

**Mark 4:1 ¶ And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.**

**Mark 4:2 And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,**

Mark now gives us a snapshot of another day in the ministry of Jesus. Once again we find Jesus at the sea teaching the multitude on the shore from a ship in the sea. This position helped guard the safety of the crowd and provided a natural microphone. Ironside describes it beautifully: "The land rises gently from the particular part of the sea of Galilee where this instruction was given. As the Lord Jesus sat in the fisherman's boat His audience would be before Him, conveniently seated or standing, as in a natural amphitheater."

Jesus taught them using parables, stories using examples from life to teach a deeper truth.

The IVP New Bible Commentary explains: "We must always remember that a parable is not the same as an allegory (very rarely used in the Bible, if at all). In an allegory, every detail has some spiritual significance, while in a parable much of the detail may not be important; it is the story as a whole which conveys the message."

Following is Mark's abbreviated version of the kingdom parables found in Matthew 13.

**Mark 4:3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:**

**Mark 4:4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.**

**Mark 4:5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:**

**Mark 4:6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.**

**Mark 4:7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.**

**Mark 4:8 And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.**

**Mark 4:9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.**

This is Mark's condensed version of the parable as Jesus told it; Matthew 13 provides a more detailed account; Luke 8 also includes a record of this first parable. The explanation will be given in following verses.

**Mark 4:10 And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.**

**Mark 4:11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables:**

**Mark 4:12** That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them.

Once they were alone, the twelve disciples along with some other followers of Jesus questioned Him about the parable. He explained that it was meant to help them understand the mystery of the kingdom of God. Mysteries in scripture reference truths that required God's revelation to be understood. What made it a mystery in part was because it referenced a kingdom not yet established on earth. Those who are not part of the kingdom, not His followers, are not able to understand the parables.

I liked this quote from Guzik attributed to Barclay: "The parable *conceals truth from those who are either too lazy to think or too blinded by prejudice to see*. It puts the responsibility fairly and squarely on the individual. It *reveals* truth to him who desires truth; it *conceals* truth from him who does not wish to see the truth."

Jesus then goes on to use a quote from Isaiah.

*Isaiah 6:9-10 "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."*

The reading of Isaiah in the King James is a little misleading, but in reading several other translations, it is clear that it is because of the hardened, stubborn hearts of the people that they cannot hear, see, understand, convert and be healed or made whole. In Mark this healing is defined as having their sins forgiven. Point is made that it is Jesus that can make them spiritually whole. These people, however, have rejected Jesus as Lord; it doesn't matter how many times they are privileged to hear Him teach and see the miracles He performs, they have determined not to believe Him.

**Mark 4:13** And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

**Mark 4:14** The sower soweth the word.

**Mark 4:15** And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

Jesus then asked the disciples if they understood the parable. He explained that He would give them the key that would help them understand other parables.

Key: The seed that the sower is sowing is the word of God. In context, this is an obvious reference to the message about the kingdom of God that Jesus was preaching to the multitudes. Jesus is the sower. Some hear His teaching, but it's like seed that falls on the wayside and is never given a chance to take root. When they hear the message, Satan comes and takes away the truth that was planted in their hearts.

Clarke makes an important application to those who preach God's word today: "It is a high offence against God to *change* the *Master's seed*, to *mix it*, or to sow *bad seed* in the *place* of it."

**Mark 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; Mark 4:17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.**

The hearts of other people that hear the word are compared to stony ground not conducive to growth. They listen to the teaching and cheerfully receive it. The truth tries to take root but is destroyed at the first sign of affliction or persecution they experience because of their acceptance of the message, so they turn away from it.

Luke's account gets a bit more specific. He stated that this seed died from lack of moisture (8:6). This seems to infer that the plant could have survived with the proper nourishment. In application, this would seem to be inferring that sufficient nourishment from the water of the word would have grown the seed of truth that had been planted.

*1 Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby...."*

The seed of truth planted in this person's heart was never given such nourishment, so that truth died; it was abandoned when confronted with tribulation and persecution.

**Mark 4:18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, Mark 4:19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.**

In this example some of the seed falls among thorns and the plant gets choked as the thorns grow around it.

The truth proves to be unfruitful in this person's life because he is so focused the things of the world and the "deceitfulness of riches." I thought the Greek was enlightening since that phrase made reference to falling for a delusion. And isn't that what the riches of this world are in comparison to the eternal treasure available through spiritual understanding. This person has made a choice to reject spiritual treasure in his quest for earthly treasure. It was interesting to note that "the lust of other things" is identified as part of the thorns. The Greek for lusts makes specific reference to a longing for things that are forbidden. Luke identifies the thorns as "cares, riches, and pleasures of this life" (8:14). In context, this would be a reference to pleasures that do not align with the pleasures of the kingdom. The writer of Hebrews describes this as "enjoying the pleasures of sin

for a season" (11:25).

**Mark 4:20** And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

In the last example, seed falls into good ground and produces fruit—some of it 100 times, some of it 60 times and some of it 30 times the amount sown.

Jesus declares that this represents the person who receives the seed of the truth of God's word with a ready and eager heart. He understands the truth and applies it to his way of life, and it begins to produce more fruit and more spiritual understanding in his life. Luke describes this person as one who "in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (8:15). Patience makes specific reference to continuance and consistency. Scripture affirms that it is continuance in the faith that gives evidence to genuine faith.

*1John 2:19 "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."*

*James 1:12 "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."*

The amount of fruit produced varies from person to person, but some find that seed of truth multiplying by 100, some 60 and some 30 times over in their life. I see that as picturing differing rates of spiritual growth according to the spiritual nourishment received. Scripture is clear in identifying the major source of spiritual nourishment as the word of God.

*Hebrews 5:13 "For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*

*1Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby...."*

**Mark 4:21 ¶** And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?

**Mark 4:22** For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.

**Mark 4:23** If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus next explains that a candle is meant to shed light; it is meant to be used, not hidden. He intends the truth He is teaching to be known and understood, but only by those who are following Him and truly desire understanding to make application to their own lives. The time is coming when no one will be able to

claim a lack of understanding, because the plan of God will be complete and His “mysteries” obvious for all to see. In light of that truth one should take care to pay attention and seek understanding.

Luke uses more specific wording in his version of v23: “Take heed *how* you hear.” You are in control of how you hear; you have a choice as to whether to accept Jesus and the truth of God’s word or reject Him.

**Mark 4:24 And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.**

**Mark 4:25 For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.**

Jesus gets more specific by warning us to pay close attention to what He is saying because according to how much you seek to understand the truth you are given directly impacts your being given more. To hear with understanding implies putting to use what you learn. As the old saying goes, “Use it or lose it.”

I think in context these thoughts are referencing back to the seed that fell on the rocky ground and among the thorns. These people give signs of having spiritual life but quickly die because they never take in spiritual food or do not produce fruit because they do not really possess spiritual life. They lose what they only appeared to have.

**Mark 4:26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;**

**Mark 4:27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.**

**Mark 4:28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.**

**Mark 4:29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.**

Jesus paints yet another word picture of the kingdom of God. Picture a man planting seed in the ground. After many days the seed begins to grow even though the man doesn’t understand the process that makes it grow. The earth makes use of the seed to first produce a blade; that seed continues to grow and transform until it produces corn that is ready to harvest.

The growth of the kingdom of God is just as mysterious. We know, however, that the condition of the heart directly affects whether that truth takes root in the life of the hearer. We know that the nourishment of God’s word contributes to its growth. When it produces fruit, we know that it is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in one’s life—and only God understands how that works in the life of each believer.

I also liked this application from Guzik: “This shows that the word of God works *invisibly* within us. God promised that His word would accomplish the

purpose for which He sends it. So when you hear the word it works in you - even as you sleep! In works in you spiritually, in a way that it invisible to our eyes."

*Isaiah 55:11 "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."*

**Mark 4:30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?**

**Mark 4:31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:**

**Mark 4:32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.**

Jesus then poses the question of what else might picture the kingdom of God. He again chooses the growth of a plant—this time a mustard seed. A mustard seed is the smallest of all the herbs, yet it grows into the largest of herb plants. It is so large that even the birds can find rest under its shade.

This parable also seems to indicate that though the kingdom of God will start with only a small group of believers, it will eventually grow to the point that even those who are its enemies will benefit from its influence.

Note: The birds of the air are identified as enemies in these parables in Matthew 13.

**Mark 4:33 And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear *it*.**

**Mark 4:34 But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.**

Mark then tells us that Jesus taught the people using many parables like these. Later, when He was alone with His disciples, He carefully interpreted them to make sure that they understood the teaching.

**Mark 4:35 ¶ And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.**

**Mark 4:36 And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.**

**Mark 4:37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.**

**Mark 4:38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?**

**Mark 4:39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.**

**Mark 4:40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?**

**Mark 4:41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?**

Finally, at the end of that day, Jesus told His disciples that He wanted to go to the other side of the sea. So they sent the multitudes away and headed out to sea, accompanied by some other little ships. A great storm arose (a common occurrence on the Sea of Galilee) that had very high winds, causing the waves to fill the ship with water. Jesus was in the back part of the ship sound asleep on a pillow. His disciples went to wake Him up, asking was He not concerned that would die. So Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the sea. All He had to say was "Peace be still," and the wind stopped and the sea was immediately calm. Try to picture that in your mind—yet another amazing miracle!

Reminder: This is the Creator functioning as man through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught that we have that same power at our disposal.

*Matthew 17:20 "And Jesus said unto them...If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."*

*Luke 17:6 "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you."*

Then Jesus turned to His disciples and asked them why they had been so afraid. He questioned their faith in light of the fact that He had told them they were going to the other side. His word should have been all they needed to know that they would get to the other side safely.

Their response—It seems that they became even more afraid than they were in the storm. They wondered at the kind of a man who had the power to command even the wind and the sea to obey Him.

I think this incident also teaches that the believer will encounter storms in life, times of trouble, as he/she lives in obedience to the LORD. In fact, He told His disciples to expect this.

*John 16:33 "...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

Every time I read this account I am reminded of the words of a beautiful song by David Phelps, The Wind and the Waves.

"All you had to do was raise your hand,  
Speak the words, "Peace be still", and all  
The anger, all the fury of that raging storm  
Surrendered to Your will.

When the storms of life take me by surprise, and my

Faith gets swept overboard, I hate it when I give into  
All my fears instead of trusting in You, Lord.

Even the wind and the waves obey- why can't I,  
Why can't I? Where is my faith, is it lost at sea?  
Lord help me to be more like the wind and the waves.

I liked this comment from Ironside regarding the miracles of Jesus: "Rationalists and rationalizing professors of Christianity are fond of trying to explain on purely natural grounds the remarkable things credited to the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. A sample of this kind of reasoning is found in a widely-read book, The Nazarene. But the clear purpose of the Holy Spirit in recording these wonders was to show us that He who so marvelously healed and helped suffering humanity was God Himself come down to earth as man. No far-fetched explanations are needed if we consider who it was who did these things. All were perfectly normal manifestations of divine power at work in response to the needs of men. To deny the miracles is but an effort to belittle Him who performed them."