

The Gospel of Mark

Walking with the Servant Savior

Lesson 5 Mark 4:1-25

Day One: Teaching with Parables

The action sequences so visible in the first three chapters of Mark now give way to a closer look at the teachings of Jesus. Both His works and His words drew many people to Him, but with many different motives. Previously, He had shared briefly using parables (2:19-22, and 3:23); now He would expound in greater depth, resulting in some being merely entertained while others were enlightened.

Read Mark 4:1-25. Today we will focus our attention on verses 1-9.

1. Where did Jesus go once again to teach? Why? v. 1

With the biggest crowd yet gathered to hear Jesus, the hillside became an amphitheater and the boat became a pulpit. There was no need for a sound system, the natural acoustics of the area allowed everyone to hear perfectly. Facing those along the shoreline, Jesus addressed the listeners using parables as a means to illustrate spiritual truths.

Getting a workout...

Using the resources you have at hand, write a definition for the word *parable*.

Telling a parable was very effective, compelling the listener to think deeply about what was being taught and respond to it. Everyone might hear what was being said, but to those listening who had become too stubborn or hardened to the truth the meaning remained *concealed*. To those who were genuinely searching for the truth the meaning became *clear*. The parable of the sower describes the various ways the human heart responds when presented with the truth.

2. How did Jesus begin and end the parable with an exhortation to pay close attention to His words? vv. 3a and 9

This parable illustrates a way of life that was familiar to Jesus' audience. The farmer in ancient Israel would patiently walk the furrows of his field, liberally throwing out handfuls of seed as he went. Depending upon the condition of the soil, some seed would take root and grow and some would not.

3. What was the outcome of the seed that fell in each of the following soil types?
 - v. 4: *some seed fell by the wayside—*
 - v. 5-6: *some fell on stony ground—*
 - v. 7: *some seed fell among thorns—*
 - v. 8: *other seed fell on good ground—*

The farmer's expectation was for a good crop each time he went out to sow the seed. Jesus taught that not all of the seed will sprout and grow, and those that do produce varying results. The reality is that only about 1 in 4 (25%) will be successful. The point is that the farmer is not to be concerned with the statistic, his concern is to sow the seed.

4. *Personal:* When the Holy Spirit presents you the opportunity to share the Gospel, are you able to sow the seed and leave the outcome to the Lord? Please share your thoughts.

Heartbeat . . . "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."
James 1:22

Day Two: The Purpose of Parables

What to look for . . .

Why did Jesus so often use parables in His teaching? The Lord placed a heavy emphasis on the *hearing of the Word of God*. Read through the fourth chapter of Mark and you'll find the word *hear* mentioned thirteen times. Jesus' focus was not on the physical sense of hearing, but rather on *spiritual discernment* of what is heard.

Read Mark 4:1-12

1. What happened once the disciples were alone with Jesus? v. 10
2. *Personal:* Sometimes when we're with a group of people we won't raise a question or ask for an explanation for fear of being embarrassed and showing our ignorance. We can, however, be completely safe taking those questions and concerns to Jesus. If there is something on your heart today that you wouldn't bring up around others, tell Him about it. He's listening—and He has the answer!

Jesus' response in verses 11-12 reveals that there are two types of listeners—those who are saved and those who are not—there is no middle road.

3. What *gift* was granted to Jesus' followers? vv.11-12

The kingdom of God was a *mystery* kept secret since the world began (Romans 16:25). Those who believed in Jesus were granted the understanding (spiritual insight) to this mystery, which was that God's kingdom had come in the person of Jesus Christ. This great truth was no longer hidden from those seeking to know God.

4. What did Jesus say about those who choose to remain *outside*? vv.11-12

Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah, pointing to the resemblance between the Israelites and those of Isaiah's day who could not understand because of the hardness of their hearts. Likewise, those who choose not to believe in Jesus are not able to understand the mystery of the kingdom. It remains hidden from them as long as they continue to reject God's truth.

Come closer . . . Hebrews 1:1-3 opens another window, illuminating some of the mystery for us. Read the passage and answer the following:

Long ago, how did God speak to His people?

- a. Long ago, how did God speak to His people?
 - b. Today, how does He speak?
 - c. What promise did God make to His Son?
 - d. How is the Son described in this passage?
- Looking through this window at the mystery of God, what insight do you gain about the authority God has granted to the Son?

A clearer understanding of the Son will motivate us to heed His exhortation to listen carefully: "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*"

5. *Personal*: Taking all the above points into consideration, what kind of *hearer* would you consider yourself: *casual—interested—or attentive*? Please explain.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three:

The Explanation of the Parable

What to look for...

The *hard, stony, thorny,* and *good soil* each represent the different conditions of the human heart with respect to *hearing* the Gospel message. The application to the listener is that *hearing* God's Word does not necessarily guarantee understanding it.

Read Mark 4:13-20; Matthew 13:18-23; and Luke 8:11-15

1. Note here the similarities that stand out to you after reading all three passages.

Jesus first taught the parable and then the purpose of using parables. In verses 13-20, He explained the *parable of the sower* to His followers in detail because unless they understood the interpretation of this one, they would not be able to understand the others that would follow.

2. Who is the *sower* or the *farmer* according to Matthew 13:37?
3. What does the *seed* represent as mentioned in Luke 8:11?

Jesus used this parable to illustrate His mission on earth and that of all His followers who would come after Him. His desire is that each heart would hear, receive, and respond to God's Word and, in turn, plant the seeds of truth in the lives of others—men, women, and children everywhere!

Up close and personal...

The remainder of your study today will be based upon a personal look at the soil of your heart. (Being completely honest will help you in understanding your effectiveness to sow God's Word in the lives of others.) Each type of soil is defined for you. Take a moment to pray and think carefully about your answers, being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. (You may elect not to share your answers with your discussion group.)

- a. *Wayside soil:* the hardened path that does not allow God's Word to sink in. This heart pays no attention to the Word when it is preached and has absolutely no attention of applying it.
 - Has God sown a word in your heart that you have absolutely no intention of obeying? Would you acknowledge what it is?

- b. *Stony soil*: the condition of the heart that hears the Word and joyfully receives it, but is not grounded in it, and so, is incapable of enduring through difficult times.
 - Have you been stirred by a message—perhaps even joyful about the possibilities, but then become deterred from it as hard times set in?

- c. *Thorny soil*: the heart that hears and even accepts God’s Word, but then allows it to be choked out by the *cares of this life*, the *lure of wealth*, or the *desire for more*.
 - Which of these specific things could be keeping you from bearing fruit—why?

- d. *Good soil*: the heart that hears God’s Word, accepts it, and then *acts* on it. As a result, there is an abundance of fruit to God’s glory!
 - Have you seen recent evidence of your obedience to God’s Word? How?

*“Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground,
for it is time to seek the Lord . . .” (Hosea 10:12a)*

Review this week’s memory verse.

Day Four: The Exactness of His Warning

What to look for . . .

God will not override a person’s will to choose for him/herself. Those who flatly refuse to listen are denied the ability to understand what Jesus says. The ones who listen with the intention to obey will be given even greater understanding.

Read Mark 4:21-25

The parable about the spiritual *life* is now followed by the parable about spiritual *light*. Jesus told it to enforce the lesson in the previous parable. He asked about the function of a candle or a lamp: *“is it to be placed under a basket or a bed?”* The answer was obvious to all: the light needs to be placed where it is visible, otherwise it is not useful. His point is directed to those with *good heart soil*, who had received and understood the Word. They were now to take the light of truth and let it shine out so others could see it. Though not everyone will respond in a positive way, the light cannot be hidden.

1. What does Jesus say about the things that remain hidden? v. 22

What Jesus told His disciples in secret He has told us to reveal to others. The light of truth we hold in our hearts is not to remain hidden. Just as a candle dispels the darkness at a cost to itself, we must place the light where it can be seen, knowing that it will also cost us!

2. With this instruction ringing in the disciples' ears, Jesus challenges them in verses 24-25 to live up to the responsibility He has given them.
 - a. What word of *caution* does Jesus extend to them? v. 24

 - b. With what word of *counsel* does He instruct them? v.24

 - c. What word of *clarification* is there for them in verse 25?

3. *Personal:* Are you able to understand all of God's truth right now? Your ability to understand will depend on how you *hear* and *respond* to God's Word. What would you say about your ability to hear and apply the truth to your life at this point in time?

Would you like to be able to understand more? Though the truth may be simple and clear, our *hearing* is often imperfect because it is related to our obedience. As we step out in obedience, our capacity to understand is increased and so is the brilliance of the light we reflect!

4. This principle is illustrated for us in James 1:21-25, from which our memory verse comes this week. Meditate on this passage and consider the *light* that emanates from your life.
 - What is the person like that hears God's Word but does not act on it?

 - What does it say regarding the one who looks into (or hears) the Word and then acts on it?

The casual, inattentive listener, will undoubtedly miss the point and lose what little understanding they have. The attentive listener who applies what they hear will continue to have a greater capacity to receive spiritual truth. Stay closely tuned in to what God has to say to you!

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five:

Praying God's Purpose

It's time to do some *prayer walking*—not in the literal, but the *spiritual* sense. The Holy Spirit will lead you today as you consider three points from your lesson, write them in the form of a prayer, and lift them to the Lord. If practicing the presence of God is new to you—be patient—it will come, and you will be blessed!

"... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26-27 NLT

A prayer for fertile heart soil...

You had the opportunity this week to look at the soil condition of your own heart. Tell God about what you discovered and ask Him to keep your heart soft and pliable to His touch.

A prayer for hearing that translates into obedience...

It's time to unplug your ears, listen up, and get serious about obeying God's Word! Determine today to give *attention* with *intention* to apply what you are hearing Him say.

A prayer for letting your light shine...

Have you been hiding your *light* from others around you who need to see it? Would you tell God today that you are ready, with His help, to make His light visible?

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes