

4. Jesus Begins Teaching Many Things by Parables

So far, Mark has focused on the miracles of Jesus. Of special notice have been his healing power and his power to cast out demons, both of which disturbed the leaders of the Jews who are all ready plotting to kill him. Jesus had insisted that he had come to teach in Mark 1:38, saying: "38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." In Mark 3, he had introduced his approach to teaching, which used parables to convey spiritual truths. In Mark 3:23-25, Mark recorded:

23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

A parable is a story from ordinary life that presents a profound, spiritual truth. The components of a parable are always true to life in every respect, unlike a fable, which may have talking animals and other features, which are not true to life. There is nothing in all of secular history to match Jesus teaching and his parables; of course, he was empowered with the Holy Spirit without measure and spoke the very words of God: "34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit." John 3:34-35

Mark opens with the Lord teaching many things by parables.

Introduction

Mark 4:1-2

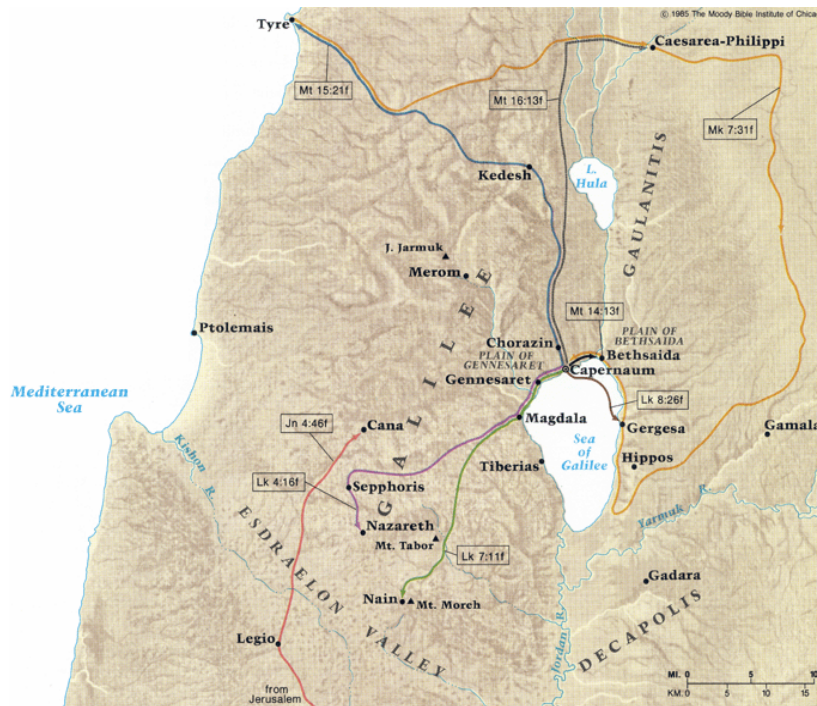
4 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:

With Capernaum so near the Sea of Galilee, it is easy to imagine that going to the sea, standing in a boat, and preaching to the multitudes on shore found the Lord with a perfect place to preach. What he taught them he did so using parables. This chapter continues with one of the most famous parables—the parable of the sower.

The Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:3-8

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, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

The parable of the sower speaks clearly for itself even though the listeners had difficult understanding them. This difficulty was, perhaps, because the spiritual concept of the kingdom of God was so foreign to them. In Mark 4:13-20, the Lord gives his apostles and those accompanying him the clear meaning of the parable.

Why the Lord Used Parables

Mark 4:9-12

9 Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him 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!"*

Mathew account of this set of parables adds to the importance of hearing the Lord. Matt 13:16-17 reads:

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

The Lord gave the secret of the kingdom to the apostles and those near him. For those outside this group, he gave parables, and they would become the fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10. Their failure to perceive and understand would keep them from turning and being forgiven. Of course, the corollary to this principle is that those who perceive what they see and understand what they hear, may turn, and be forgiven.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

Mark 4:13-20

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 – thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

The teacher may teach, but it is the student who must learn. What mother or father when teaching a child has not chided them: "Don't you understand?" After his rhetorical question, Jesus proceeds to explain the parable of the sower:

- Satan appears immediately to take the word from some people.
- Some receive the word with joy, and then last just a little while until when

- Others hear the word but because of worries of this life, the deceitfulness of sin, or the desires for other things, they become unfruitful.
- Others hear the word, accept the word, and produce a crop.

Embedded in this parable is the principle of the instrumentality of God's word. God acts upon the hearts of people through his word. The apostles carried this principle into their own writings. Paul wrote in Rom 10:14:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Again in Rom 1:16: "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." James and Peter taught that the new birth was by the word of God. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:22: "23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." James agreed with this writing in James 1:18: "18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

Bringing the Light into the Open

Mark 4:21-23

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 him hear."

Verse 21 is reminiscent of Matt 5:14-16:

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Verse 22 presents a kingdom of heaven open, hiding nothing. People of today often want to suppose that there are great, unrevealed mysteries yet to come. While it is presumptuous to think that we know what God intends, it is not presumptuous to take the clear teaching of the apostles and prophets. Paul declared that Eph 3:4-5:

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

The church, of which we are members, has the *manifold wisdom of God*, according to Eph 3:10-11:

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

One may only conclude that what ever was hidden, whatever was concealed, God has revealed in Christ. Anything beyond what God revealed is bogus. There are neither later day revelations or interpretations.

Using What We Have

Mark 4:24-15

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 he has will be taken from him."

This teaching echoes the principles of the parable of the talents found in Matt 25:14-30. This teaching and the parable of the talent have had such profound affect on our culture that the original meaning of talent as *a measurement of weight* has given way to the metaphoric meaning of talent as *ability*:

Middle English, from Old English *talente*, from Latin *talenta*, plural of *talentum* unit of weight or money, from Greek *talanton* pan of a scale, weight; akin to Greek *tlēnai* to bear; in senses 2-5, from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. *Webster's Online Dictionary*.

What the Kingdom of God Is Like

Mark begins here with a set of parables from Jesus that explain the kingdom of heaven is by comparison to everyday matters with which his listeners are very familiar.

Mark 4:26-27

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."

This parable of growing seed illustrates that seed planted is always working, first spouting, then stalk, then head, and then full kernel. When the grain is ripe, the harvest comes. This teaching runs like a fine thread throughout the New Testament. Paul eloquently used the analogy in 1 Cor 3:6-9:

6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

The Revelation explains the harvest with vivid imagery in Rev 14:15-16:

15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

However, in Matt 9:37-38, the Lord expressed the need for more harvesters:

37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Mark 4:30-32

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 seed you plant in the ground. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the

birds of the air can perch in its shade."

Regardless of what we think about the size of the church, the kingdom of heaven, it is enormous. Rev 7:9 describes the extent of the great kingdom:

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Mark 4:33-34

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.

The Lord explained everything to the disciple while he was with them. In Luke 24:25-27, Luke records a scene where the Lord is explaining the scriptures concerning himself:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

When the Lord left, he sent the Holy Spirit, whose work it was to inspire these men. The Lord taught them this in John 14:25-26:

25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jesus' Power over Nature

Mark 4:35-41`

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Previously, Mark has shown the Lord using his power over sin, disease, and demons. Now he shows that the Lord has power over nature. In Mark 6:47-50

47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

Each time the Lord conquered nature, the disciples became terrified.