

Mark 4
November 22, 2009
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

As we are making our way through Mark, it is apparent that some of our popular sayings or understandings about the Scriptures sometimes lead us astray. We have found this to be true with such simple words as The Gospel, Kingdom of Heaven, Christ or Messiah. Over time, we tend to develop a popular usage of these words and then this effects how we read the Bible. If the popular view is accurate, this is not a problem. But if the popular view is either inadequate or even misleading, then this can really mess up how we read our Bibles.

Today, we are again faced with a section of the Bible that has some popular misconceptions. I think the way that we commonly take the parable of the sower and the various grounds is not so much incorrect but simply inadequate. We have taken a moral example out of the parable and confused that with what the parable was actually talking about. I think we can and should make an application from the parable of the sower and the seed to how we receive the Word of God sown. But that is not what Jesus was talking about.

EXEGESIS

¹And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. ²And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

Jesus is in a ship on the sea. Remember, the waters and the sea are a good representation of the world and the Gentile world at that. He taught in parables so that His adversaries would be confused and so that His friends would listen.

As we make our way through the parable of the sower, we should keep the general context in mind. Jesus is being attacked by the Scribes and Pharisees. They have accused Him of being a devil. But Jesus has come to them doing good deeds, healing diseases, casting out demons, explaining the Scriptures. They have no basis on which to call Him demonic but they do so anyway. Jesus is pointing out to them that the very accusations that they are making are the ones that they are guilty of.

The judgment of God for this blasphemy of the Holy Ghost will come upon them without forgiveness in less than a generation. Their old way of doing things is going to be completely torn from them as the new Kingdom of God is inaugurated on the earth.

With that in mind, let us look at the sower and the soils. We have come to think that the sower is Jesus and the preaching of salvation. About a fourth of the people preached to have the right kind of soil to respond to Jesus and be saved. If the soil is not good, then we must work on the soil so that they can receive salvation.

However, I think Jesus is more specifically referring to what has already happened to Israel. Israel is the place where the seed is being sown and there are multiple kinds of ground. Jesus is talking to the various kinds of soils as He speaks. Of course, we can make application from this sermon and talk about the kinds of soils that are present in our own hearts. But before we do that we should understand what Mark, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is saying.

¹⁰And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. ¹¹And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables:

Jesus is not concerned about making Himself understood to His enemies. His interest lies in being the good shepherd to His flock. Those who are outside would be the scribes and Pharisees and rulers.

¹²That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them. ¹³And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

This quote from Isaiah helps us understand the parable. Jesus is not simply talking about those who are going to respond to His Words, or not. God had planted a seed in Israel in ancient days. That seed had taken root or not on these various kinds of soils. Jesus is looking around and finds these four kinds of responses to God's planting in Israel.

Isaiah 6:9-12. Not hearing means judgment coming. As it was when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, so will it be when the Romans do so again.

Isaiah 6:13- The Holy Seed. But the seed is not holy. This means that judgement is once again looming.

Ezek. 17:22-24- But there is hope that God will restore the seed and it will fall on ground that will produce fruit.

The little holy seed, as small as mustard seed, will grow as tall as a stately cedar and the birds of the air will gather there.

Jesus upbraids them a bit for not being able to figure out the parable. If the disciples were dense, so are we, as we try to figure out the meaning of these parables after 2000 years and thousands of commentaries.

Parable-³Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: ⁴And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

Explanation-¹⁴The sower soweth the word. ¹⁵And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

In Israel, in Jesus's own day, there were those whose hearts had already grown hard and barren. No seed, no word of God could penetrate them.

Parable- ⁵And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: ⁶But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

Explanation-¹⁶And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

There were those that Jesus had preached to who embraced the Word but as soon as they heard hard words from Jesus, say about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, they left Him.

The apostles themselves fall into this group. They are the ones who fall away from Jesus when affliction and persecution arise. So, we should not see these soils as permanent conditions. The disciples eventually bear fruit but only after repentance and filling of the Holy Spirit.

Parable-⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Explanation-¹⁸And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, ¹⁹And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

The Scribes and Pharisees fall into this category. Judas, as well was tempted and led away by money. They did not have pure zeal for the word of God.

Parable-⁸And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. ⁹And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Explanation-²⁰And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

The true disciple is the one who bears the fruit of righteousness. These are the ones who hear the Word of God and do it. Perhaps no one fits this description of fruitful disciples of Jesus until after the Resurrection. But there were other disciples who were longing for the Messiah, who saw Him and believed. John Baptist was one. Elizabeth and Zachariah were others. Anna in the temple.

Explanation of Judgment-All will be revealed soon. Those who are faithful and those who are judged.

Parable-²¹And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?

Of course not, a candle is made to be lit and put on a candlestick. A candle lights and reveals. Just so, the various kinds of soil will be revealed. God will judge those who reject the Christ and He will give grace to those who embrace the Christ with faith.

Explanation-²²For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. ²³If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

²⁴And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. ²⁵For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

He is speaking in parables. He is explaining the parables to His disciples. They are hearing and their hearing will result in being given more. The Pharisees, Herodians, Scribes and Sadducees are all rejecting the Christ. Even what they do have, the temple, some semblance of the Jewish faith, a distant belief in the Christian God, will be taken from them. They will end up utterly destroyed and destitute.

²⁶And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; ²⁷And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. ²⁸For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. ²⁹But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

The kingdom of God grows miraculously. It starts small and explodes. When it is mature and has grown into the time of harvest, the Lord will harvest the kingdom.

³⁰And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? ³¹It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: ³²But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it. ³³And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

Mustard seed is small. We cannot imagine how such a small seed can grow into a large shrub that houses the birds of the air. But it does do this.

In fact, the small mustard seed grows into a huge Cedar, like the Cedars of Lebanon. This is a picture of the full force of the gospel taking over the world.

If the parable of the sower is about only a few believing, then how does the mustard seed grow into a large bush that houses the birds of the air? Because the seed is being replanted. The seed that God planted was

destroyed and did not produce thirty, sixty or one hundred fold. Jesus cursed that tree not so that it would fail to produce fruit. No, He cursed it because it did not produce fruit.

Psalm 80- The vine is torn down but the man at the right hand of the Lord will re-establish the vine.

³⁵And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. ³⁶And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. ³⁷And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. ³⁸And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? ³⁹And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? ⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Jesus's ability to speak about the kingdom of God is validated by His ability to rule even the wind and the sea.

The ship was full of water and in danger of sinking. Jesus was sleeping. The disciples think that Jesus does not care that they are going to sink and die. But Jesus does care and He proves it by speaking to the wind and sea and commanding them to be still.

He asks the disciples why they are so fearful. They were afraid of wind and sea. This corrects their fear. Rather, they should fear Jesus, the ruler of wind and sea.

What manner of man? He is the King of Glory. He is the Messiah. He is the Creator.

EXHORTATION

Jesus is the Holy Seed. He sows the seed but He, Himself is the seed. That seed cannot help but grow into the kind of tree that the Lord has prophesied. It will be like a mighty cedar and all the birds of the air will rest under the shadow of its boughs.