


WEEK 26



Mark 4:1-34
The Mystery of the Kingdom
In Four Parables

Four Kingdom Parables | 4:1-34

- *Apart from the Olivet Discourse (13:3-37), these four parables (4:1-34) constitute the largest grouping of Jesus' teaching in Mark.*
- *These include parables disclose the character of the Kingdom illustrated as sowing, growing and harvesting –*
 - *The Sower 4:3-20*
 - *The Lamp 4:21-25*
 - *The Growth of the Seed 4:26-29 and*
 - *The Mustard Seed 4:30-32*
- *The appearance of Jesus signals the release of the mysterious forces of God which will culminate in the recognition of the majesty and sovereignty of God.*
- *The environment is hostility and unbelief*
 - *Satan and demons, scribes and leaders, Jesus' own family, the preoccupied people*
 - *Against Jesus armed with love, mission, miracles and parables (?)*

Parables . . .

- *One of the most characteristic elements in Jesus' teaching (about one-third)*
- *Expresses truth in a concrete picture, rather than an abstraction.*
- *"To be similar or like something else" and is a broad, complex inclusive term –*
 - *OT proverbs, taunts, stories, fables or allegories.*
 - *A narrative in a parable is so understandable on its face that the true meaning can be concealed (as Nathan with David, 2 Sam. 12:5, or the disciples in Mark 8:16).*
- *In NT can refer to figurative forms of speech of every kind – Similes, Matt. 10:16, 13:33; Metaphors, Mark 4:21; Stories, Luke 15:1-32; Allegories, John 10*
- *A moral or spiritual truth is illustrated through analogies to everyday experiences. Some are short making a single point. Others are long with detailed interpretations.*

Parables . . .

- *Parables were told to . . .*
 - *Often make the truth more engaging and clear, Luke 15:3. They appeal to the imagination enticing the hearer to judge, then applying that judgment to them.*
 - *Sometimes used to make truth obscure to those who lacked spiritual sensitivity.*
- *Two levels (strata) are at play – the natural and the redemptive.*
 - *Parables reveal the nature of redemption that had previously been hidden.*
 - *The realism arises from the certainty that no mere analogy exists between the natural illustration and redemptive reality as both originate in the purpose of God. Thus, there is an inner affinity, not just an outer illustration.*
 - *This is why the created order "is like" the Kingdom of God." The natural life of men was intentionally created to be an illustration of the Kingdom of God. Contemplating one can reveal the intentions of the other.*

The Parable of the Sower | 4:1-20

- *Framed at beginning and end with a solemn call to attentive hearing (3, 9). This sets this parable apart as the key to the others. Hence the interpretation (13-20).*
- *The story is faithful to the reality of Palestinian agriculture, where plowing follows sowing.*
 - *The sower is not careless scattering the seed on the path or among thorns or on rocky places.*
 - *He does so Intentionally. For he will plow AFTER he sows.*
- *This is important to the correct interpretation.*
 - *Sowing is more important to the story than soils.*
 - *The Kingdom of God breaks into the world as seed which is sown.*
 - *The diversity of response correlating to the soils is not the primary consideration.*
 - *God is the central figure. Sowing the central action.*

The Parable of the Sower | 4:1-20

- *The climax is the glorious character of the harvest – some 30X, 60X, 100X.*
 - *This harvest is achieved against the background of many obstacles.*
 - *The emphasis is not on the waste of seed, but on the splendor of the harvest.*
 - *The harvest is glorious. The Kingdom will be glorious!*
- *Nature of sowing and reaping in the Bible, the law of the harvest.*
 - *You reap what you sow.*
 - *You reap in a different season than you sow.*
 - *You reap in proportion to what you sow.*
- *Teaches the relationship between the breaking out of the Kingdom and the end harvest.*
 - *Jesus is the Seed.*
 - *He is falling to the ground and dying (John 12:23-26).*
 - *And his harvest shall be glorious!*

The interpretation | 4:33-34

- *Why is the “mystery of the Kingdom of God” veiled in parables?*
 - *Only understood against the backdrop of unbelief and opposition.*
 - *A distinction is made between the disciples (to whom God entrusts the mystery of the Kingdom) and the unbelieving multitude (from whom the truth is concealed).*
 - *The revelation of God is only accepted or rejected when it enters the human scene. That acceptance or rejection is contingent not on the seed but on the soil.*

- *Two classes of people confronted by a single event, the revelation of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The difference is faith (believing).*
 - *Revelation + unbelief = revelation veiled (parables), no harvest. Here Jesus’ whole mission becomes only a parable, an enigma.*
 - *Revelation + belief = revelation given (secrets understood), abundant harvest. Faith precedes the breaking in of the Kingdom.*
 - *BELIEVING always precedes SEEING in the Bible.*

The interpretation | 4:33-34

- *Jesus cites Isaiah 6:9 - must be understood with the prefix “That it might be fulfilled . . .”*
 - *The context is Isaiah’s commissioning. His ministry will be where revelation causing hardening (specifically revelation of judgment and the coming Messiah).*
 - *Jesus cites Isaiah not to explain why he speaks in parables.*
 - *But to say he is “filling up” this prophecy, like Isaiah, in the context of unbelief.*
 - *It does not mean those “outside” are excluded the possibility of belief.*
 - *It does mean those “outside” are excluded the possibility of further instruction in the secrets of the Kingdom so long as unbelief continues.*

- *Jesus’ presence means the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom has come. These can only be discerned through faith as a gift from God. Therefore, Jesus’ very presence is a disclosure and a veiling; it releases both grace and judgment.*

- *Note that “all things” in verses 11 and 34 are either veiled or revealed based on belief.*

The Parable of the Lamp | 4:21-25

- Note first that the lamp “comes” to be revealed and does not “come” to be hidden (21).
 - The KJV translates Strong's G2064 in the following manner: come (616x), go (13x), miscellaneous (13x), variations of 'come' (1x).
 - Lamps do not “come”, they are “brought”.
 - “Does not the lamp come” indicate that Jesus is the lamp.
- And God has not brought near his Kingdom in the person of Christ for the purpose of concealing him. There will come a harvest day when his identity will be known to all.
- And the disciples who are on the inside are permitted to know not only the Kingdom but the reason for concealing (25). The hiddenness is in anticipation of the disclosure.

The NT concept of “Parousia”

- The future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God.
- NT passages
 - Mat 24:3, 27, 37, 39
 - 1Co 15:23
 - 1Th 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23
 - 2Th 2:1, 8
 - Jas 5:7-8
 - 2 Pe 1:16, 3:4, 12
 - 1Jo 2:28
- Precisely because there is going to be an unveiling that unravels the enigma and reveals the mystery, hearing with true perception is important now.

The Parable of the Growth of the Seed | 4:26-29

- *Mark alone records this parable.*
- *V. 29 The end of the world is in view. This verse reflects Joel 3:13 in context of God judging the nations.*
- *This parable clarifies the relationship between Jesus' mission of his first advent and at his second advent. His work at first was sowing. His work to come will be harvesting.*
- *But the time between sowing and harvesting is not insignificant, because in between something happens.*
 - *The seed germinates and sprouts by God for it is not by human intervention – “whether he sleeps or gets up”, and*
 - *It springs up and matures in a mysterious manner that almost goes unnoticed – “He knows not how.”*
- *The sower is ultimately interest is in the harvest but he does not fully understand it.*
- *This time before the final manifestation of the Kingdom is a time to be sowing, not a time for wasting.*

The Parable of the Mustard Seed | 4:30-32

- *Mustard seeds were indeed the smallest of seeds of Palestinian agriculture of the time.*
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- *All attention is focused on the contrast between smallest of seeds and largest of shrubs.*
- *This is concerned with the enigmatic presentation of the Kingdom as embodied by Christ.*
 - *It may appear characterized by weakness and insignificance – but remember the mustard seed!*
 - *The day will come when the Kingdom of God surpasses the glory of the mightiest kingdoms of earth.*
- *Mark ends by noting he selected illustrations of Jesus' teaching from a much larger body of teaching.*