

“The Parable of the Sower”

Mark 4:1-20

“HE TAUGHT MANY THINGS IN PARABLES” v.1-2

1. The prominence of parables in the teaching of Jesus.

- Especially in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), but also in John.
- 10 parables are found in all 3 synoptics; 9 in both Matthew & Luke; 15 parables are unique only to Luke
- Parables were also used in the OT. E.g., Nathan’s story to David in 2 Samuel 12

2. A brief background on the interpretation of parables in the Bible.

- Early church: often explained w/ allegory, sometimes fanciful interpretations. (Augustine/Good Samaritan)
- Pendulum swing response in 19th and 20th centuries: all parables only have one main point (no allegory).
- More balanced approach: elements of allegory in some parables, some with one point, some with more.

3. Jesus often spoke in parables to the crowds but explained them privately to his disciples. 4:33-34

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER. v.3-9

1. Historical context: Palestinian agricultural practice was to sow the seed *then* plow it into the ground.

2. The key difference was on where the sower sowed the seed.

- The harvest of the seed that fell into good soil is true to experience. 30, 60, even 100 times what was sown
- The emphasis is not on the seed that was ‘wasted’ but on the tremendous harvest of the seed that grew!

3. The parable of the sower is a kingdom parable.

- The kingdom of God is both present (sowing) and future (harvest).
- Spreading the Word of God is the central activity of the kingdom of God.
- The kingdom of God has to do with harvest, judgment, and consummation (fulfillment).

“THE SECRET OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD” v.10-13

1. A smaller group along with the disciples later asked Jesus about the parables. v.10

2. Jesus made a distinction between those who were with/close to him and those “outside”. v.11

→ Jesus spoke in parables both to reveal and conceal.

- That’s why the parable of the sower begins and ends with a ‘call to hear’. v.3, 9

3. Part of the reason Jesus taught in parables was to veil the truth from the crowds. v.12

- Isaiah 6:9-10: And he said, “Go, and say to 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 blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”
- Those on the outside (who do not receive him) see Jesus as a confusing enigma.

4. Understanding the parable of the sower is key to understanding the other parables. v.13

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER EXPLAINED. v.14-20

1. The seed is the word of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. v.14

2. Jesus and his kingdom face opposition from Satan. v.15

- Remember all that has happened in chapters 1 to 3: constant opposition from Satan and his demons.

3. Jesus and his kingdom face opposition from tribulation and persecution. v.16-17

4. Jesus and his kingdom face opposition from the riches and pleasures of the world. v.18-19

5. But those who receive Jesus and his kingdom produce a supernatural harvest. v.20

→ The central idea is the coming of the kingdom of God. It will be received by some and rejected by many.

- Context: remember what just happened in the story before the parable of the sower.

APPLICATIONS

1. What role does the Jesus and his kingdom play in your/my life?

- His royal Word. His royal court (the church). His royal conquest (the Great Commission). His royal calling (to suffer).

2. We must play the LONG GAME.