

Mark 4:1-34

- Crowds continue to gather. Maybe they come more for miracles and help, but Jesus is now focused on teaching. Many will hear, but only some will not understand.
 - Teaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God is Jesus' priority in his ministry. This has already been affirmed several times in Mark:
 - 1:38 – “*And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”*”
 - 1:22 – “*And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*”
 - 1:27 – “*And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”*”
 - 2:2 – “*And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.*”
 - 2:13 – “*He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.*”
- Jesus' parables reveal a man's heart and his desire to learn, perceive and understand the Lord. The parables DO NOT automatically teach and communicate. The parables of Jesus:
 - Help continue the process of revelation and lay the foundation for the next level of understanding (this person is taught by the Spirit of God)
 - Confuse, conceal and misdirect the Truth which leads to the undoing and deconstruction of any understanding originally possessed by the individual (this person does not have the Spirit of God, but the spirit of the world)
- This is the second longest section of Jesus teaching in Mark. (Mark 13, the Olivet Discourse concerning eschatology, is longer)
- The parable of the sower is followed by three more parables that help explain and build on this parable:
 - The parable of the lamp
 - The parable of the secretly growing seed
 - The parable of the mustard seed

Mark 4:1 – **“Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.**

1. “Again” – *palin* – “a second time”
 - a. This may be referring to 3:5-6 and 3:7-9 which was the first time when Jesus left and turned away from who rejected him and planned to destroy him:
 - i. In 3:5-6 –
“*he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*”
 - ii. Then in 3:6-7 –
“*Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from*

Galilee and Judea...And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him"

- b. Now, "again" he turns away from those close to him and his family that did not understand him in 3:21, 31-34. They had come to the house in Capernaum -
"And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."
 - i. 3:31-34 is immediately followed by 4:1, *"Again he began to teach beside the sea..."*
2. Jesus is using the boat
 - a. To keep a distance from the people who were crowding him for miracles and not letting him speak to the people
 - b. Provide him a speaking platform with good acoustics for sound
3. The people were kept there by the sea because of Jesus' presence and Jesus could speak to them and teach them
4. The great crowds were not there to learn and Jesus knew their motives and heart as in John 2:23-25:
"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."
5. "very large" referring to the crowds is the Greek superlative *pleistos* which could mean this very large crowd was not just large, but the largest crowd yet.

Mark 4:2-8 – **"And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:**

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.

4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.

5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

1. The parable of the sower is about hearing and responding.
2. Parables will both:
 - a. reveal to those open to and seeking the kingdom of God
 - b. conceal from those with hard hearts and seeking the kingdom of the world
3. Interpreting parables:
 - a. Improper method is to treat parables as if they were allegories. Every part of an allegory is interpreted to have a meaning. Augustine did this with the parable of the good Samaritan which made the wounded man Adam, the robber was Satan, those that passed by without helping were the Law of Moses, the Samaritan was Jesus, the inn represents the church, etc., etc.
 - b. Proper method is to focus on the main point of the parable while allowing some allegorical elements make more than one point.

- i. The parables of Jesus must remain in the context of Jesus' ministry that was focused on proclaiming the kingdom of God. Do not remove the parable from the context and how the people would have heard it. Jesus was not telling us a parable for application to a modern situation in a modern setting. Modern application yes. Modern interpretation, no.
 - ii. Any allegorical element should also have direct context application, and not some distant church age reference.
 - iii. We must have correct exegesis of the parable before we can make correct application. Twisted exegetical interpretation will provide false application.
- 4. Soils – external conditions effect the seed in the parable
 - a. **Path** – hard-packed soil leaving seed exposed to be eaten
 - b. **Rocky** ground – thin layer of soil mixed with rocks or laying on bedrock. The seed would germinate quickly, but the rock prevented it from growing and establishing the necessary root system for support. Moisture could not be sustained and the sun (which is also necessary) scorched the plant
 - c. **Thorns** in soil –
 - i. Thorns are referred to in Scripture as interfering with the good crop, as evidence punishment from God and at times metaphorically as:
 - 1. Gen. 3:18 – *“thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”*
 - 2. Jeremiah 12:13 – *“They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the LORD.”*
 - 3. Isaiah 5:6 – *“I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.”*
 - 4. Jeremiah 4:2-4 – *“if you can swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then the nations will be blessed by Him, and in Him they will glory.” For this is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your unplowed ground, and do not sow among the thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and remove the foreskins of your hearts, O men of Judah and people of Jerusalem. Otherwise, My wrath will break out like fire and burn with no one to extinguish it, because of your evil deeds.”*
 - ii. The seed in the thorns was **not eaten**, it was **not scorched** and it **did sprout** and **did grow!**...but, the weeds choked it out before it could produce fruit.
 - 1. Three levels of failure:
 - a. Hard soil – seed eaten
 - b. Rocky soil – plant scorched
 - c. Thorny soil – plant choked before fruit
 - d. **Good soil** –
 - i. Allows the seed to:
 - 1. Sprout (not be eaten)
 - 2. Grows up (not be scorched)
 - 3. Yields fruit (not choked by thorns, weeds)
 - ii. Three levels of success:

1. 30x
2. 60x
3. 100x

Mark 4:9 – **And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

1. Similar to:

- a. Jeremiah 5:20-22 – “Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah: “Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear. Do you not fear Me?” declares the LORD. “Do you not tremble before Me, the One who set the sand as the boundary for the sea, an enduring barrier it cannot cross? The waves surge, but they cannot prevail. They roar but cannot cross it
- b. Ezekiel 12:1-3 – “Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, you are living in a rebellious house. They have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, son of man, pack your bags for exile. In broad daylight, set out from your place and go to another as they watch. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house...”

2. This could mean a couple of things:

- a. Anyone who has ears should be able to hear and respond to Jesus. And, since everyone has ears, everyone should be able to hear and respond.
 - i. This would fit the concept that all in the crowd could hear, could understand and could have responded.
 - ii. It is a call for EVERYONE in the crowd to respond
 - iii. But not everyone would respond
 - iv. The very fact Jesus is saying “He who has ears, let him hear”, would indicate that everyone was welcome to respond.
 1. Revelation 22:17 – *“The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”*
- b. Anyone who has ears to hear (which means not just physical ears, but the spiritual ability to perceive) should be able to understand and respond correctly
 - i. This leaves open the question of how do they get spiritual hearing ears:
 1. They seek and hunger for Truth
 2. God gives them the ability to hear because:
 - a. They are seeking
 - b. They have accepted previous revelation (including general)
 - c. They were simply chosen by God
 - ii. According to the following context these are the people who have received and will continue to grow until they stop hearing.
 - iii. Matthew 13:36, 43 – *“Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.”...Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

Purpose of the Parables

Mark 4:10-12 – “And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,

2532 [e]	2036 [e]	846 [e]	4771 [e]	3588 [e]	3466 [e]	1325 [e]	3588 [e]	932 [e]	3588 [e]	2316 [e]
Kai	elegen	autois	Hym̃n	to	mysterion	dedotai	tēs	basileias	tou	Theou
11 Καὶ	ἔλεγεν	αὐτοῖς	ὑμῖν	τὸ	μυστήριον	δέδοται	τῆς	βασιλείας	τοῦ	Θεοῦ .
And	He was saying	to them	To you	the	mystery	has been given	of the	kingdom	-	of God
Conj	V-IIA-3S	PPro-DM3P	PPro-D2P	Art-NNS	N-NNS	V-RIM/P-3S	Art-GFS	N-GFS	Art-GMS	N-GMS

Emphatic (pointing to 'Hym̃n')

Passive - given by God, not attained (pointing to 'dedotai')

1565 [e]	1181 [e]	3588 [e]	1854 [e]	1722 [e]	3850 [e]	3588 [e]	3956 [e]	1096 [e]
ekeinois	de	tois	exō	en	parabolais	ta	panta	ginetai
ἐκείνοις	δὲ	τοῖς	ἔξω	ἐν	παραβολαῖς	τὰ	πάντα	γίνεται ,
To those	however	who are	outside	in	parables	-	everything	is done
DPro-DMP	Conj	Art-DMP	Adv	Prep	N-DFP	Art-NNP	Adj-NNP	V-PIM/P-3S

1. Two groups are identified here by Jesus:
 - a. “To you” – referring to the 12 and the others with Jesus
 - b. “Those outside” – referring to the crowds
2. Matthew 13:11 and Luke 8:10 the disciples “know” the mystery.
Mark 4:11 the disciple “has been given” the mystery.
 - a. “has been given” is a divine passive given to them by God, and not achieved by their intellect.
3. “Mystery” – *mysterion* – means something formerly secret that God has now revealed to his people. Paul uses this word as does Mark, Matthew and Luke only here.
4. Those outside are those that do not recognize who Jesus really is: religious leaders, family, etc. Because those on the outside do NOT recognize God and God’s will in the man Jesus they:
 - a. Are NOT given
 - b. Do NOT know
 - c. Can NOT see the mystery
5. Mark uses Isaiah’s struggle with unbelieving Israel in 720-680 BC when Isaiah writes in Isaiah 6:9-10.
 - a. Mark could quote the Masoretic Text, the LXX (Septuagint) or the Aramaic Targum when quoting Isaiah. He is closest to the Aramaic which means he is quoting this text of Isaiah or quoting Jesus’ exact words when He quotes Isaiah.

12 so that

“they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

	2443 [e]	991 [e]	991 [e]	2532 [e]	3361 [e]	3708 [e]	2532 [e]	191 [e]	191 [e]	2532 [e]	3361 [e]
	hina	Blepontes	blepōsin	kai	mē	idōsin	Kai	akouontes	akouōsin	kai	mē
12	ἵνα ,	ΒΛΕΠΟΝΤΕΣ ,	βλέπωσιν	καὶ	μὴ	ἴδωσιν ;	Καὶ	ἀκούοντες ,	ἀκούωσιν	καὶ	μὴ
	so that	Seeing	they might see	and	not	perceive	and	hearing	they might hear	and	not
	Conj	V-PPA-NMP	V-PSA-3P	Conj	Adv	V-ASA-3P	Conj	V-PPA-NMP	V-PSA-3P	Conj	Adv

a purpose clause; Jesus is teaching in parables to blind the eyes and deafen the ears of outsiders

4920 [e]	3361 [e]	4219 [e]	1994 [e]	2532 [e]	883 [e]	846 [e]
syniōsin	Mē	pote	epistrepsōsin	Kai	aphethē	autois
συνιῶσιν ;	Μὴ	ποτε	ἐπιστρέψωσιν ,	Καὶ	ἀφεθῆ	αὐτοῖς .
understand	lest	ever	they should turn	and	should be forgiven	them
V-PSA-3P	Adv	Conj	V-ASA-3P	Conj	V-ASP-3S	PPro-DM3P

1. God will use their rejection to accomplish his purpose
 - a. Hardening Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:12; 10:1 and Romans 11:25-32
 - b. Scribes in Mark 3:22-30
2. These words are a judicial pronouncement, and not evangelical in tone.
 - a. Their fate is sealed.
 - b. Their judgment has already been decreed.
3. This is the soil of the path where the seeds were sown and eaten. There is not a chance they will grow.

Mark 4:13-20 – **“And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”**

1. Paraphrased: If you are a believer (positive towards God) you will understand this parable and continue to advance in understanding through other parables. If you do not understand this parable, you are on the outside and will never understand this or any other parable
2. Point:
 - a. A person must be receptive of Jesus, the Word, the plan of God, the work of God to advance.
 - b. If a person rejects God, God’s plan, Jesus, etc. then they are sealing their fate. They will decline further into darkness and confusion.
3. Note the shift from the original parable to the interpretation of the parable:
 - a. The “seed” in the parable which was the “word” or “message” becomes the “hearers” in the interpretation
 - b. The parable is focused on Christ and the message, but the interpretation is revealing discipleship.
 - c. One, the meaning of Jesus. Two, the meaning of discipleship
4. In 4:14-20:
 - a. “word” – logos – is used 8x
 - b. The command to “hear” – akouein – is 4x
 - c. The first three types of hearing in Mark are orist tense communicating in an enextended point of time meaning the action which is something done simply and finally was only on the surface like in one ear and out the other. It was not meditated on. It was not held on to. It wasn’t kept and used to analyze life or apply in life. It was in one ear and out the other. No concentration. No personalization.
 - i. Those Satan stole the word from

- ii. Those with no root who fell away in tough times
- iii. Those whose wealth and worldly desires choked the word
- d. In 4:20 the hearing is in the present tense which indicates a continual, ongoing hearing and relationship with the message. This fourth type of hearing results in what is identified as discipleship in the person:
 - i. Hearing
 - ii. Receiving
 - iii. Bearing Fruit – a harvest produced from the original seed

Interpretation of the Parable

14 The sower sows the word.

15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

1. Jesus explains the parable with focus on the farmer, the seed and the soil. But, the farmer is not the focus. The issue is the seeds production in the different types of soil.
2. This would be a parable about the soil.
3. The seed is the message which is the message of the kingdom
4. The soil is the individual receiving the message.
5. The soil:
 - a. Hard – those who do not receive the message or are unresponsive. Satan takes this Truth away. It must be replaced by an alternative reality or deception.
 - b. Rocky – those who respond favorably to the message but they fall away
 - i. Fall away due to:
 1. Trials – life experiences and challenges. Internal pressure
 2. Persecution – rejection by the world. External pressure
 - ii. They liked the message but did not get past the immediate gratification of the message of the kingdom. They could not wait for it. They did not fully understand it.
 - iii. They fall away which means the desert the faith when it becomes too difficult to do or too hard to understand (John 6:66)
 - c. Thorns
 - i. Cares – stressful concerns and anxiety – the cares of “this life” or “this age”
 1. 2 Corinthians 11:28
 2. 1 Peter 5:7
 - ii. Deceitfulness of riches – an illusion of worldly security
 1. 1 John 2:17
 - iii. Desire for other things – anything that takes away the focus on the kingdom

Lamp Under a Basket

Mark 4:21-25 – **“And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?”**

22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.

23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

24 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

1. God is not going to hide the light
2. Even men put a lamp on a stand. So, God will put this message on a stand.

Parable of the Growing Seed

26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.

29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

1. Focus is on growth

Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?

31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,

32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

1. Contrast the small beginning with the great results

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.

34 He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.