

# **Gospel of Mark**

## **Parables**

### **January 3, 2010**

#### **Mark 4:1-20**

#### **I. Review of First Three Chapters**

Through the first three chapters, we have covered a lot of ground in Jesus' early ministry. We have seen John the Baptist setting the stage for Jesus' entrance. We saw Him being baptized, going into the wilderness to suffer temptations, and calling His disciples/apostles.

We have seen Him as a miracle worker healing the sick and driving out demons. Without recognizing Him as Messiah or God, we see the adoring crowds following Him wherever He goes; while they do not recognize Him for what He is, they recognize Him as something special.

On a darker side, Jesus has been evaluated by the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. They have found Him guilty of blasphemy according to their ungodly legalistic ways and want to kill Him.

Even His own family thinks that He has gone mad! So, how will Jesus react?

#### **II. Parables**

What are parables? In the Septuagint, the underlying Greek word indicates that a comparison is being made, usually (but not always) emphasizing one major point. In a sense, Chapter 4 not only provides some parables or comparisons, but it also demonstrates their purpose as used by Jesus. He quotes from Isaiah 6:9 in verse 9 below indicating that people will not always understand the message from God. In Isaiah, we know that a remnant will heed the message (see Isaiah 7-9), but that most will not get it.

We have seen the mixed reaction to Jesus' message. Basically, Jesus appears to want to continue teaching His disciples but is slowing up the information going to the public at large (verse 33). He would take His disciples aside (verse 34) and then explain to them as much they could understand.

The parable of the four soils is the example parable...as well as one with a great message.

In interpreting parables, keep the interpretation simple. In the one that we will look at today, Jesus gives us an interpretation, but in most, the interpretation is not given. In the parable of the four soils, we see that almost every ingredient has a meaning; we know that this is so because Jesus tells us how to interpret it. In others no interpretation is given; so as we make our interpretations more complex, we allow for greater and greater deviation from what we know is absolutely true. The more complex we make the interpretation, the less we are able to be sure that it is correct. If we are not sure that it is correct, what good is the interpretation?

Even in today's parables, we see people wanting to go beyond the clear and simple meaning of the parable. Jesus is telling us what we should do to be a good follower of His. He gives three examples with varying degrees of deviation concerning the optimal growth of a believer, and one that appears to be the correct way. People have a tendency to want to argue over who is saved and who is not. It is not clear that this is Jesus' message for the passage. So, such arguments while interesting are also rather meaningless.

### III. Jesus' Introduction to the Parables: Mark 4:1-8

#### Mark 4:1-8

**4:1** 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, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

#### NIV

The counterparts for the parable of soils are Matthew 13:1-23 and Luke 8:4-18.

Verse 1: The lake is the Sea of Galilee. As before, He teaches in a boat so that the crowd will not encroach on Him.

Verse 2: As verse 33 also points out, only a few of Jesus' parables are actually recorded in the gospels.

Verse 3: Jesus begins the parable of the four soils. Usually in the parables, Jesus uses familiar subjects.

Verse 4: In the first century, a farmer would have hand scattered the seed. He would have wanted to plant as close to the road as possible to make the most use of his land. So, some going on the path or in the other unacceptable places was understandable.

Verse 4: As we will see, the birds represent Satan who takes these people/seeds away.

Verse 5: This soil probably had limestone or some other rock beneath the surface that holds the moisture below it from getting to the plant, making the plant's root system be shallow. When the sun comes, it dries the shallow layers of the soil destroying the plant that germinated from the seed.

Verse 7: Jesus had looked them in the eye and told them what He thought of their The usual interpretation is to assume that the ground had a lot of thorn seeds in that germinated and grew as the good seed did and choked the desired plants

Verse 8: This is the only one that strives and grows as desirable. In my own experiences as a boy farmer, my conclusion would be:

- Lots of fruit from the seed that fell on good soil
- Possibility of some fruit that grew on rocky or thorny soils. Almost all of these plants will not survive if the conditions are extreme enough.
- No fruit from what the birds eat (although I have seen seed eaten by birds survive the birds' digestion systems and grow elsewhere).

People have often and correctly compared these different soils to the conditions of one's heart. See below for Jesus' interpretation.

### IV. Understanding Parables: Mark 4:9-13

#### Mark 4:9-13

**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!" **13** Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"

#### NIV

- Verse 9: Jesus uses this saying two times in Matthew, three times in Mark, and twice in Luke. A variation is used eight times in Revelation. Mark 4:23 below is yet another variation, used only in that verse. When Jesus says this, He means to listen closely to it...almost all people have ears to hear...and apply its teaching in your life according.
- Verse 9: Throughout this chapter, hearing (i.e. applying) is important and implies understanding that leads to action in one's life. It also means that you learn the point so well that you can pass it on.
- Verse 10: If the twelve did not understand this parable, the crowds were unlikely to do so. Why did the apostles not ask Jesus earlier about its meaning?
- Verse 11: "Secret" is really the word *musterion* which is often translated as simply mystery. What is a mystery or secret? It can be:
- A mystery as in a mystery book
  - A secret that was revealed only to initiates.
  - Something revealed in God's timing that was not revealed earlier
- Jesus' coming revealed many mysteries that were hinted at in the OT but not explained.
- Verse 11: Why would Jesus teach to these other people only in parables? Certainly, to the Pharisees who had already rejected Jesus or to His family who thought that He was crazy, this is understandable. However, how about to the following crowds? We might speculate that they did not believe in Him as the Messiah/God, but only a worker of wonders. But He has also left behind others that He had called disciples, keeping the teaching to only his smallest, closest group.
- Verse 12: Jesus quoted this from Isaiah where the prophet was told by God that this is how his message would be received:

#### **Isa 6:9-10**

**9 He said, "Go and tell this people: "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' 10 Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."**

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With this Jesus answers the question of why He taught in parables. Basically, God has a plan. He will make sure that those who believe will do so. Others might believe later, but now is not the correct time. Indeed, it did not matter as far as belief, if He taught plainly. By teaching in riddles, it was also harder for the Pharisees to convict Him of doing what their traditions said was wrong. As with Isaiah, a remnant would believe, but most would not. Eventually, the role of the twelve will be to teach others what Jesus has taught them. All but one of them will be the good soil.

- Verse 13: Jesus pointed out that if they did not understand this parable, which is simple (if we do not go overboard in our interpretation of it), they would have a hard time understanding God's kingdom. By explaining it to them, they might have a greater ability to understand better future parables. Neither Matthew nor Luke records these words of rebuke.

#### **V. Jesus' Interpretation: Mark 4:14-20**

##### **Mark 4:14-20**

**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."**

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Verse 14: The seeds are to be equated to the word of God. People grow based on word that is sown in them. The word is the same regardless of where it is sown.

Verse 15: Are these people saved? Usually the answer is no, but notice that the word is "sown" in them. Again, the goal should not be to classify these people as believers or unbelievers, but rather as those that are correctly following Jesus/the word and those who do not.

Verse 16: Are these people saved? Since they have no joy and fall away quickly when prosecution comes, they are generally considered as "not saved." However, they are "sown: as well.

Verse 18: These people "hear the word" – remember Jesus' comment in verse 9 above. Yet, the worldly matters affect them and they are not fruitful. Many would suggest that they are saved, even though a case can be made that they are not.

Verse 18: How would you tell if a person is one sown in the thorny soil, verses the hard or rocky soils? You probably cannot tell. Whether saved or not, these people are not doing what God wants them to do.

Verse 19: Consider the following verses:

#### WORRIES OF LIFE

**Phil 4:5-7**

**6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

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**Matt 6:34**

**34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

**NIV**

#### DECEITFULNESS OF WEALTH

**1 Tim 6:6-10**

**6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

**NIV**

#### OTHER DESIRES

**1 Peter 1:13-14**

**13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.**

**NIV**

Verse 20: Those who preach/demonstrate the word produce others who preach/demonstrate the word.

**2 Tim 2:1-2**

**2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**

**NIV**