

WAIT AND SEE

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Mark 4: 26-34

I know this isn't the season for fireworks but, where do fireworks come from? How did this custom of shooting off fireworks begin?

Fireworks were invented in China. Very early in history, during the first thousand years after Christ, Chinese scientists discovered gunpowder. And from this discovery came the concept of fireworks. The ancient Chinese people were very superstitious and believed that fire could disperse evil spirits.

Sparks were a good omen, they thought, a good indication of the future. Loud sounds, they believed, would frighten away ghosts. And they thought smoke was good for your health. And so, in ancient China, fireworks were the perfect thing. All the fire and noise would chase away the spirits and ghosts, and the sparks and smoke would make you healthy.

Chinese kings were given fireworks as a form of tribute. Today, Chinese people set off fireworks to express their happiness and to invite good luck into their lives. Today, we use fireworks as a form of entertainment, and often as a way of celebrating some sort of event or holiday, like Guy Fawkes or New Year.

Today in the Word of God, the prophet Ezekiel talks about something similar to fireworks, and here is the comparison. With fireworks, it's always amazing to me that one of those little rockets could give off so much light and so much noise. One little rocket – it doesn't seem like much as it sits in the box – there doesn't seem to be anything to it. But wait and see - when it's set off, it lights up the night sky and gives off a boom that you can hear a good distance away.

In our reading today, the prophet Ezekiel talks about something that seems small, seems insignificant. But wait and see - it becomes something much greater than you would ever expect.

What Ezekiel is talking about is the Kingdom of God. He compares the Kingdom of God to a tiny little stalk.

God plants that stalk, and it doesn't look like much as it sits on top of a high mountain. But you must wait and see – eventually it becomes the greatest, most amazing tree in all the world. Today God teaches us about his kingdom, and how he works. God does things that seem small in our eyes, to begin with. But the things that God does, turn out to be the greatest, most amazing things we could ever imagine.

Today, as we focus on this picture that the Old Testament prophet paints for us today, we learn two lessons about God's kingdom. Lesson number one – we will learn why we are

sometimes unimpressed by God and his work. And lesson number two, we will learn why we can be impressed by God and his work.

Look at verse 22, where God says, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it. I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel, I will plant it.” God describes himself as a gardener planting a tree. He plants a small shoot onto a high mountain. God finishes his work, brushes off his hands, and walks away. It doesn’t look like much – just a small green stalk sitting by itself on top of a high mountain. Not very impressive.

What God is talking about here is Christ, and the Christian church.

When Jesus was born, he didn’t look like much - a tiny baby born to a poor Middle Eastern family.

And as Jesus carried out his ministry, he didn’t look like much. Sometimes he would perform a miracle, but most of the time he talked about things that people didn’t care about – he talked about repentance and faith and the life to come. And when Jesus died on the cross, he didn’t look like much – very unimpressive, as he died between two common criminals on a Friday afternoon. His early followers didn’t look like much either – a group of uneducated fishermen who didn’t fit in with the rest of society. One needs to wait and see.

Perhaps today, you and I are tempted to look at Christ, to look at God’s church, and think to ourselves, “I am not impressed. This doesn’t look like much to me.”

We look at our world today, and often it’s hard to see the greatness of Christ. We look at the state of Christianity in our world today, with all of its problems, and it’s hard to see the greatness of Christ. We look at our own lives – all of our own problems, and it’s hard to see the greatness of Christ. You need to wait and see.

The secret to seeing God’s greatness is focusing on things you cannot see and focusing on the future. The prophet Ezekiel told Israel to focus on the future – something they could not see – and there they found God’s greatness. Verse 23:

“On the mountain heights of Israel, I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar.” God is talking about Christ, and his kingdom here. Someday, it will grow, God says.

“Birds of every kind will nest in it.” God is talking about people here. People of every kind will become a part of God’s kingdom. People from all over the world, every nation, every background, every kind of personality and every social status. Look to the future, Ezekiel told the people of Israel, and you will see the greatness of God’s kingdom.

The last part of verse 23: “They will find shelter in the shade of its branches.” If you were a bird, this would be a driving force in your life – to find shelter. This is why birds like trees so much. There’s safety there. There’s shade there. There’s shelter there. You can find relief

from the hot sun and the driving rainstorms and the cold winds, in the branches of those trees.

In the same way, God says, people will come and find spiritual shelter in Christ. Shelter from fear. Shelter from uncertainty. Shelter from despair.

A man and his wife were blessed with twin daughters, and immediately after having twin daughters, his wife was stricken with cancer. During that time, all kinds of doubts and questions and fears began to rain down on him. Where did that man find shelter when his world was crashing down around him?

He was a Christian, and so he focused on something he could not see - the promises of God.

That was his shelter. He didn't try to solve his problems himself. He looked to God, and God, through his Word, sheltered him from despair and anger and fear. God was his shelter.

When fireworks are lit off at night, it doesn't look like much to begin with – a small white dot quietly sailing up into the night sky. But then it reaches its peak, and it explodes with a loud bang, and the dark sky is filled with a beautiful colour and design, all from one small firework.

When you first meet Jesus, He doesn't look like much. When you first have contact with his Word, it may not seem like much to you.

But wait and see – after dying, he rises from the dead. The Holy Spirit works on your heart, and that's when the fireworks begin. You begin to believe that this man Jesus is God. You realize that his death wasn't just a sad injustice, it was all part of a master plan designed to take away your sins.

And someday, when you look into the sky, you will see something greater than the greatest of all fireworks displays. You will see Christ coming again in all his glory, with all the saints and angels behind him, coming to take you to be with him forever.

This portion of God's Word teaches us that if you want to be impressed by God, then wait, and see. Do not focus on all life's troubles that you see and experience here and now.

Focus, instead, on God's Word, and let the Holy Spirit show you what Christ has done for you – look at what Christ has promised to you – and look at what Christ has waiting for you. Things may seem small now, but wait, God says, and you will see.

God surrounded you with trees, not just to give you shade, but to remind you of his kingdom. Every tree starts out as a tiny shoot but grows into the great tree that you see out your window. And so, it is with God's kingdom. It doesn't seem like much now, but wait and see, God says, wait and see. The fireworks are coming. Amen.