

3.Christianity cared for vulnerable children

Christians cared for vulnerable children. In the Roman world, unwanted babies, mostly girls, were left to die or put to death. And it was legal to do so. And the early Christians were the ones who stepped in and rescued those babies and cared for them. They formed the first orphanages in the 4th Century.

And caring for vulnerable children is a big part of what we do as a church. Through our foster and adoption ministry. Guys, did you know that care communities, which are communities that come around families who foster and adopt to provide them support, 25 percent of the care communities in our state come out of our church.



Two weeks ago, we all sponsored nearly 1,800 kids in Kenya. From what I understand, the kids who were available in Bondeni—we sponsored all of them. There was a comment on social media where somebody said, “Why don’t you care for kids in your own city the way that you are caring for kids in Kenya?” We do. We can walk and chew bubble gum at the same time.

1.Christianity openly opposed slavery

2.Christianity fueled scientific and medical breakthroughs

Christians fueled scientific and medical breakthroughs. We can talk about how Christianity and science are not opposed, but they teach that God is rational and the universe is ordered and knowable. And that worldview helps give birth to modern science.

3.Christianity built social safety nets

The next one. Christians built social safety nets. Before the government welfare system, the church provided food, distributions, care for widows, and support for the poor and Rome noticed.

4.Christianity transformed moral values

Christians transformed moral values. In the ancient world mercy was often seen as a weakness. Compassion was seen as irrational. Christianity flipped all of that and mercy became a virtue.

History tells us what Jesus first said in Mark, chapter 4, that when the gospel takes root and grows, as it spreads, even people who never accepted Him personally end up sitting in the shade.

Now, I want to say this. To be fair, when we fail or fall into indiscretion as Christians representing Jesus we give those accusations that Christianity is bad for society fuel. So, be on guard. Don’t give the bride of Christ a black eye. However, you should never be embarrassed to be a Christian. And you should recognize what Jesus said in this passage, that we provide shade for society.

Guys, I saw this last week. When the seed of the gospel takes root, it changes things. We were in Kenya partnering with Missions of Hope International and the medical and dental teams that were there.



And when you walk through one of the largest slums in the world in Nairobi, Kenya, and you see that the average income is about three to five dollars a day, and when you see little children who are running barefoot on mud with sewage mixed in, and trash everywhere—that is the very definition of the least of these.

And when we went into this community about 18 years ago, the last thing they needed was handouts. Handouts only hurt. You actually need to go in... What we've done through Missions of Hope International is we've started a school to provide education, a church to lead them to Jesus, healthcare to take care of their physical bodies, skill sets so they can learn a skill to get a job, and then micro-finance loans to loan them money to start a business.

Those five things called CHE: community, health, evangelism—every time I go back I see tangible changes. You've got to go. You go into Bondeni and you see a light in this very, very dark place.

And in fact, we've invested nearly 1.2 million dollars to build a brand-new high school in Kilifi on the coast. We were there last week to do the ribbon cutting and to open it up. Guess who showed up to the ribbon cutting? A Kenyan government official. And he gave a talk and he said, "Listen. What you Christians are doing in this community is changing things. Please keep doing it." I thought, "Where in the world are we? This is amazing."

And all of this started back in 2008 when I got invited on a vision trip and I, for the first time, walked through the Mathare Valley. I'd never seen poverty like that in my life. The smell—I've never smelled anything like that in my life. There was darkness there and hopelessness that I've never seen.

And they said, "What we are looking for is a church to partner with communities within the Mathare Valley. Would you just walk with us? This is the long game. Would you just walk through this community and do the five things that we've said?"

And they said, "The most difficult community is at the very bottom of the valley. It's called Bondeni. And the reason why is because all of the sewage and the trash flows to the bottom of this land where Bondeni is. There is a river that flows through there and it is polluted with sewage. And young men, for their job, would pull water out of that polluted river to make illegal brew.

And I said, "Well, let's go walk through it." And they said, "Well, we can't walk through Bondeni. It's too dangerous." I said, "It's the middle of the day." They said, "Yeah, it's too dangerous."



So, we went up on a hill and we looked down on all of these young men pulling water out of the river and we just started praying over the darkness of that valley. And those young men kept looking up at us. And finally they flipped us the bird. And I thought, "This is where we are coming because we do hard things."

Guys, that was in 2008. We started a school. And I wish I could take all of you there to see the transformation and the change. Now, not only can we walk through they know who we are. And they know our church name. And they know that we love them and that we are partnering with them. We've seen families changed. We've seen kids' lives changed.

We started a church back in 2014 in the valley. It was just a small, little fledgling church with portable set up and tear down. And I met the pastor of that church. His name is Pastor Steven. This is a picture of when I first met Pastor Steven. That's me on the left, if you didn't know. And don't judge. Alright? He was interpreting for me and it's the first time I'd ever preached in a small, little fledgling church that we got started in Bondeni.

I was in this same church last Sunday. I hadn't been able to be there in like 13 years. And this is Pastor Steven preaching last Sunday. He's the one on the right. I am not the one on the left. Alright? And that church is thriving.

Pastor Steven taught an expositional sermon through Ephesians. It was a beautiful thing. And he is telling this church, which is so full of life (if any of you follow me on social, I posted a video of the worship service—so full of life)... And they are growing. He bought out the plots on both sides and they doubled the size of the church.

And in his message he said to his church that without our brothers and sisters in Christ at Traders Point none of this would be possible. They are our partners. They love us. You should have seen the look on his face.

But then Pastor Steven said this, "Without Traders Point I would likely be dead." I had never heard him say that. And I was like, "Man, what are you talking about?" And he went on to say that he grew up, as a boy, in that village in the darkness of the dark in the slums of Nairobi,

And he said that as a young man he was one of the ones who had resorted to making illegal brew from the polluted river. And I thought, "You've got to be kidding me." Now, I don't know if he was the one who flipped us off, but he was in that position.



Guys, can I just say this? Man, the seed of the gospel changes things. You want to know what I think is one of the biggest weeds in the western world that chokes out the seed of the gospel? Cynicism. It's everywhere. And maybe you felt it creep up in you as I went down through the list. You were like, "I'm going to fact check every single one of them. I don't know about that." You are just cynical of people's motives. And it chokes out the seed of the gospel.

Guys, if it can bring hope there, there is no reason why it can't bring hope here. It can change your life. It can change your marriage. It can change your family. It can change this city. It can change this nation. The question is: Do you have enough faith to let God do what only He can? Or, are you allowing your cynicism or bitterness or lack of faith to choke out the seed of the gospel?

"God, I don't understand what You are doing?" He's like, "Great. Now you are finally in a place where you can let Me into your life and do what only I can."

Here's the takeaway for today, the application. Maybe for some of you who have given your life to Jesus, you've pulled the oars up out of the water and you are drifting and you know it. You are not actively pursuing after Jesus.

And you are like, "Well, I'm still good. I'm still good. I believe in Him." Yeah, but you are drifting. You are being deformed away from Him. And you need to put oars in the water. Stop coming to church with a thimble and start coming to church with a thermos and say, "God, I'm here ready to receive what it is You want for me."

Next is this. Maybe for the first time you are ready to allow the seed of the gospel to get planted in the soil of your heart. And there is still a lot that you may not know. You don't need to know much other than you are a sinner and God is good and He gave the life of His only Son to save you by grace. You just need to receive.

The only thing that you bring to the equation is your sin. And He says, "Give it to me and I'll clothe you with My righteousness." If you are ready for that let me lead you in this prayer.

Father God, I thank You that You are a good God. I thank You that You don't give up even when we are so hard-hearted and cynical.

God, I pray right now that some who are listening to my voice are going to receive You today, that they are going to open up the soil of their heart to receive the seed of the gospel message. And I pray that You would save their souls.



Right now I'm just going to pray. I just want you to follow after my prayer. God, I confess my sin. I know that You are God and I'm going to check my cynicism at the door because it's not working. It's not getting me anywhere. I choose to trust in You. And so, I confess my sin. I confess that You are the Lord and Savior of my life. And would You receive me just as I am?

I give You my sin; would You please exchange it for Your righteousness. Would You give me faith to move. Would You give me eyes to see. Would You help me walk out of darkness and into Your light. I will follow You the best that I can for the rest of my days. Would You please produce a harvest of righteousness out of this small faith that I bring You today. I ask this in Jesus' name. And everyone said: Amen and Amen.

