

Read also Genesis 12:1-5, 46:1-5, Exodus 1:1-7. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org.

Consider the meaning of these words:

Promise: an express assurance (distinctly stated) on which expectation is to be based.

Faithfulness: steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant. True to one's word, promises, vows.

God made a promise to Abraham. "Leave your native country and your relatives and I will make you into a great nation." Abraham left. He took God up on God's promise. He and his wife were old. They were infertile. Nevertheless, they took God up; expected it to happen. They believed God's vow. It was all about promise.

Time passed. And God was faithful. They indeed bore a son. Then Isaac had Jacob, who had twelve sons. Promise: *an express assurance on which expectation is based.* Faithfulness: *steady in allegiance, true to one's promise.* God sent them to Egypt with the same promise that God would make this family into a great nation. So the next generation went to Egypt with the expectation. There were 70 of them.

In Africa they indeed multiplied, becoming powerful and they filled Egypt. God was faithful, steady in allegiance and affection for these people. What is God like? He is a promise keeper; God is faithful – true to His word.

Eventually these people were brought out of Egypt to the land God had given them, which was part of the promise.

Israel went from the insignificant – a man and his wife, to this massive number of people. Minute beginnings – to millions.

This promise of God's to build a nation for Himself undergirds all the Bible, from Genesis, where the promise is made, to the last book, Revelation.

Mark talks about this kingdom God is building.

Now the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. It is not a political kingdom, though we often wish it were. It is not a system of government that humans have devised, though we would like it to be. In fact, there's nothing like it here on earth, so it takes metaphors and parables to describe it to us so we can understand God's kingdom.

The parables we've studied, the soils, the lamp, and today two more, paint a picture of the kingdom of God to help us figure out how it is built, how to become a part of it, the surety of its coming and the blessing the kingdom brings to all people. Mark tells us, "Jesus presented his message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity" (Mk 4:33).

The parables are metaphors to help us see what we are in for as Christians who belong to the kingdom. Do you know what you are in for? Are you assured of God's promise for you? Anticipate that God has promised and God is faithful.

So let's hear the Word of the Lord: READ Mark 4:26-29

Did you see any similarities to the stories in the Old Testament?

Abraham and Sarah are living your average life. He hears the voice of God one night – and becomes a believer. They follow God and believe God's promise but – the promise is impossible.

Have you ever had something in your life that is impossible? Perhaps you even struggle to believe there is a God who can help you.

Day and night came and went. They lived with their impossible problem when one day God overcomes the problem and a son is born. God keeps His promises! They don't know how. In God's time it happens! God is faithful. This is exciting!

The kingdom is not driven by us or our will, nor does it depend on our power. In fact, the self is displaced and someone else is at the center of things whom we cannot really define or control. We simply wait in faith and follow as it unfolds.

In the course of time, God works. The utterly simple, the insignificant tiny seed of faith becomes a full, majestic nation. This is good news for us!

A woman begins with a pile of scraps. Maybe some of them are from an old discarded dress; cast offs. The woman works; little by little day after day and in the course of time those scraps have become a beautiful quilt with an intentional pattern. That's how God works.

God is at work every day. You don't always see it in your life. Sometimes you feel like a disassembled pile of scraps; insignificant; small, but God is making something significant of you, fulfilling a promise in you as you wait in faith, moving forward as you follow Him, confident of the harvest.

Paul explained it like this. He said,

“Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News . . . I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field” (1 Corinthians 3:5-15).

In your life God has made a promise and you are moving toward it. We don't always see something great as it is developing. We must trust that God keeps His promises and move into this adventure with Jesus, knowing that a harvest will come.

Do you think about where you are headed as a Christian? Do you think about the harvest? Or do you see it as so far off it's non-existent on your radar?

Peter said, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief" (2 Peter 3:9-10).

Jesus said, READ Mark 4:30-34

Remember about parables? You have to draw near to Jesus and ask about them. You have to persist to understand spiritual things.

Paul said this:

"When I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world, as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger" (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

The Corinthians weren't ready but we want to be in that inner circle, ready for the harvest. That is the end point – when God's kingdom is fully in effect.

The end point is full of magnificence. C. S. Lewis said, it is unabashed blessing.

Jesus said, "It's like the greatest of plants that all the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." Here's how Ezekiel explained it:

"The birds nested in its branches, and in its shade all the wild animals gave birth. All the great nations of the world lived in its shadow. It was strong and beautiful, with wide-spreading branches, for its roots went deep into abundant water" (Ezekiel 31:6-7).

Does it sound like a good thing? Do you believe God will keep His promise? That is God's way of growing a healthy family. People have experienced God's faithfulness throughout the Bible. Jesus is supremely confident in it.

A German pastor named Rev. Thieliicke said it like this:

"One day, perhaps, when we look back from God's throne on the last day we shall say with amazement and surprise,

- ~ *If I had ever dreamed when I stood at the graves of my loved ones and everything seemed to be ended;*
- ~ *if I had ever dreamed when I saw the specter of atomic war creeping upon us;*
- ~ *if I had ever dreamed when I faced the meaningless fate of an endless imprisonment or a malignant disease;*
- ~ *if I had ever dreamed that God was only carrying out his design and plan through all these woes, that in the midst of my cares and troubles and despair his harvest was ripening, that everything was pressing on toward his last kingly day –*

If I had known this I would have been more calm and confident; I would have been more cheerful and far more tranquil and composed”¹

So as we consider all who have gone before us in this congregation – whether babies or grandfathers – they are experiencing this hope.

We do not need to be anxious; in fact, be quite the opposite! Sleep and rise in humble confidence that God has invaded this needy world – not with a powerful, visible campaign but with a seed, and it will grow into a marvelous, bountiful, plentiful abundant harvest that blesses all of us from every nation who believe.

AMEN

¹H. Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*, trans. J. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1959), 88.