

SERMON | JESUS AND HIS PARABLES

SERIES | BOOK OF MARK

STUDY GUIDE | DAVID STOCKTON | SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024

SERMON SUMMARY

Mark 4:1 – Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. Jesus was a teacher. The word again emphasizes Jesus as a teacher. So far in Mark, Jesus has taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, His hometown (Mark 1:21). Jesus taught beside the lake (Mark 2:13). There were also 3 times the Pharisees and teachers of the law questioned Jesus and He answered them with parable type explanations (Mark 3:23). One other interesting thing is Mark is always telling us the setting. In the synagogue, by the lake, and on the hillside.

Mark 4:2 – He taught them many things by parables. Parables are a big deal. He taught them many things in parables (4:2). When Jesus' disciples asked Him about all the parables, He told them He speaks to those on the outside in parables, so they may see, but not perceive, and hear, but not understand (4:10-12). This is a reference back to Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 6:9-10). God told Isaiah he was supposed to preach to Israel, but he needed to know they would mostly reject what he had to say. He wanted Isaiah to know he was just supposed to sow the seed. Then, what grows, grows. What doesn't grow, doesn't grow. Then Jesus tells them the meaning of the parable. To those who want to know Jesus, the parable will be rich, but to those who don't want to know Jesus, the parable will produce nothing. So, this leads us to a first answer to why Jesus taught in parables.

1. To Reveal and Conceal, but mostly Conceal. Why would Jesus conceal? Well, the parables explain that it is not Jesus who is concealing. It's the birds, the stones, and the weeds, that do the work of robbing a person of receiving and understating or perceiving and hearing. Jesus is faithfully sowing. He is spreading the good news of God's favor, kingdom, and power, but the condition of the hearts determines whether someone can receive it or not.

The *birds* are the devil and his deceptive ideas. You are not good enough. You blew it. No one could love you, especially not a holy God. Christians are idiots. Faith is just a crutch. the Bible is oppressive and archaic. God will ruin all your fun and take away your friends and people you love.

The *stones* are the flesh and our disordered desires. Brother Hugh told me his relationship with Jesus has been like emptying a wheelbarrow. He said he kept walking the path Jesus laid out for him and every year Jesus asked him to take another thing out of his wheelbarrow. First it was gambling. Next was smoking. Next was the way he treated women. And on and on. Year after year Jesus would focus on a new thing in his wheelbarrow that he needed to remove. Maybe this year, hurry is what Jesus wants you to remove. Maybe it's porn. Maybe it's gambling or smoking. Maybe it's pride, greed, or fear. The stones will keep growth, depth, maturing, and health from happening, and leave you vulnerable to failure of heart and falling away.

The *weeds* are the world and its normalizing of sin. In one of the Super Bowl commercials a lady calls a credit card company thinking she will be talking to a robot. When a human answers, she says, "Wow you AI robots sound so much like real people." The real person says, "I am a real person." The lady calling says, "Well, how would I know if you were real or AI?" The real person answers, "Well how would you prove to me you were not AI?" The caller is then perplexed and says, "I don't know." The real credit card person then says, "Well do you feel like a robot?" Something subtle and unintentional happened. By asking the woman if she felt like a robot, the commercial was promoting how one feels as the primary way someone knows what they are. Therefore, what one feels is the primary way to arrive at truth, belonging, or identity. If we were to rely on feelings, there would be no good fruit in our lives. No one ever feels like sacrificing. No one ever feels like humbling themselves.

The point here is that the world is normalizing all kinds of things which will choke out our faith. In Phoenix there is gravity pulling us into busyness, chasing the superficial, and artificial. And many find themselves waking up one year, five years, ten years, down the road, realizing they've only existed and haven't been living. The world will choke out what is good, beautiful, and everlasting. Jesus is the only way to that. Jesus is the only way, truth, and life. Jesus over feelings.

Mark 4:30 – What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? Jesus' main message through His entire life was that the kingdom of God was here and now, and its gates are open for all who would come. He wanted so badly for everyone to understand God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, He knew the glory, beauty, and rightness of the kingdom of heaven is too much for our capacity of understanding. Jesus knew our language and words could not describe or contain the wonder and majesty of the kingdom of God. So, He relied on parables to point at it. This brings us to our second reason why Jesus spoke in parables.

2. Heaven's glory cannot be contained in earthly words. This gives us so much hope and excitement for heaven. Some of the concealing that was happening in the parables was not an intentional concealing, but an unavoidable concealing. In the book of Matthew you hear the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." You can take this parable and learn about the kingdom of heaven, but there is no story or words we have to fully describe it. And the truth is even if we had the words, our current capacity for understanding could not get us in the ballpark.

Mark 4:34 – He did not say anything to them without using a parable. Mark wanted us to know that parables were a major part of Jesus' ministry. Teaching was a major part of Jesus' ministry. Communicating what the kingdom of God is like, was a major part of Jesus' ministry. So, it is safe to say for us who are wanting to follow Jesus, by being like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did, we need to teach people about the kingdom of God. It is our responsibility to help other people know that God's kingdom is real, and here and now. That God's kingdom is righteousness, joy, and peace for those who believe. But God's kingdom is judgment, darkness, and hell to those who do not believe. Jesus' last words to His disciples were all about going into the world and teaching them all they know about Jesus and His kingdom. And then baptizing those who receive and not worrying about those who do not. It is our job to sow the good news of Jesus' kingdom and love. To some hearts it will be revealing, and for others, it will be concealing and hardening. For those with kids or loved ones who are hardened to Jesus, keep sharing His love, joy, and righteousness with them, but also let the Lord bring the increase. All the goodness, truth, and beauty we have experienced in this life is just the tip of the iceberg. It is a faint shadow of glory, which will be revealed to those who stay faithful to the One, who has always been faithful to us.

SCRIPTURE READING

READ THIS WEEK'S BIBLE PASSAGE: Mark 4:1-34 (NIV)

The Parable of the Sower

4 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. **2 He taught them many things by parables,** and in his teaching said: **3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." 9 Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." 10 When he was alone, **the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables 12** so that,**

“they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”

¹³ Then Jesus said to them, **“Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”** ¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

A Lamp on a Stand

²¹ He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand?” ²² For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

²⁴ “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. ²⁵ Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

The Parable of the Growing Seed

²⁶ He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ Again he said, **“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?”** ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

³³ **With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.**

³⁴ **He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.**

BIBLE PASSAGE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you in these passages? Did the Lord highlight anything to you? What do these passages teach you about the character of God? What do these passages teach you about mankind? What do these passages teach you about how mankind should respond to God? What do these passages teach you about how to respond to others?

Read these passages again (use a different translation if helpful). How did these passages help to convict, correct, or encourage you?

GROUP DISCUSSION

DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS WITH YOUR GROUP

1. What is a parable of Jesus that has meant a lot to you?

Parables in the Book of Mark:

The Parable of the Cloth and Wineskins (Mark 2:21-22)

The Parable of the Strong Man (Mark 3:23-27)

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-8)

The Parable of the Lamp (Mark 4:21-25)

The Parable of the Seed that Grows Itself (Mark 4:26-29)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32)

The Parable of Clean and Unclean (Mark 7:14-23)

The Parable of Salt (Mark 9:49-50)

The Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-9)

The Parable of the Fig Tree (Mark 13:28-31)

2. How comfortable are you with sharing about the Kingdom of God with others?
3. Do you have a story, parable, or other method to help you share the Kingdom of God with others?
4. What birds, stones, or weeds in your life is the Lord asking you to trade for what He has for you?
5. How do we overcome our feelings? What are some of the verses you cling to that bring you back to the truth of God's Word?

PRAYER

Take some time for prayer requests and pray over one another before wrapping up.

