

Mark 4

V.1-9 Jesus is a teacher - He is more than just simply a teacher AND He is more than just simply a healer - who He is as a person and the nature of His work is dynamic, and real, and present with those He is with.

A great multitude again gathers to him - he will meet their need for teaching, for instruction. He does so by employing parables.

A parable is a story that is parallel to/alongside of a generally known life experience.

Many of Jesus' parables use as their foundation agriculture, or fishing, or everyday life circumstances that the multitude would identify with.

Jesus CHOSE to teach in parables, intentionally. In His parables Jesus instructed people on the heavenly kingdom. He taught them about things that they were unschooled in by using ideas that they were familiar with.

A parable can be seen as an intentional teaching device employed by the teacher to take the student from the known to the unknown.

A parable is NOT a fable, or a fairy tale.

Rules to help us understand parables:

Expositional constancy - what means one thing in one parable holds constant in others. How we determine that is dictated by the next rule...

Primacy - first mention, used to help "interpret" parables.

By using these fundamentals to help we can avoid over-interpreting, over-applying, or mis-interpreting/mis-applying Christ's parables.

Parable of the sower - ends with the exhortation - "He who has ears to hear let him hear."

The implication is that some people in the crowd will grasp these eternal truths from the parable, and some will not. But the crowd is encouraged to HEAR!

What we don't see is Jesus expounding upon the parable to the masses. He teaches the message and let's it rest with the hearer.

Imagine the weight of hearing the parable of the sower taught sans exposition; giving each one time to chew on the principles of the sower, the seed, the soils, the struggle, the dying, the fruit. There's a lot here!

Sometimes we need to let the silence do the heavy lifting.

Now, He does explain this parable, and others to his disciples, and we actually see them coming to Him asking for the meaning, and in this we see that the disciples have seeking hearts - though they may not understand everything.

[Luk 8:9-10 NKJV] 9 Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?" 10 And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest [it is given] in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'

V.10-20 Explaining the parable

The disciples were specifically granted, given, permitted to know "the mystery of the kingdom of God," that knowledge would impact them continuously and eternally - and don't we know that God's word does this still!

Truly there are things about God's kingdom that are mysteries to us - we perhaps grasp a part of understanding but the fullness will not be revealed until we are complete in Christ.

Jesus is now teaching the disciples intentionally about kingdom truth, He takes the time now to expound upon his public teaching in a more in-depth and detailed fashion AND he makes a distinction between the disciples and "those who are outside."

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10

[Isa 6:8-10 NKJV] 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here [am] I! Send me." 9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' 10 "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."

He uses God's word to teach them about what is going on and why it is that people find these parables so elusive, so unclear.

Paul writes about this enduring condition - a condition that we have all experienced apart from Christ:

[Eph 4:17-19 NKJV] 17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But by grace we heard God's word, and His word kickstarted our darkened, alienated, blind hearts to truth.

Jesus asks them, "Do you not understand this parable?" The unspoken answer is no they don't understand!

That should give those of us who profess difficulty in understanding some comfort as we see how Jesus responds.

He is so patient as he begins to expound upon the meaning for them. This will serve as their anchor moving forward, this is the beginning of expositional constancy for them. This is how they will understand the rest.

Jesus begins to explain the various elements of this parable, what they relate to in this life, and in the kingdom of God.

V.21-25 Broadcasting truth

Now that Jesus has instructed His disciples he also says to them that this truth is meant to be shared.

This also informs our understanding of the cults - cultish behavior involves secrets, levels of initiation, guarded information, etc.

The gospel, the good message of Jesus Christ is open for all! It's light is meant for all.

Jesus also tells these hearers to PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT THEY HEAR from Him. The measure of attention they apply to hearing will be the measure they receive.

Are we listening? Or are we only waiting for our chance to talk? Who are we listening to? Is the message we are receiving regarding the Kingdom of God or man's kingdom?

What's interesting about this teaching on "what we hear" is that those who have a pretense of understanding make the worst listeners.

There are those who falsely believe that they have all of this Christianity stuff figured out and they've come to some poor conclusions without examining the evidence or paying any attention to the message.

And unfortunately those people are supremely difficult to reason with because they are the experts in their own mind, unable to receive God's word because they're minds are made up, their consciences having been seared.

Jesus says that these people will have whatever they think they possess, in the realm of understanding, taken away from them.

[2Ti 3:1-9 NKJV] 1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; 9 but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

V.26-34 Kingdom parables continued

One we are quite familiar with

The parable of the mustard seed -

"In fat soil they often attain a height of 10 or 12 feet, and have branches which attract passing birds" (Vines)

“The little round seeds were an emblem of any small insignificant object. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament; and in each of the three instances of its occurrence in the New Testament (Mat 13:31,32; Mar 4:31,32; Luk 13:18,19) it is spoken of only with reference to the smallness of its seed. The common mustard of Palestine is the *Sinapis nigra*. This garden herb sometimes grows to a considerable height, so as to be spoken of as "a tree" as compared with garden herbs.” (Easton’s Bible Dictionary)

We must be careful not to over interpret this but to take Jesus at his word.

Also when we stop to consider that sometimes the parables confound us we come to realize just how much need of instruction we really have! Are we the ones on the outside!?

Do consider though this notion that Jesus teaches about this kingdom that is being built by the word that has grown to such a state that it is an attractive home for the birds of the air.

Consider for a moment what this may represent - is it a beautiful picture or a terrible picture? It is represented both ways by Bible teachers.

Well, in concert with the rule of expositional constancy, we see in the parable of the sower (v.4) that the birds of the air came and devoured the seed that fell by the wayside.

Jesus interprets this for us in v. 15 when he says:

[Mar 4:15 NKJV] 15 "And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

So...what do the birds represent? Evil! Wickedness! Satan! All nesting in the branches of God's kingdom that are waiting to snatch away and devour the word of God as it falls.

This actually aligns quite nicely with what Jesus teaches about wheat and tares in Matthew 13.

In this sense Jesus' parables take on a prophetic nature, accurately depicting the age we live in and the age that the church has grown into.

But there again we must be careful not to over-interpret and to say the kingdom of God equals the church - because the church of God, while part of the kingdom of God, is not the culmination of God's kingdom.

We see here that parables characterized Jesus' teaching ministry and we have much to learn from them.

V.35-41 Lord of creation

Context is the crossing of the Sea of Galilee with Jesus in the boat he taught from along with several other small boats.

Jesus takes rest in the rear of the boat and is apparently undisturbed by the violent storm around him.

Being a man as we are perhaps he was exhausted! Being the Son of God, with a definite end - the cross - he had peace in this moment. This would not be His end even while the disciples feared for their lives.

He calms the storm by His words - rebuked, commanded, charged - the tempest to be still, to be at peace.

We see the characteristics of Christ here, and in beautiful relation to our earlier scriptures regarding parables.

In these parables Jesus teaches us about the effects of the word of God. By this action we see the effect of the word of God. He is the Lord of all creation. His word is true and certain and will come to pass. AND, Christ brings peace to the most violent, fearful, bleak situations.

We must not forget that these men thought they were going to die in a very real sense.

Jesus brings them peace and he exhorts them on their lack of faith. The two are not disconnected.

We who believe are challenged on this often. We know that Jesus brings peace, even in the most dire of situations, and yet we are also challenged by His word.

This peace that Jesus brought moved them to a place of awe, of reverential fear, or perhaps just straight up FEAR!

As these disciples are walking with Jesus, floating with Jesus, sailing with Jesus - they are beginning to learn WHO He is. The one who commands creation.

The one whose words are irrefutable, and whose words are building the Kingdom of God.