

## “The Parable of the Sower – Part 1 - Illumination”

Mark 4:1-20

(Preached at Trinity, March 17, 2010)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we enter **Chapter 4** we find one of the most familiar of our Lord's parables – the Parable of the Sower.  
**Verses 1-3** set the stage. The scene is similar to what we saw in **Chapter 3**  
**Mark 3:9** - “And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him.”
2. We are told that once again a great multitude have gathered to hear Jesus. There were so many that Jesus had to speak from a boat anchored off shore. You can imagine the silence of this huge crowd as they listened intently to the words of Jesus.
3. In **Verse 2** Mark tells us that Jesus deliberately spoke in parables.<sup>39</sup>  
An important genre of the Gospels is the parables. Jesus spoke often using parables. Mark says here that Jesus taught them many things using parables.  
With parables Jesus taught the nature of the Kingdom and the mysteries of the Gospel.
4. This is the first parable we've come to in the Gospel of Mark. We need to pause just a moment to further understand the nature of parables?
  - A. A parable is not the same thing as an allegory.  
In general it could be said that a parable is a simile extended into a story.  
Remember, a simile is a figure of speech where two things are compared using the words like or as.  
Our Lord's parables usually began, “The Kingdom of heaven is like. . .”  
An allegory is a metaphor or series of metaphors extended into a story.  
A metaphor is a figure of speech where a symbol is used as a direct representation of something. A well known Biblical allegory is in **Proverbs 5** talking about marital fidelity.  
**Proverbs 5:15-18** – “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.<sup>16</sup> Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, *and* rivers of waters in the streets.<sup>17</sup> Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.<sup>18</sup> Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”
  - B. Where an allegory may contain many symbols a parable is usually characterized as teaching a specific truth.
    - a. Although we can glean various theological truths from a parable its primary design was always to teach one primary truth.
    - b. There may be several elements to the parable but they point to the one specific truth

5. Why did Christ speak in parables? The simple answer: to conceal and to reveal
- A. On one hand you might think the parables were stories told in a manner that would be easily understood. They seem simple and interesting. They deal with realities of daily life that we can identify with.
- But while it may seem that the parables were used for clarification they were actually used to veil the truth – **see verses 10-12**
1. Jesus was quoting from **Isaiah 6**  
**Isaiah 6:8-10** – “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. <sup>9</sup> And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”
  2. For the lost the parables were given to conceal – To veil the truth from those not willing to see it.
  3. For them, the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10 will be fulfilled
- B. For the elect...
1. They are used for illustration sake to explain hidden mysteries
  2. They help open the mind of God to our weakness of mind
  3. They cause us to dig deep into His storehouse of treasure
    - a. We must be studious in digging & learning of the mysteries of God
    - b. To those who have, more shall be given – Verse 12
  4. **Matthew 13:16** – “But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”  
 The prophets longed for, searched for these things

This tells us several things about God’s revelation of Himself to men

- I. God’s revelation of Himself is essential for salvation
- A. The Gospel demands receiving the facts of the Gospel
1. The facts are perspicuous or understandable
  2. Some of the most mentally simple people have embraced Christ
  3. Children can understand the Gospel to the saving of their souls
  4. In fact worldly wisdom is wholly insufficient in understanding the Gospel  
**Matthew 11:25** – “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:19** – “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”
- B. Sin has left human beings totally blind to the things of God
1. The unbeliever cannot receive nor understand the testimony of Scripture.  
 He has no spiritual discernment  
**John 8:43** – “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.”

**1 Corinthians 2:14** – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

2. All truth must be applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth  
**John 14:26** – "But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."  
**John 15:26** – "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:"  
**John 16:13** – "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."
  3. We cannot know the deep things of God unless He reveals them externally through His Word and internally by enlightening our minds.
    - a. External revelation comes through the Word of God. God's Word is essential in revealing the truth necessary for salvation
    - b. Internal revelation is called enlightening or illumination  
God takes His Word and enables us to understand the spiritual truths.
- C. This illumination demands regeneration or the new birth
1. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again”  
**John 3:3-8** – "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
    - a. The word “see” is from the Greek word ὅραω - perceive, understand, recognize; experience;
    - b. In other words, without the new birth a man will have no understanding of the hidden wisdom of God
  2. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones* - The Holy Spirit "takes His own Word, He illuminates it, and takes our minds and enlightens them, and we are thus made receptive to the Word."
  3. Without this illumination a man will only become religious but it will be a religion void of spiritual power  
**2 Timothy 3:5-7** – "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. <sup>6</sup> For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, <sup>7</sup> Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."
  4. This is the issue we will find in the Parable of the Sower

II. God's revelation of Himself is particular

A. This Divine illumination is given according to God's Sovereignty

**Mark 4:11** – “And 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.”

1. According to God's sovereignty and purpose there are millions of people who live and die and never hear the gospel.
2. For 2000 years before Christ the heathen nations never had access to the Word of God. There are still many in the far reaches of the world today who have never heard the gospel. God is particular to whom He reveals Himself
3. There are millions in our generation who hear and yet continue in unbelief? They have access to the external revelation, yet they are void of inner illumination.

**Matthew 11:25-27** – “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.”

4. God reveals Himself to the elect. Paul prayed for the Christians at Ephesus

**Ephesians 1:18** – “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,”

B. Not only is illumination granted to the elect, it is withheld from unbelievers in judicial judgment

**Ephesians 4:18** – “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:”

1. Mark stresses the judicial aspect to their hardness

**Mark 4:11-12** – “And 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: <sup>12</sup> That 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.”

2. God in judgment has given them up to the blindness of their hearts –

- a. For the hard-hearted God gives them over the hardness of their hearts.

**Romans 1:21-22** – “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,”

- b. Because they do not make good use of the knowledge they have even that which they have will be taken away

**Matthew 13:12-13** – “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.<sup>13</sup> Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.”

**2 Timothy 3:7** – “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

- 3. As human beings continue to harden their own hearts God continues to harden their hearts

**Romans 9:18** – “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

#### Conclusion:

1. God’s sovereignty in no way limits our responsibility. We find that Pharaoh hardened his heart and God hardened his heart.

**Exodus 8:15** – “But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.”

**Exodus 8:32** – “And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.”

**Exodus 9:34** – “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.”

**Exodus 9:12** – “And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.”

**Exodus 10:1** – “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him.”

**Exodus 10:20** – “But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.”

2. As we continue in rebellion against God our hearts become more and more hardened and God give us over more and more to our corruption.

Today is the day of salvation.

<sup>NAS</sup> **Hebrews 3:15** – “while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."

**Mark 4:9** – “And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”