

Teaching Notes/Life Group Study Questions – audio available on website (sookebaptistchurch.com) as a podcast.

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Uniquely Jesus

October 9, 2016

Mark 4

In his public ministry Jesus focused on healing and teaching, as well as mentoring a core group of disciples.

Jesus didn't... just heal; nor did he... just teach. He did both.

When he taught the large crowds of people who came to him, Jesus always used parables. Mark 4:2 – “He taught them many things by parables...”

Mark 4:34a - “He did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

What is a parable?

“A parable is a simple story that uses the ordinary, the everyday, such as hidden treasure, a tiny mustard seed, a determined woman looking for her lost coin, a barren fig tree, a pearl of great price, uninvited wedding guests... in order to illustrate who God is and what his kingdom is like.

There is a key phrase Jesus often used at the end of many of his parables.

Mark 4:9 - *whoever has ears to hear, let them hear*

Mark 4:23 - *If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear*

Mark 4:24 - *consider carefully what you hear*

Coffee/Question

What are some reasons you can think of that would explain why Jesus would frequently tell people to **listen** to him? Wouldn't that have been annoying? Hadn't they come to him because they wanted to hear what he said???

8 Minute Timer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsnshAgEFEO>

Feedback

Parables have a double meaning.

There is the literal meaning, apparent to anyone who has experience with the subject matter.

And there's a deeper meaning – a beneath-the-surface lesson about God's truth and his kingdom, that is only perceived and understood by those who have “eyes to see” and “ears to hear.”

Jesus' parables often involved an element of surprise or an unexpected twist. For example, why would a shepherd risk his life to find one lost sheep when ninety-nine were safe with him in the barn?

The twist was intended to help people think of God in ways they'd never considered. Jesus used parables to not only help a person to think about God in fresh way, but to move their heart to respond to God.” <http://www.rc.net/wcc/parable1.htm>

Jesus began many of his parables with the phrase – “*This is what the kingdom of God is like...*” Mark 4:26. Why do you think he did that?

Many Jewish people of that day weren't clear in their thinking about God's kingdom. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, Pilate asked him, “*Are you the king of the Jews?*” Jesus answered him, “*My kingdom is not of this world... My kingdom is from another place...*”

What Jesus said to Pilate was consistent with what he had taught for 3+ years. Never once did Jesus suggest the kingdom of God was like the empire of Rome, only better and stronger.

One of images Jesus frequently used when describing the kingdom of God in this present time... was that of a seed. A farmer plants a seed in the spring. And the farmer, and everyone else knows, you never reap a harvest in the same season in which you plant.

It takes time for the seed to germinate; to send down roots into the soil and send up a shoot towards the light. It takes time for the shoot to develop. It takes time for fruit to grow and ripen.

Jesus taught that this is how it is with God's kingdom in this present time. This was the key point of the **parable of the mustard seed** – look at **Mark 4:30-32**.

Like the mustard seed, the kingdom of God which Jesus announced, at that moment, seemed so small, so insignificant, so powerless when compared to the might of Rome.

But implied in Jesus' teaching was this assurance - what the kingdom of God now is, is not what the kingdom will ultimately be.

When reading the parables, it is important to not get sidetracked, trying to figure out a meaning for every detail of the story.

Remember: every parable has a main point. That's what we are to look for.

Some of the meanings are clear; easy to figure out.

But some of the parables are hard to understand.

Jesus' disciples had to have him explain many of them to them – look at Mark 4:10.

Now look at Mark 4:11-12.

What is Jesus saying here?

On the first read you could think he's suggesting that God is deliberately making it difficult for some people to come to him; that there are some people God wants to see, stay lost; some he doesn't want to forgive.

The **parable of the four soils** will help us rightly understand what Jesus is saying in verses 11-12. Let's read the story – Mark 4:3-9.

What's the story about?

It's about a farmer who sowed seed.

But the primary point Jesus is making is how the seed grew... in different kinds of soil.

What different kinds of soil did the seed fall on?

A path.

Rocky places.

Thorny places.

Good soil.

What happened to the seed in each type of soil?

The path – birds ate the seed

The rocky places – the seed sprouted, but it had no root

The thorny places – the seed sprouted, but it was choked

The good soil – the seed sprouted, and the plant grew and produced grain

You and I might think why didn't the farmer just plant his seed in the good soil?

Why didn't the farmer pull out the weeds surrounding the seedling?

Why didn't he transplant the seedlings that sprouted in the rocky soil?

What the farmer didn't do is not the main point of the story.
The main point has to do with the different kinds of soil.

Romans 10:17 says, *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."*

I need you to hold that verse in your mind as we read Jesus' explanation of the parable. Verses 14-20.

* All four types of people heard the word – verses 15, 16, 18, 20.

So the main point isn't about hearing - that some heard and some didn't.
Everyone heard.

* The seed only took root, grew and produced fruit in one type of person – v.20.

So is Jesus' main point... that the good soil represents good people?

Remember what happened at Levi the tax collector's house.

The Pharisees, who were the "good people," the "moral people," the "righteous people," asked Jesus' followers, *"Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

Jesus heard them ask this question and answered it: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* Mark 2:17

In the case of Matthew, who was hosting the dinner party that night, he was not a good person, and yet, unlike the Pharisees, he had heard the word of Jesus and had responded to it with an enthusiastic yes.

So we know that the good soil in which the seed took root doesn't represent good people. Then what is it?

Matthew the tax collector, was present that particular day when Jesus taught on the soils, and he was also present when Jesus later explained it's meaning.

Let's look at what he wrote in his gospel – Matthew 13:10-15:

*"Why do you speak to the people in parables? [Jesus] replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. **12** Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.*

Why was the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom given to Jesus' followers, and not to those, described by Jesus as being on the outside?

What did it mean to be on the inside versus the outside?

Jesus is saying there are things a person can't understand about the kingdom of heaven until... they believe.

Many people think they have to understand in order to believe; and Jesus says, you have to believe in order to understand.

Jesus' disciples had heard his invitation to come, follow him.

And they had responded... in faith.

They received him, they believed in him.

And because of their faith, Jesus could continue to reveal more and more to them.

Conversely, what Jesus was saying to the crowds, was being snatched away, or choked out, or was withering, because of their...**lack of faith.**

This why they were hearing but not understanding; and seeing but not perceiving.

In Matthew 9:29 Jesus said to two blind men,

"According to your faith let it be done to you."

In Matthew 13:58 this commentary was given about the people of Nazareth:

"And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."

Let's keep reading from Matthew 13.

13 *This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. **14** In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. **15** For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."*

Every human heart is calloused - verse 15a.

This insensitivity; this dullness, this deadness of the heart towards God, is what impedes each one of us from rightly understanding who God is and perceiving just how desperately we need him.

If God didn't seek after us; if he didn't call out to us; if he didn't shine the light of truth into our darkened minds, none of us would see him, or know how lost we are.

But he does seek...call...shine.

And when he does, the only way in which his word will take root within us, and produce fruit, which is the evidence of life, is when a person responds in faith to him; when they turn their lives towards him.

Listen to what Hebrews 4:2 says:

“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it ...did not combine it with faith.”

When the message of Jesus is heard, it must be combined with faith.

Otherwise it will... be snatched away.

Otherwise it will... get choked out.

Otherwise it will... not take root in us.

Hebrews 11:6: *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”*

The person who comes to Jesus must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

The secret of the kingdom of heaven is Jesus.

He is the mystery that had been hidden since the beginning and is now revealed.

But no one can understand Jesus;

no one will turn their life to him;

no one will bow the knee to him.... without faith in him.

Because his disciples had faith in him, Jesus held a second class after every major teaching session with the crowds, where he would, as Mark 4:34b says, *“explain everything.”*

This is what Jesus meant when he said, Matthew 13:12: *“Whoever has (faith) will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have (faith), even what they have will be taken away from them (snatched, choked, withered).”*

Ephesians 2:8: *“It is by grace we are saved through faith...”*

2 Corinthians 5:7: *“For we live by faith, not by sight.”*

Hebrews 11:3: *By faith we understand.... [that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.]*

Romans 1:17: *For in the good news of Jesus the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

From first to last, to follow Jesus is to live by faith in him.
This is the news with which Jesus wanted to surprise his listeners.
It is not about what a person does to earn favor with God.
It has everything to do about trusting Jesus for what he has done for us.

These are the emphasizes we want to learn as we tell the good news of Jesus' story to our generation.

People need to know that God in his goodness looks for us; calls to us; invites us to come to him. And the word, the good news of Jesus will take root and grow within us, when we put our faith in him; when we take him at his word; when he believe him and receive him into our life.

If you are here today, and you haven't yet put your faith in Jesus, I need to ask you: are you ready to do that?

If a person were to wait until they figured it all out, no one would come to Jesus. But have you heard enough to realize he's your Savior and God; that he loves you; that only he can make things right between you and God?

This is why he died for you. And when he rose again from the dead, that was the proof he had paid our sin debt in full!

Will you come to him?
You can do that right now.
Speak to him in the quiet of your own heart.

Good Good Father

Chris Tomlin

Oh, I've heard a thousand stories
Of what they think You're like
But I've heard the tender whisper
Of love in the dead of night
And You tell me that You're pleased
And that I'm never alone

You're a good good Father
It's who You are, it's who You are, it's who You are
And I'm loved by you
It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am

Oh, and I've seen many searching
For answers far and wide
But I know we're all searching
For answers only you provide
'Cause You know just what we need
Before we say a word
You're a good good Father

It's who You are, it's who you are, it's who you are
And I'm loved by you
It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am

Cause You are perfect in all of your ways
You are perfect in all of your ways
You are perfect in all of your ways to us

4:1-9, parable of the four soils

Jesus tells the crowd to listen.

How does the farmer sow?

The farmer doesn't sow carefully or stingily – much seed seems to be wasted.

Why does Jesus teach in parables?

Note: a parable is an illustration of the truth – it enables you to put things side by side and compare.

Where was Jesus when he was doing this? What does this remind us of?

The irregular land surface in the area where Jesus was teaching offered a variety of soil, frequently fertile, but sometimes shallow and rocky.

	Hard Path	Rocky Soil	Thorny Soil	Good Soil
<i>Who</i>	?	?	?	?
<i>Response</i>	?	?	?	?
<i>Outcome</i>	?	?	?	?

What determines the seed's growth?

What is the hallmark of good soil?

What is the difference between good and bad soil?

What was Jesus doing as he was teaching from the boat?

What did everyone at the lake have in common?

Which was the good soil?

What is the secret of the Kingdom of God?

What is Jesus interested in as he sows the word?

What does it mean to bear fruit?

What does "accept" mean?

4:10-20, the parable explained

What is the difference between the insiders and the outsiders?

Does Jesus want outsiders to be forgiven?

Does Jesus want people to be forgiven?

What's the difference between seeing and perceiving, or between hearing and understanding?

4:21-25, parable of the Lamp

What is the purpose of a lamp?

Who is the light?

What is Jesus saying about the Kingdom of God?

Jesus tells parables for the gospel to be revealed. Things that are secret are to come to light.

Jesus' desire is that people would see.

What does verses 24-25 mean?

What happens to those who have much? little? Why does this happen?

4:26-29, parable of the growing seed

What does this parable tell us about the kingdom of God?

4:30-32, parable of the mustard seed

What does this parable tell us about the kingdom of God?

Old Testament Verses

- Isaiah 6:9-10: Go and say to this people: Hear and hear, but do not understand. See and see, but do not perceive. Make the heart of the people fat, and their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.
- Psalm 14:2-3: The Lord looks down from Heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek God. They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt, there is none that does good, no not one.
- Ezekiel 12:2: Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.
- Psalm 119:105: Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.
- Jeremiah 29:13: You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

Application Questions

- What parable most resonates with you? Why?
- What do you sense Jesus is asking you to do?