

“Jesus Teaches Through Parables”

Mark 4:1-41

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Opening Prayer

Pretty much all of Jesus’s parables are well known to those who have spent much time in church. The teachings are timeless after all, and in the theme of this Lenten season, they so often are filled to the brim with the Lord’s great mercy. Some of the parables, though, tend to stick in our minds above the rest. The parable of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, and this one, the parable of the sower and the seed, are even more deeply engrained into us as Christians. In our reading for this evening, Jesus gives the parable of the sower and the seed, then its explanation, and then follows it up with a few more parables to round out our understanding. Finally, He performs a miracle on the sea before the disciples, calming the storm. All of these things are given to show the disciples, and us, how we are to value the kingdom and by whom it comes.

Mark chapter four opens with the well-known parable of the sower and the seed. Seed is spread by a sower, literally a farmer who was tossing out seed, and it falls upon four types of ground. Hard ground, where the seed doesn’t ever stand a chance, rocky ground, which looks like it will produce well but the roots are not deep, thorny ground, where the seed is overcome by weeds, and finally good soil that produces a bountiful harvest. The followers of Jesus, most notably the twelve disciples, come to Jesus later for an explanation of this parable. Jesus responds to them “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.” He tells them the truth, that those who wish to understand His calling, they will hear it and comprehend, but to everyone else Jesus’s words will be just words. They will miss the true purpose, they won’t ask for forgiveness, they won’t comprehend the deeper meanings, and they will (because of their own stubborn hearts) not inherit God’s kingdom. With that background, Jesus then explains the parable.

The sower of the seed is the one who spreads the Good News. In this case it is Jesus, but in short order that duty gets turned over to the disciples, the church at

large, and now today to us. We share the good news with any who would hear it. The seed is that Good News of salvation through Christ. The soil are those who hear it. The first soil described, the hard soil, are those who immediately reject the good news. Satan steals them away, their own sinful nature doesn't let them comprehend it, and they immediately run from Christ. The second soil are those who receive the word at first, and so long as everything is easy they look like good Christians. Truthfully Beloved, this type of soil is like many here in the west who claim to follow Christ. When it is convenient and easy they follow Jesus. But when persecution or difficulty arise, especially if it is because they follow Jesus, then they abandon the Gospel and wither. The third type of soil also encompasses many who claim to follow Christ, but aren't really about living the life. The third soil with the weeds shows how concerns about the world can choke out any concern for the Lord. Kid's sports, a busy work life, hobbies that are all-encompassing, and any number of other non-eternal things get in the way and eventually push out any kind of prosperous faith. Finally, there is the soil that produces an extraordinary harvest. The good soil, the ground that is fertile and ready and has been prepared receives the Gospel and then spreads it. Obviously, the final soil is the one we should strive to be. There are some notes we can take from this parable and apply, and this combined with the other two parables about the kingdom of heaven give us a little insight.

Speaking shortly, note that the one who sows the word gives it everyone. It doesn't matter that the Gospel is going to be rejected, it is still given. Everyone is given that chance. Speaking about the three unfit types of soil, we should note that they not only hear the Gospel, but as any good landowner could tell you, they have the potential to change if God so allows. The hard ground could be plowed up, the rocky soil could have the stone removed, the thorny ground could have herbicide put on it. It isn't a lost cause, even if the seed is rejected at first. More importantly, it is easy to tell the good soil from those that are bad. The good soil produces a harvest. Faithful Christians, who take seriously their calling from the Lord, seek to produce a harvest. In spite of the hot sun (persecution), in spite of other types of soil failing, the good ground produces. If you are wondering where you fall in this, you can simply ask yourself if you have been a productive Christian. Have you encouraged, uplifted, and shared with others the good news? Have others come to know Christ or to know Christ better through your hard work and the Lord's work within you? Then you are good soil. The kingdom of God is built and maintained by those who are fruitful.

Speaking of the kingdom of God, the short two parables that come after give more understanding about it. The parable of the seed in verses 26-29 shows us that the kingdom of God and His salvation grows within people. As many of you can attest, over time the Lord worked within you slowly but surely to bring you into His kingdom. It often doesn't happen overnight, but over time. The parable of the mustard seed is given to show how just a little pinch of faithful evangelism can grow into something great. Mustard seeds are small, but produce large bushes. As a good example in ministry, sometimes all it takes is one person, one kid, one coworker, etc. who comes to know Jesus... and then a whole troupe follows suit. The kingdom of God can grow like that, starting with just one but expanding rapidly. Speaking of the kingdom of God, it all starts and ends with the Son of God, Jesus.

The chapter ends with Jesus and the disciples getting into a boat. This is one of several instances where Jesus will perform an amazing miracle out on the water that only the twelve will see. In this case, Jesus proves His divinity (and thus also the weight of His words that He just preached) by calming a storm that was threatening the thirteen of them. The chapter ends with the disciples questioning amongst themselves "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" Beloved, we know the answer. He is the Son of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world, and it is through Him that we are saved into the kingdom of God. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer