

4

Mark 4:1-34

Teaching with Stories

Jewish teachers in Jesus' day often used parables. In this section of Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells stories of situations from everyday life to teach spiritual truths. A parable usually illustrates a single point in a way that is vivid and easily remembered. Jesus' parables move his listeners to think about what he says and then make their own decision to accept or oppose his teaching.

As you read this chapter, imagine sitting with the crowds on the lakeshore, listening to Jesus.

Read Mark 4:1-9

1. If you were an artist, how would you paint the scene in verse 1?

What are the advantages of holding a teaching session in this manner?

2. What is Jesus emphasizing by his opening and closing statements (verses 3, 9)?

3. Describe briefly the four kinds of soil and what happens to the seed sown in each soil.

Read Mark 4:10-20

4. Who receives Jesus' interpretation of this parable? Why?

What does Jesus say that their concern about the meaning of the parable indicates (verse 11)?

Who has made the division between those on the inside and those **on the outside** (verses 10-11)?

5. What happens to those outside who hear the parables?

Note: Verse 12 is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10. William Barclay, a Scottish theologian, comments, "The Greek version [of Isaiah 6:9-10] does not say that God intended that the people should be so dull that they would not understand; it says that they had made themselves so dull that they could not understand—which is a very different thing" (Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, 2001).

6. When Jesus explains the parable to those who ask the meaning, what does he say the seed is (verse 14)?

What experience do the four kinds of people share (verses 15-16, 18, 20)?

In what ways do they differ from one another?

7. Jesus compares the types of soil on which the seed falls to the kinds of people who hear his message of the good news of the kingdom of God. Describe what happens to the seed in their lives when they face the pressure of the real-life situations he talks about.

Type of Soil	Life Situation	Impact on Seed

8. As you see what prevents a fruitful harvest in verses 15-19, give a present day example of each of these things.

Which ones are a possible danger in your life or in the lives of people you know?

9. What variation occurs even among people who are good soil for God's word?

Since each of the four types of people in this parable hear the word, what makes the difference in their lives?

Read Mark 4:21-25

10. What similar thought is expressed both in verses 21 and 22?

If Jesus is referring to the purpose of parables, what does he say about them (verses 21-22)?

Note: A common Jewish parable of Jesus' day told about Parable and Truth who came to town. The people ran and hid from unadorned Truth. But when Parable came, dressed in brightly

colored clothes, they poured into the streets and celebrated. Truth complained to Parable, "I don't understand. Yesterday the people ran away from me. But when you told them the same thing today they celebrated." Parable explained, "People can't stand to look on naked Truth, but they will listen to it dressed in Parable."

11. How does Jesus emphasize the importance of paying attention, of listening to the word of God (verses 24-25, and 9)?

What happens when you cease to give it your attention?

Read Mark 4:26-34

12. What things does the parable in verses 26-29 teach about the growth of the kingdom of God?

13. At what point is the growth hidden. At what point is it obvious?

How does this parable apply to the growth of the kingdom of God within an individual?

14. What is the main point of the parable in verses 30-32?

How does the parable apply to the growth of the kingdom of God in the world throughout all generations?

Compare the extent of Christ's ministry at this point in Mark's account with its extent today.

15. What do verses 33-34 show about Jesus' pattern of teaching?

*Note: The word **disciples** in Mark refers to a larger group than the twelve.*

SUMMARY

1. From this chapter, what specific impressions do you have of Jesus' teaching?

2. Why do you think Jesus emphasizes the importance of the way you hear, and the attention and response you give to the word of God?

3. In Mark 1:15 Jesus declared: ***“The time has come.... The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*** What do the parables in this chapter add to his teaching about the kingdom of God?

CONCLUSION

Listening to the teachings of Jesus is not enough. Obedience must follow hearing. The word of God must be allowed to take root, grow, and bear fruit in our lives.