

I love appetizers. Sometimes we order a few appetizers just for our meal. All those different tastes, yum! Here are three sermon appetizers:

1. O be careful little ears what you hear

O be careful little ears what you hear

For the Father up above

Is looking down in love

So, be careful little ears what you hear

2. When I was in Wheaton Grad School (IL), Dr. Franklin and I would go round and round about God's Word. He was very wooden in his view of preaching. Exasperated one day, I said, 'if I go out to the woods and preach this afternoon and there is no one to hear my words, you are saying that someone, somewhere will get saved because of that sermon.' He replied, 'yes.'

3. People love to talk to their dog, but here is what dogs hear: 'blah, blah, blah, WALK, blah, blah, blah.' 'Blah, blah, blah, TREAT, blah, blah, blah.' 'Blah, blah, blah, PLAY, blah, blah, blah.'

We are simply going through the book of Mark, looking at it segment by segment. Its key verse is: 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45 NIV).' This verse gives the outline and purpose for Mark's biography of Jesus.

'For the Son of Man' - Prologue, Mk 1:1-13.

'Did not come to be served, but to serve,' - Service, Mk 1:16-8:30. The first half of the book, including today's portion, is all about service.

'And to give his life as a ransom for many.' - Suffering, Mk 8:31-15:47.

Epilogue, Mk 16:1-20.

Today, we look at the Mark 4:1-34.

- So far, Mark has only given us a or two sentences of the content of Jesus' preaching: "'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news! ... Come, follow me,'" Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people (Mk 1:15, 17 NLT)."
- Today, Jesus serves by preaching.

- This is the largest unit of Jesus' preaching in the book of Mark – other than an end times sermon in chapter 13.
- Jesus preached about the kingdom of God.

## The Kingdom of God Mark 4:1-34



There is a lot to go through, so let's jump right in.

### 1. Sower, 4:1-9.

'Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. <sup>2</sup>He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: <sup>3</sup>"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. <sup>4</sup>As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. <sup>5</sup>Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. <sup>8</sup>Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" <sup>9</sup>Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." <sup>10</sup>Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant (Mk 4:1-9 NLT).'

Three of the four soils are negative ...

Four soils ...

- Path, v. 4.
- Shallow soil, v. 5.
- Thorns, v. 7.
- Good, v. 8.

What a waste! Three of the four soils cause the seed to be wasted. Why waste seeds like that? It is like my preaching in the forest without anyone there to hear.

But such thinking misses the point because of cultural differences.

- At that time in Palestine, they sowed seeds broadly and then plowed the ground. The plowing revealed the ability of the soil to receive the seeds. For example, the rocky ground was discovered when the soil was plowed only a thin layer of soil covered the limestone.
- We tend to see the four soils as the main point, but the act of sowing and plowing is the main point. The receptiveness of the soil is not predetermined.

The Kingdom of God can break up well-worn pathways of sin and bring spiritual growth – it all depends on the receptivity of the human heart.

- The emphasis is not on the waste but the splendor of the growth, the 30, 60, or even 100-fold multiplication.

Jesus' parable begins with 'Listen!' and ends with 'Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.'

- Preaching the grace of God is different from sowing physical seed. You could preach in the woods, but it more effective to sow where there are people.
- The point is that we are to sow broadly and let the Holy Spirit plow the human heart. When the seed germinates there is an abundant harvest.

One more observation: the harvest stands for judgment. Yes! There is a present and future aspect. The present is a time for sowing and the future is a time for judgment. We should not be surprised that Jesus has not yet returned, he is giving as much time as possible for spiritual seeds to sprout.

## 2. Why Parables, 4:10-12?

'Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant. <sup>11</sup> He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, <sup>12</sup> so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven (Mk 4:10-12 NLT).'"

Critics complain that Jesus is hiding the truth from people. No, the broader context here is that there is opposition and unbelief.

- His own brothers think he is mad.
- The Pharisees think he is demon possessed.
- The people don't want to hear his preaching, they just want him to be healed.

Jesus used parables as a filter.

- Those who were open to spiritual truth, really 'heard' the meaning.
- Those with hard hearts did not understand.
- If the eyes of spiritual understanding are open, then more and more revelation is given.
- Jesus' statement in v. 12 highlights the unbelief that is all around them.

Like a dog connecting WALK with to go for a walk. His understanding brings more understanding like PLAY and TREAT. Faith & belief brings more understanding.

### 3. Interpretation of the Sower, 4:13-20.

“Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? <sup>14</sup>The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. <sup>15</sup>The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. <sup>16</sup>The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup>But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. <sup>18</sup>The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, <sup>19</sup>but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. <sup>20</sup>And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted (4:13-20 NLT)!”

- In his interpretation to the disciples, the important thing is ‘the farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others (v. 14).’ ‘God’s word’ or ‘the message’ is mentioned six times.
- Despite the details of the four soils, emphasis is still on the sowing seeds broadly; it is on the farmer sowing seeds and letting the Holy Spirit be responsible for the reception of God’s word. Isaiah notes: ‘As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, <sup>11</sup>so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Is 55:10-11 NIV).’
- I can say with confidence that there are very few of us who are sowing God’s word to the lost. Be brave and sow God’s word broadly.

### 4. Hearing, 4:21-25.

“Then Jesus asked them, “Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine. <sup>22</sup>For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. <sup>23</sup>Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” <sup>24</sup>Then he added, “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given — and you will receive even more. <sup>25</sup>To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them (Mk 4:21-25 NLT).”

Even though the word picture changed, the subject has not changed.

- Jesus is the light; he is the word.
- A literal reading of v. 21 is ‘does a light come and place itself under a basket?’ Lights don’t move by themselves; it emphasizes the humanness of the lamp. We are to recall that Jesus said, ‘While I am in the world, I am the light of the world (Jn 9:5 NIV).’

Also, we are to guard what we hear: 'Pay close attention ... the closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given (v. 24).'

- On the one hand, 'Oh, be careful little ears what you hear.' Be very cautious of who is influencing you.
- When our spiritual eyes have been opened (Ep 1:18), we naturally desire more light, more understanding.
- One of the symptoms of a sick Christian is a lack of desire for more of Jesus, more fellowship with God's children, and lack of reading God's word.

## 5. Growth, 4:26-29.

'Jesus also said, "The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup>Night and day, while he's asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. <sup>28</sup>The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. <sup>29</sup>And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come (Mk 4:26-29 NLT).'"

This parable is unique to Mark. Just a couple of thoughts:

- There is a mystery to the Good News. We don't know how someone is going to respond to hearing. 'Power (is) released through the scattering of the seed ... (and it) unleashes mysterious forces' and achieves God's purposes.<sup>1</sup>
- Also, note that there is a time of harvest, a time of judgment.

## 6. Growth Pt 2, 4:30-34.

'Jesus said, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, <sup>32</sup>but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade." <sup>33</sup>Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup>In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them (Mk 4:30-34 NLT).'"

In this story, we should not get tripped up on the 'smallest of all seeds.' This is a Jewish proverb, a way of saying very small.

The main point here are the contrasts:

- Small – Large
- Weakness – Strength

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 169.

- Now – Then
- Time of sowing, germinating, mystery, growth – Time of harvest and judgment

The content of Jesus' sermons from village to village is remarkable.

- The kingdom of God is not how it appears now; it is mysterious and will grow beyond what we can imagine.
- Our calling is to sow the seed broadly and trust the Holy Spirit to bring growth. Be brave and sow God's word broadly.

### **Conclusion.**

For just a minute, let's think about what has been planted in our hearts ...

There is something deep within the human heart that longs for things unseen. We love solving mysteries and getting deeper understanding.

- We know money will not satisfy.
- We know power, fame, and influence will not satisfy our deepest longings.
- These are temporary things.
- The seed of eternity has been sown in the human heart (Ecc 3:11). That spiritual seed has erupted and is growing.

Our hearts long to understand why we exist, our purpose in life, and what is beyond what we can see.

- Like Michelangelo's Adam, we long to touch our creator.
- Entrance to God's kingdom requires child-like faith (Mk 10:15). As infants we loved playing peek-a-boo with mom or dad. When we were older, we loved to playing hide-and-go-seek. We loved the discovery of the hiding place, the revealing of the mystery.
- Our hearts just know that there is something mysterious out there to be discovered.
- That is why C.S. Lewis' Naria series is so popular. While the Pevensie children play hide and seek, Lucy finds another world through a wardrobe.
- Bing Videos



The seed of God's word has been planted in the soil of our heart and we long to find God: 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup>I will be found by you,' declares the Lord (Jer 29:13-14 NIV).'

Seeking means movement, a looking for – will you come and seek him and the kingdom of God?