

## Message #13

## Mark 4:21-34

Jesus' ministry was one of preaching and teaching. But at this point He changed His tactics to using parables to teach. Now a parable is teaching that uses comparisons and analogies to make a point. It is different from a type. A type is some comparison that requires an antitype to make the point. A parable contains the truth within itself. **A critical key to understanding the parable is that there is a need for someone who knows what it means to accurately interpret it.**

Keep in mind that hundreds of people are following Jesus Christ and He is not going to let everybody tap into the wonderful instruction He is presenting. In fact, Jesus specifically said that He was speaking in parables so that those not in a right relationship with Jesus Christ could not understand (Mark 4:11-12). **So what we may conclude is that Jesus purposely hid or veiled the meaning and true interpretation of these parables to many in Israel so they would not understand them.**

In fact, we may observe from **verse 34** that Jesus carefully explained and interpreted everything “privately” to His own disciples.

Now I actually think that this principle is still true today. Years ago, when I went to school, Mr. Miles taught many things about these parables in his doctrine and theology classes. Now I had read the Bible and I had read the parables, but I did not get the meaning of them or the full picture of them until he opened them up. He said that he had the same thing happen to him when Dr. Chafer taught him. So there is still a sense in which these parables are tricky and require careful observation and explanation. What we learn here is this:

**JESUS TAUGHT MANY THINGS ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD AND THE WORK OF GOD IN PARABLES, BUT HE ONLY GAVE AN ACCURATE KINGDOM EXPLANATION AND INTERPRETATION PRIVATELY TO HIS OWN DISCIPLES.**

Last time we examined the parable of the sower. That parable was designed to teach that our job is to sow the seed of the Word of God and when we do that, there will be various responses to the Word of God. The first parable taught us that only 25% of those who hear the Word actually take it seriously (Mark 4:3-20). According to Christ's numbers, only one in four of all those who are religious are actually serious about understanding and applying the Word of God.

Now in this parabolic section, Jesus is going to reveal other significant truths about the Word of God and the “kingdom of God.”

This is how the kingdom of God is operating on the earth at the present time and these parables are about what the disciples needed to be doing in view of the coming kingdom. The invitation to hear and understand the parables is given to “anyone who has ears to hear” (v. 23).

Now in this section there are three more parables that are designed to elaborate more on what God is doing at the present time:

**PARABLE #1 – The parable of the lamp. 4:21-25**

**The parable of the lamp is designed to teach that the responsibility of the disciple is to sow the truth and shine the truth, not hide the truth.** Even though only 25% get it, it is still our job to communicate the truth. Truth is not to be hidden, it is to be communicated.

Now Jesus begins with two rhetorical questions in **verse 21**. The first question expects a “no” answer and the second question expects a “yes” answer. The lamp is not brought out to be put under a basket or bed. It is brought out to be put on a lampstand.

Now the lamp did not initially look fancy. It was a small clay dish with a spout with fabric and a wick. The clay pot was filled with oil and the wick was lit and radiated the light. The reason you have a lamp is not to hide it under a basket, but to put it on a lampstand so it will shine forth the light.

Now the original light or lamp, which came into this world, was Jesus Christ. When He came the first time He didn’t look to impressive. He brought a kingdom “light” message to Israel that communicated to her that He could forgive sins and get her into the kingdom.

**Verse 22** says there will come a time when everything will be revealed about this kingdom. There will come a time when everything will be revealed and everything will come to light and it is the job of the disciple to communicate that. It is critical that they herald the truth to the world.

**Verse 22** explains that when the light shines forth everything is going to be revealed. When light is hid there are secret things and dark things that are hidden. But when the light shines forth, everything is exposed. All truth about everything and everyone will be revealed and our job is to communicate that truth. **The truth of the Word of God exposes everything. It is critical that the Word of God be proclaimed because this is what exposes everything.**

**People need to be taught this. There will come a day when every dark, sinful thing we have ever done will be exposed by the Word of God and the only way to have our sins forgiven is by faith in Jesus Christ. We need to communicate the truth of this to people.**

Now the challenge of **verse 23** may mean that “everyone should listen and respond to this message of Jesus Christ,” or it may mean “those who have been given insight by God need to listen and understand this.” In other words, people who are right with God and know the truth are responsible to communicate that truth.

**Now verse 24 explains that it is critical that you take care as to what you listen to.** We have a serious responsibility to carefully listen to accurate instruction from the Word of God. Our growth is contingent upon this.

The degree to which we listen to the truth will be the degree of our profitability. The way we give serious attention to the Word of God will determine how much knowledge we actually gain. If one listens to the whole counsel of God and communicates that, then you will grow more and more. But one who does not listen to the truth of God will discover that what he has will be taken away. This is a strong challenge to pay attention to what we study; what we are taught, who we associate with and where we worship.

According to **verse 25**, those who carefully invest themselves and accurately listen to and apply kingdom truth will get back more than their investment. They will grow more and more and understand more and more. However, those who reject will discover that their spiritual blindness will only increase.

People right with God and in tune with the Holy Spirit love to learn the Word of God. They have a passion to know truth. But those who are not in tune with the Holy Spirit have no interest in accurately understanding Scripture and find it uninteresting.

This is a very serious warning about kingdom truth for our age. Many people think church is church. No, it isn't. You need to be very careful about what you are listening to, because your growth and development and eternity are on the line.

It is imperative that we are listening carefully to the whole counsel of God because it is our responsibility to present it.

The purpose of the Word of God is to convict, reveal and expose things.

**PARABLE #2** – The parable of the process of growth. **4:26-29**

**Actually the next two parables have to do with the nature and growth of the kingdom in response to taking in the Word of God.**

Now this second parable of the process of the secret growing seed only occurs here in Mark and not in Matthew or Luke. So if the book of Mark is not systematically studied, one misses this key point. This is a parable about the mysterious spiritual growth in the kingdom of God without any human intervention or understanding.

In other words, the seed is sown and the power to produce growth lies in the seed. Growth is not determined by formulas or techniques of men; it is a very mysterious work of God that is unleashed by the sowing of the seed.

Spiritual growth does not take place by man coming up with some slick formula. It does not come by following religious traditions and rules invented by men; it is a personal thing that God controls. God controls real growth apart from any human intervention. We cannot make people believe or grow; our job is to carefully and accurately sow the seed and once we do that, it is out of our hands.

Now the verb tenses are intriguing. In **verse 26**, he casts the seed is aorist tense. But in **verse 27**, the verbs goes to bed, gets up, and sprouts and grows are present tense. So other than sowing the seed, all of the continual ongoing action of growth had nothing to do with the action of the farmer. He does not cause the growth and doesn't even know how it is happening.

The point is God is in sovereign charge and control of real growth taking place in the kingdom program. Our job is to sow the seed and shine forth the light of the truth. God is the One who is running things.

It is so important that we understand this. The growth and success of the kingdom of God is the sovereign work of God, not a result of our human actions, scheming or manipulation. Many denominations believe it is their job to do the harvesting. That is God's job. Our job is to do the sowing of an accurate communication of the seed of God's Word. The power is in the seed, not in us. When Jesus told His disciples to pray God would send out workers into His harvest, He sent His own disciples out to preach (Matt. 9:38/10:6).

It is like a man who casts seed on the soil (**v. 26**). He spreads the seed and then goes to bed at night and gets up the next day and the seed is just growing and the man can't even figure out how it is happening (**v. 27**). The soil is producing crops "by itself" (**v. 28**).

He is not responsible for it; God is. His job is to sow the seed and then God decides the growth. The farmer's job is to confidently trust that the growth will occur. The farmer cannot force the growth, but he can wait for harvest time.

Now the harvest time would be the time when Jesus Christ would come back to establish His kingdom. That ultimate moment is described in Revelation 14:14-15 and Revelation 19:11-21. **The job of the faithful believer is to shine forth the truth and sow the seed and wait for God to do His harvesting work.**

So it is in our relationship with God and in our own growth. God produces the growth and He gets the glory and when the crop reaches maturity, it is harvested. The key to growth is the seed=the Word.

The kingdom of God is a mysterious kingdom that will grow over time. It will grow until harvest time and then the harvest will come. Man does not cause the growth; God does and in the end God will harvest His crop. Our job is to consistently sow seed and let God work and He will bear fruit in His time.

**PARABLE #3** – The parable of the small mustard seed that has unusual growth. **4:30-34**

Keep in mind the context; huge numbers are following Jesus Christ in Galilee. In fact, Josephus claimed that there were about 3 million people in Galilee. But of the thousands following Christ, only a handful, so to speak, actually believed in Him.

Now the third parable is also about growth. It is about an odd form of growth. Some have said this is about good growth, but others suggest this is about evil growth.

The point of this is that the kingdom of God will start out small and it will grow larger and larger and become monstrous in size and eventually it will be infiltrated by birds.

A mustard seed is about the size of a grain of sand. A tiny speck of a mustard seed grows into becoming one of the largest shrubs that stands six to over ten feet high. In fact, it eventually gets so large that it is infiltrated by birds.

**The noun “birds” refers to wild birds and in the immediate parabolic context, it is the same word used in verse 4 which is identified as being the demonic forces of Satan (v. 15).** The point is when it comes to religion things will become monstrous and wild. Demons will infiltrate the church and religion.

Dr. Chafer gives an excellent interpretation of this parable: “The very small beginning in the early days of the church has developed out of all due proportion in mere members and includes all professing Christendom. The great tree now shelters even the birds of the air. It is significant that the birds of the first parable are represented as catching away the good seed” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 5, p. 352). In other words, as we near harvest time, many evil and corrupt things will infiltrate churches.

The fact is those who are truly right with God and truly love the Word of God are like the small mustard seed. They are smaller than all the religious seeds that are sown upon the soil.

The point of the parable is teaching that until harvest time the religious world will grow and grow and will eventually become something God never intended it to become. It will become a big conglomeration infiltrated by evil and corrupt birds.

Do we not see this happening today? Do we not see churches being infiltrated by bizarre things? Satan and his forces are at work in the world of religion and religion is flourishing.

But real love for the Word of God is lacking. What do we do? What is our job? Our job is to sow the seed by shining forth the truth of the Word of God.

God will do His work with His Word. He will harvest the crop. Our job is to shine forth the truth and may God help us to do that.