

Lesson Four

(Mark 4:10 - 5:34)

The Purpose of the Parables

(Mark 4:10-20)

10 When Jesus was alone, some of those who had heard him came to him with the twelve disciples and asked him to explain the parables.

11 “You have been given the secret of the Kingdom of God,” Jesus answered. “But the others, who are on the outside, hear all things by means of parables, *12* so that,

*They may look and look, yet not see,
they may listen and listen, yet not
understand;*

*for if they did, they would turn to God
and he would forgive them.”*

13 Then Jesus asked them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How, then, will you ever understand any parable? *14* The sower sows God’s message. *15* Sometimes the message falls along the path; these people hear it, but as soon as they hear it Satan comes and takes away the message sown in them. *16* Other people are like the seeds that fall on rocky ground. As soon as they hear the message they receive it gladly. *17* But it does not sink deep into them, and they don’t last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. *18* Other people are like the seeds sown among the thorns. These are the ones who hear the message, *19* but the worries about this life, the love for riches, and all other kinds of desires crowd in and choke the message, and they don’t bear fruit. *20* But other people are like the seeds sown in good soil. They hear the message, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred.”

Mark shows us the disciples asking Jesus to explain the whole reason and purpose behind the parables. The answer Jesus gives them teaches two lessons: A. No one will find truth who does not actively search for it. B. Those whom God cannot convince, he confuses. Compare 2 Thess. 2:11-12. Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to prove this. Both Mark and Luke make what sounds like a harsher statement, but this may be due to the Hebrew custom of stating *result* as *purpose*. Faith in Christ qualifies one to understand the truth. Compare what Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14.

“Secret” in the way scripture uses it, means almost the exact opposite from our usual meaning. It refers to God’s plan which has long been kept hidden, but has now been *revealed* to the men of his choice. Compare the way Paul speaks about this in 1 Cor. 2:6-10. Paul shows us more about God’s secret purpose in Eph. 3:1-6; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2-3; Rom. 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 3:9; 16; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Eph. 5:22-33. God’s final message came through his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). God’s plan to act in sovereign power to set men and women free from sin and guilt was made known to these disciples through Jesus the Son. They should understand what they see and hear taking place in Jesus’ ministry. But the outsiders are mystified by the parables and do not respond. It is a scriptural principle that: “to everyone who has, even more will be given; but the one who has nothing, even the little he has will be taken away from him.” (Compare Matt. 13:12.) It is God’s *intent* that everyone be saved through Christ. But when men and women close their minds to the truth, God takes

away from them the opportunity of responding to it. This is not unfair, because when one turns to Christ, the cloud is taken away (compare 2 Cor. 3:14-16). It is not an unalterable *decree*, but the offer of a free *choice*. Parables were meant to stimulate the search for truth, and the opportunity will be given to all who open their minds to His teaching.

As Jesus explains the parable, he speaks of the different kinds of individuals who come into contact with the gospel. Note the sower sows God's message (word). In each case the message which is sown is the same. The difference lies in the *response* of the soil. The soil symbolizes the *reaction* of the one who hears. *The Path* symbolizes the person who is "too hard" for the message to be able to penetrate. This is due to such things as sin, indifference, prejudice, false teaching, etc. Notice that Satan immediately takes it away. Is this fair??? Yes, because the person has deliberately closed his or her mind to the message of God. *The rocky soil* symbolizes the person who has no strong conviction of belief. Since they are not really committed to Christ, they are unwilling to pay the price (Luke 14:27) to follow Him. *The Soil with Thorns* symbolizes the person who is committed, but who is so busy with everything else that no time is left for Jesus. Then we see also three types of good soil. This person finds new life and gives Jesus the highest priority. Certainly all will receive the same gift of eternal life (compare Matt. 20:1-16), yet there are three different levels of "fruit bearing" (Luke mentions only the "one hundred"). This reminds us of the parable of talents (Matt. 25:14-30), which teaches that each is responsible for the capability which he has, not for what he does not have. By working together, we accomplish the Lords' purpose (compare 1 Cor. 3:5-9).

Further teaching in parables

(Mark 4:21-34)

21 Jesus continued, "Does anyone ever bring in a lamp and put it under a bowl or under the bed? Doesn't he put it on the lampstand?"

22 Whatever is hidden away will be brought out into the open, and whatever is covered up will be uncovered. 23 Listen, then, if you have ears to hear with!"

24 He also said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear! The same rules you use to judge others will be used by God to judge you -- but with even greater severity. 25 The man who has something will be given more; the man who has nothing will have taken away from him even the little he has."

26 Jesus went on to say, "The Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed in his field 27 He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens.

28 The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit: first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain. 29 When the grain is ripe the man starts working with his sickle, because harvest time has come."

30 "What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?" asked Jesus. "What parable shall we use to explain it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world. A man takes it and plants it in the ground; 32 after a while it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade."

33 Jesus preached his message to the people, using many other parables like these; he told them as much as they could understand. 34 He would not speak to them without

using parables; but when he was alone with his disciples he would explain everything to them.

Verses 24-25 confirm the parable of the sower. Mark stresses “*what you hear,*” Luke stresses “*how you listen.*” *What* we hear depends upon *how* we *listen*, and determines what we get out of it. This involves our attitude toward others. If we are harsh and critical of everyone else, God will do to us just what we do to our fellowman! Furthermore, an opportunity which is not used is taken away, and becomes a curse. But every opportunity used, brings further opportunity.

The very purpose of light is to provide illumination. Who would cover it up or hide it??? If a light is hidden, it can only be for a short time, and when it is placed on the lampstand, its light reveals the things hidden by darkness. Jesus himself is *light* (John 1:4-5), and it would be foolish for him to hide the very thing he came to reveal. Yet we can see that time was required for this light to be clearly revealed. The parables and the whole mission of Jesus were not easy to understand, but in time the meaning would be clearly revealed. Jesus worked *secretly* in his earthly ministry, but the *meaning* was to be made known at the right time as God vindicated Him and brought in His kingly rule in power. Compare Paul’s anthem of praise in Acts 13:26-41.

Only Mark gives the Parable of the Growing Seed. The same lesson is taught by Isa. 55:10-11; James 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:23-25. Results do not come *instantly* either in nature or in spiritual things. We are to “sow the seed” and to “water it,” but it is God who makes it grow (compare 1 Cor. 3:6-9). The public ministry of Jesus was a time of sowing. The “seed” would certainly grow and produce a rich harvest. We can *see* growth in the results, even though we may not understand the *how*.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed contrasts what seem like tiny beginnings -- “the preaching of an unknown prophet in a corner of Palestine: with the triumph of the end results. The small round mustard seed was the smallest seed planted, but it grew to as much as ten feet high. The Kingdom of heaven was to begin small, then grow to include enormous crowds of people (see Acts 15:14-18; Rev. 7:9-10). Popular thinking expected a political messiah who would burst on the scene, overthrow the Roman occupation forces, and restore the power and pomp of David the king. But this was not in God’s plan. Do not be misled, then, by small beginnings and quietness. Make sure to penetrate the *mystery* of the Kingdom of God and become part of it! Compare Col. 1:13.

Jesus Calms a Storm

(Mark 4:35-41)

35 On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples. “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” 36 So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat that Jesus was already in, and took him with them. Other boats were there too. 37 A very strong wind blew up and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. 38 Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to die?”

39 Jesus got up and commanded the wind, “Be quiet!” and said to the waves, “Be still!” The wind died down, and there was a great calm. 40 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you frightened? Are you still without faith?”

41 But they were terribly afraid, and began to say to each other, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

After spending the day teaching by the side of the lake, Jesus wishes to cross over to the south-east corner. Jesus' closest disciples were men who had lived on the lake as fishermen. These two facts provide the setting for this miracle. The Twelve get into the boat with Jesus, and set off for their destination. This seems the only way to escape the crowds of people, but Mark tells us, "Other boats were there too." It seems this incident took place at night on the lake (compare 5:1).

Jesus needs rest and quiet (just as we would), and goes to sleep. Mark adds: "in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow." A very strong wind blew up (Matthew tells us: "suddenly a fierce storm hit the lake"), and waves threaten to swamp the boat. Lake Galilee is over six hundred feet below sea level, and has a tropical climate. Just to the north are the mountains of Lebanon, and the updraft from the heated lake brings cold air down from these mountains, creating severe storms. These are experienced sailors who know something of the awesome power of the storm. Probably they came to Jesus in a group, all shouting at once -- "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" It is possible that Mark records the very words which Peter used on this occasion. Probably they thought He could do something to help them (compare Matt. 8:25). We see Jesus demonstrate His authority. Jesus got up and *commanded* the wind! Mark tells us: "The wind died down and there was a great calm." (The other boats would experience the sudden cessation of this storm also. McGarvey says: "They are probably mentioned to show that a large number witnessed the miracle when Jesus stilled the tempest.")

When they see Jesus act and the storm die down, they were stunned with surprise! Mark tells us they were "terribly afraid." If they had earlier expected him to do something, they are now terrified by the result of his command! Who and what is this man who can control the forces of nature and silence them with a word! They had not yet learned that Jesus is both Lord and Creator of nature (see Col. 1:16). Their question is to be answered from the Old Testament portion of the Bible where it is the Lord who controls the elements. See Psalm 107:23-30; also Psalm 89:8-9; 93:3-4; 106:8-9; Isa. 51:9-10.

If this miracle did not happen, then no power of God was revealed in the event. Yet the early church did believe this incident was the power of God revealed! A strong testimony, then, to the historicity of the calming of the storm.

McGarvey writes: "In the parables of this section, especially in those of the sower, the seed and the mustard seed, the prophetic power of Jesus is clearly exhibited. Without superhuman foresight he could not have so accurately traced out the manner in which different classes of men throughout all time would deal with the word of God, as he describes it in the parable of the sower; nor could he have known in advance of experiment, that the seed of the kingdom would grow from its planting until the time of harvest, as described in the next parable; nor that, as declared in the third, the kingdom would ever attain to the prodigious growth which our eyes have witnessed. His divinity is attested by his unflinching foresight into the distant future."

Jesus Heals a Man With Evil Spirits

(Mark 5:1-20)

5 They arrived on the other side of Lake Galilee, at the territory of the Gerasenes. **2** As soon as Jesus got out of the boat he was met by a man who came out of the burial caves. **3** This man had an evil spirit in him and lived among the graves. Nobody could keep him tied with chains any more; **4** many times his feet and hands had been tied, but every time he broke the chains, and smashed the irons on his feet. He was too strong for anyone to stop him. **5** Day and night he wandered among the graves and through the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones.

6 He was some distance away when he saw Jesus; so he ran, fell on his knees before him, **7** and screamed in a loud voice, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? For God's sake, I beg you, don't punish me!" **8** (He said this because Jesus was saying to him, "Evil spirit, come out of this man!")

9 So Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

The man answered, "My name is 'Mob' -- there are so many of us!" **10** And he kept begging Jesus not to send the evil spirits out of that territory.

11 A large herd of pigs was near by, feeding on the hillside. **12** The spirits begged Jesus, "Send us to the pigs, and let us go into them." **13** So he let them. The evil spirits went out of the man and went into the pigs. The whole herd -- about two thousand pigs in all -- rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and were drowned.

14 The men who had been taking care of the pigs ran away and spread the news in the town and among the farms. The people went out to see what had happened. **15** They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to have the mob of demons in him. He was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind; and they were all afraid. **16** Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the man with the demons, and about the pigs. **17** So they began to ask Jesus to leave their territory.

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had had the demons begged him, "Let me go with you!"

19 But Jesus would not let him. Instead he told him, "Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how kind he has been to you."

20 So the man left and went all through the Ten Towns telling what Jesus had done for him; and all who heard it were filled with wonder.

Films such as "The Exorcist" have made people more aware of the reality of *evil* as an actual malignant spiritual force (but have also given the Devil a lot of free publicity in a distorted way). The thought of actually being controlled by demonic powers is especially frightening! In our time, this man would be diagnosed as having a particularly severe "manic-depressive psychosis" which made it impossible for him to live a normal life in human society. However this diagnosis would be incorrect. Two facts in this incident take it out of the realm of a purely physical illness: the supernormal knowledge this man had about Jesus (verses 7-8); the incident of the pigs.

It was not unusual for places to have more than one name. The territory of the *Gerasenes* was also known as the territory of the *Gadarenes*. Gadara, an important city, was seven or eight miles to the south. Gergesa is modern Khersa on the lakeside, and the cure must have taken place near here. The burial caves are still to be seen in the cliff. The only way society had of dealing with him was to try to chain him up. He stayed away from people. Note he had superhuman strength when under the control of the demons. It was a

characteristic of these demons that *they knew who Jesus was*. Compare James 2:19. Nothing is observed today in any way comparable to the *messianic insight* seen in those demon-possessed individuals.

The incident with the pigs has raised endless questions. Perhaps Jesus did this to show the reality of the demons. A “psychosis” or “epilepsy” or any other such thing could not be instantly transmitted from a man to a herd of animals. Mark specifically mentions the number *two thousand*. This implies there were two thousand demons in this man. (A demon being a spirit and not material, could do this.) They had identified themselves as “Mob” (“Legion”) because there were so many of them. The demons expected to be sent back to the abyss, and they knew Jesus had the authority to send them there. They beg to be allowed to go into the pigs (swine is another name for pigs). It seems they would much rather do this, and they also seemed to feel free to bargain with Jesus. The sight of the two thousand pigs rushing down the slope of the hillside to drown in the lake gives us a vivid insight into the severity of demon possession! The authority of Jesus is once again displayed dramatically.

Why did Jesus *not* tell the man to keep silent about his cure this time??? Was it because this was a Gentile area? Or because Jesus did not intend himself to work there? Mark shows the man sitting “clothed and in his right mind.” This should *not* be understood in “twentieth-century psychological terms,” however, the demon-possessed were clearly *abnormal* people. When normality returned after healing, everyone could clearly see the difference. The people (14, 16) reacted negatively to all this, and asked Jesus to leave their territory. Christ does not stay where he is not wanted. He did not visit the Gerasenes again.

The Woman Who Touched Jesus’ Cloak

(Mark 5:21-34)

21 Jesus went back across to the other side of the lake. There at the lakeside, a large crowd gathered around him. 22 Jairus, an official of the local synagogue, came up, and when he saw Jesus he threw himself down at his feet 23 and begged him with all his might, “My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!”

24 Then Jesus started off with him. So many people were going along with him that they were crowding him from every side.

25 There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years,

26 even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time. 27 She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him. 28 “If I touch just his clothes,” she said to herself, “I shall get well.”

29 She touched his cloak and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was cured of her trouble. 30 At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him. So he turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?”

31 His disciples answered, “You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 The woman realized what had happened to her; so she came, trembling with fear, fell at his feet, and told him the

whole truth. **34** Jesus said to her, “My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed from your trouble.”

We see some of the pressure under which Jesus worked, as two people ask for his help at the same time. Jairus was one of the synagogue elders who convened the congregation, preserved order, and who invited the readers and speakers. (The actual work was done by the attendant, Luke 4:20, who was responsible for the building and its furniture.) His request shows us that by no means were all of the religious leaders opposed to Jesus. Believing in the power of Jesus, he had the faith to come to him to find help for his critically ill daughter. (Matthew’s condensed account has him saying she is already dead. This is an *idiom* to emphasize the critical nature of her condition.) She was already at the point of death as Jairus came to Jesus and she passed away as he was speaking (vs. 35).

As they were going to the house of Jairus, the incident with the woman who had severe bleeding took place. Certainly this healing would have an effect on the faith of Jairus. The woman had suffered for twelve years from this serious illness. No slur is intended upon doctors as such. This is to show the hopelessness of the victim. It is difficult to view this through Jewish eyes, since the woman’s condition would have prohibited her from participation in the religious rites of Judaism (see Lev. 15:25-30). Her condition made her religiously unclean, and she would be shy about coming to a holy man such as Jesus. She believes that touching is the way to be healed (compare 6:56). Matthew’s condensed version has Jesus turning around and looking at her. Certainly Jesus was aware of the woman and healed her as she touched him. What he says about “Who touched my clothes?” was to bring out the lesson. His question asks for her declaration of faith. This woman’s faith caused her to act, and Jesus healed her.

The way in which the woman was healed shows a certain supernatural quality about Jesus. It would be wrong to think that power flowed *involuntarily* from him, as from a short-circuited battery. The spiritual power of Jesus is not to be narrowly defined and consequently misunderstood. Jesus himself made certain that there could be no basis for superstition in the thinking of the woman. He brought her out into the open so that she might recover her self-respect and find healing for her soul as well as for her body. He gave her dignity by his love and care for her as an individual. He spoke a healing word which transformed what might have been a mechanical act into a personal relationship. A lesson in this is that care -- even spiritual care -- is incomplete without accompanying love (compare 1 Cor. 13).

Alford writes: “The error of her view was overborne, and, her weakness of apprehension of truth covered, by the strength of her faith. And this is a most encouraging miracle for us to recollect when we are disposed to think despondently of the ignorance or superstition of much of the Christian world: that He who accepted this woman for her faith, even in error and weakness, may accept them.”

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 4:10 - 5:34)

1. What is meant by the expression “secret” (mystery) of the kingdom? (4:11)

2. Please explain verse 12 in your own words.
3. Why does Jesus give the rebuke in verse 13?
4. Show how the parable of the sower fit in with the time and place where Jesus gave it.
5. What seems to be the key to all the parables?
6. Show the difference between emotion and conviction.
7. In what ways is teaching in parables relevant to the church today?
8. Jesus states a strange purpose for hiding something. Explain. (4:22)
9. Isn't it unfair to give to the one who has and take from the one who doesn't have? (4:25)
10. What is the main point of the parable of the growing seed?
11. What is the main point of the parable of the mustard seed?
12. Jesus taught in parables "as much as they could understand." What is the significance of this? (4:33)

13. Does our service to Christ exempt us from “storms?” Explain.
14. Describe the storm in your own words.
15. What did the disciples think Jesus could do about the storm? Was their faith weak?
16. Could what Jesus did here be compared with the creation of the world?
17. Be specific in your reason for the rebuke in verse 40.
18. What is the most important lesson in this incident?
19. Why would demons run to Jesus -- not away from him? Explain.
20. Why would demons have any desire to go into pigs?
21. Wasn't it wrong to destroy the property of another?
22. Show how the man was both attracted and repelled by Jesus.
23. What was the response of the crowd when they saw the man healed?
24. What is the only thing that can turn the Savior away?

25. Use your own words to describe the humility and sincerity of Jairus.

26. Why mention the woman had spent all her money on doctors without beneficial results?

27. Show the determination and faith which this woman had.

28. Did Jesus know who touched him before he asked the question?

29. Why did the woman make the confession which she did?

30. Did Jesus accept the woman's error and weakness? What did he accept?