

Mark

“Sacred secrets for the asking”

4:1-20

- I. **Introduction**
- II. **Vs. 1-2 What did He say?**
- III. **Vs. 10-12 Two kinds of hearers**
- IV. **Vs. 3-9, 14-20 The parable of the sower**

I. **Introduction**

Because Jesus’ increased popularity and notoriety He was no longer teaching in the local synagogues and instead His pulpit was a small boat set out a safe distance from shore.

This was not the only sign of popularity as Jesus had to adopt a new method of teaching as the 10’s of thousands were far more interested in the temporary than they were in the permanent. *A parable is an earthy story with a heavenly meaning thrown alongside truth for comparison.* Jesus chose this method to make people pay attention and listen.

Depending on how a person views the text, there are between 30 and 46 parables recorded and distributed between the synoptic gospels, John’s gospel doesn’t record any. Luke records the most and Mark the fewest. One is unique to Mark, 10 are only in Matthew and 18 appear only in Luke. The remainder appear in one or both of the other synoptic accounts. Parables must not be linked to:

- **Fables**, as they have a spiritual aim
- **Myths**, as they are truthful
- **Proverbs**, as they are longer
- **Allegories**, as they are complete and not always self-interpreting

They were not unique to Jesus they are found elsewhere in scripture and known to be used by rabbis. What was unique was the exclusivity that Jesus employed this method

and how He used it to draw people to Himself for the answers. *Parables are like shells on a nut or fruit: They keep good fruit for the diligent, and protect it from the uninterested and lazy!*

II. Vs. 1-2 What did He say?

In chapter 3 verse 23 I mentioned that Jesus adopted the parabolic method when teaching. In chapter 4 verses 33-34, Mark will offer his commentary on this method employed by Jesus saying that, “*with many such parables He spoke the word to them **as they were able to hear it**. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And **when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.***” That commentary is the key to understanding this method as well as the difficulty of verse 12. As I look at this chapter I notice that three of the four stories deal with some type of seed. The only one that diverts from this in verses 21-25 and it has to do with light under a basket and visibility. The word “parable” in verse 10 in the best manuscripts is *plural* which would have included all of the parables spoken by Jesus that day. *This leads me to the belief that the four parables mentioned were done at one time from the boat. The interpretation that Mark includes in verses 10-20 happened sometime after the teaching while Jesus was alone with His disciples. That being said Mark breaks apart the chronological order of events in order to give needed instruction and interpretation on what is commonly referred to as the “Parable of the sower” to his Roman readers.* The reason for this seems to be found in verse 13 where Jesus said to His parable inquirers, “*Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand **ALL** the parables?*” To place this instruction at the end chronologically as it happened would cause the reader to lose the opportunity in the text to apply the instructions and interpretation with the present and preceding parables.

Based upon verse 13 the “*Parable of the Sower*” is the key to all parables. It is for this same reason I think it is best that we first deal with the setting in verses 1-2 then move to the instructions in verses 10-12 before we move to the parable its self, verses 3-9 and with Jesus’ interpretation in verse 14-20.

Vs.1-2 Back in verse 9 of chapter 3 Mark told us about the need to keep a small boat off shore because of the crushing crowds and here we see that Jesus had to get into that boat to keep from getting crushed. Then Jesus adapted a simplistic method of teaching do to the limitations of His hearers. ***The fact is that even our Lord’s words fell upon DULL EARS, HARD HEARTS and UNRESPONSIVE WILLS!*** That fact ought to make every pastor and parent feel a lot better!

III. Vs. 10-12 Two kinds of hearers

Vs. 10-12 To take these verses out of the context is to create confusion with regards not only to the intent of parables but to the character and nature of Jesus. ***Did Jesus mean, as “simple reading” seems to imply that He spoke these stores in order to hide truth so that people could not understand and in not understanding couldn’t be forgiven?*** Our Lord points out that there are **two kinds of hearers**:

1. The first one He describes as “*To **you** it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God..*” This is a class of hearers who according to verse 10 “*when He was alone, **those around Him with the twelve** asked about the parable.*” A group who certainly was the minority among the 10’s of thousands but was not exclusively disciples. **Their chief characteristic, the common denominator in this first group is they are the ones that “came to Him and asked Him” about the parable.** Jesus said it had been given to **THEM** “*to know **sacred secrets** or **mysteries of the kingdom of God.***” Twice in the telling of the parable Jesus makes reference to the key to these sacred secrets as being available to those that He says in verse 3 “*Listen!*” and again in verse 9 who have “*ears to hear, let him hear!*” Notice what this mystery is about; “*the kingdom of God*” that is *how God is at work in the world, functioning through humanity now and throughout world history.*

2. The second one Jesus describes as, "...those who are **outside**, all things come in parables." Jesus isn't mentioning a geographical location but rather a position of a person's heart. It is to this second group that Jesus addresses the information of verse 12 as He describes their present condition as: "*Seeing that they may see and not perceive, and hearing that they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.*" **This passage presents some difficulties that are cleared up in the context of verses 11 and 33 as clearly Jesus wanted people to be able to hear who were truly interested.** First the word "*that*" at the start of verse 12 in the Greek means, "*in order that*" or because of, which implies that verse 12 was a preexisting condition in these hearers and **NOT** one caused by Jesus teaching parables. Matthew's account supports this as these folks were seeing and hearing but what they saw and heard was not leading them to the Lord. This is a quote from the prophet Isaiah in the 6th chapter verse 9-10 who describes the people of his time as being those who saw and heard but were nonetheless blind and deaf because of the hardening of their hearts. Jesus employing parables to loosen the heart and was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. This is more obvious when we read in Matthew 13:14 as Jesus says, "*And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled*". He quotes Isaiah further in verse 15 saying, "*For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.*" God didn't close their eyes and ears they closed them for the purpose of not turning from sin and the outcome was that didn't receive forgiveness.

IV. Vs. 3-9, 14-20 The parable of the sower

As we look at this parable generally we see that there is one sower and one type of seed but Jesus describes four varieties of soils. In three of these illustrations life is either missed or lost because it is rejected, still born or compromised. **There are four consequences of the seed in these four soils and each had an agent that caused the consequence:**

1. Soil by the *wayside*, the seed was **stolen** by the foe
2. Soil on *stony ground*, the seed was **starved** by the flesh
3. Soil *among the thorns*, the seed was **strangled** by fear
4. Soil on *good ground*, the seed was **successful** by faith

There also appears to be three levels of fruitfulness that could be due to opportunity or fidelity, ability or loyalty! Jesus says that the crop showed growth by “yielding a crop, sprang up and increased”, verse 8. In 1st Peter 1:23 Peter writes that we are “*born again not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God that which abides forever.*” The soil upon which the seed is sown speaks of the conditions of people’s hearts not only the hearts prior to salvation but at any given time. We must not think that our soil is automatically “Good” and will produce fruit because at one time it has. Any given day this can change, if we don’t remain in the same spot spiritually.

Vs. 3-9, 14-20 The word “*listen*” in the Greek means “*Be listening*” but it is not a word that was issued as a command but one rendered in kindness. Though issued in kindness and gentleness it was nonetheless done to a crowd that was far more interested in coming in contact with Him to be healed than it was to listen to the word. That combined with the word “*behold*” right afterward was saying, “*Pay attention to what I’m about to say!*”

Again this parable Jesus describes **four places where the word was sown:**

- a. **Wayside**: The word “*wayside*” simply means road and is defined by Jesus in verse 15 as the condition of the heart whereby after a person hears the word, satan comes in and takes away by force the word that was sown in their hearts. That fact that it was sown describes in the Greek that it had begun to germinate but satan came in and snatched it away before it had time to become a plant. The first group described are those that are “**Hard Hearted**” they hear the word and as far as obedience to the word is concerned they say, “*That’s for the birds.*”
- b. **Stoney ground**: The same seed of the word fell on ground full of rocks and Jesus defines the condition of this soil in verses 16-17 as having a superficial experience with the word and that the condition of their heart as being rocky didn’t permit the roots to go down into the heart. Jesus describes these “rocks” as tribulation and persecution that comes and they quickly stumble. As long as the word is producing the desired results without any negatives they are fine but as soon as such belief cause something other than this they leave. Stony ground speaks of “**Shallow Heart**”. Oh they say Jesus is the way but as soon as things don’t go their way they drop their commitments. They are crises Christians as that is when they turn back to faithfulness.

- c. **Among the thorns**: The seed of the word here fell amongst the seeds of thorns and it choked out the word suffocating the plant. Jesus describes this in verse 18-19 and says that they are drawn in a different direction by cares and worries of their course in life. The cravings for the things and life style of this world chokes out the word thus the word isn't able to bear fruit. This heart speaks of a "***Crowded Heart***", a person has too many things crowding out the word of God. Worries about finances either because they have too little or they have too much.
- d. **Good ground**: Finally Jesus describes in verse 8 "good soil" in which the seed not only yield a crop according to the Greek it keeps on yielding a crop. And in verse 20 did so accordingly. The final soil of the heart is a "***Fruitful Heart***" producing an ever yielding crop. Agriculturist tell us that a great yield is 48 times the amount of seed sown. So 30 times would still be very good, 60 times the amount of seed would be amazing and a 100 times the amount sown would be miraculous.