

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark

Message 19

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The Rich Fool by Rembrandt Cir. 1627

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Jesus Explains the Sower Parable
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The First Shall be Last by James Tissot Cir. 1886-96

JESUS EXPLAINS THE REASON HE USES PARABLES

Mark 4:10-12

¹⁰ And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. 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: ¹² 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 (KJV).

Jesus waited until He was alone with His disciples and the twelve apostles to answer His disciple's questions on His use of parables. Just as God the Father revealed the knowledge of who exactly Jesus is to Peter (Matthew 16:17), the same holds true for the Words and parables of Jesus. Those who earnestly seek God will find Him. Peter was earnestly seeking God and He found Him in Christ Jesus. What Jesus is saying here is not an intention to deny anyone the Gospel. Many would exhibit hostility toward Jesus and God the Father as well. Those who did not want God and sought to malign Him would be denied access to the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God was a mystery in the sense that until the New Testament and the appearance of God on earth in Jesus the Kingdom was not fully known. These characteristics of God's *earthly Spiritual Kingdom* were not revealed in the Old

Testament. This concept is discussed here in Mark and more fully in Matthew chapter thirteen. This mystery concept came about as a result of the rejection of the deity and/or Messiahship of Jesus. The period of this Mystery Kingdom or seed sowing is essentially the Church Age and it was hidden from the prophets and now revealed to the people God as chosen. The basic “secret” to all the Kingdom parables is that God’s Kingdom had come into the world through Jesus by the Holy Spirit in a *spiritual sense*. This seed showing period was a precursor to the physical Messianic Kingdom, which will be literally on the earth for a thousand years immediately following the Great Tribulation.

Because of the disciples belief in Jesus they had been granted the knowledge of the Kingdom but they were not fully aware of all its characteristics and impact. Paul also affirmed this at the end of the book of Romans.

Romans 16:25-27

²⁵ Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,²⁶ but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:²⁷ to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (KJV).

Those who were blinded in unbelief exhibited hostility and just viewed Him as a threat to their existence. They rejected Him and did not ever come to realize the secret of God’s Kingdom. This mystery form of the Kingdom or the Spiritual Kingdom mystery would begin with the rejection by Israel of Jesus’ Messiahship (Matthew 12-13) and will end when they finally accepting it (Matthey 23:37-39). There are a total of nine parables in Matthew 13, Luke 8 and here in Mark chapter 4.

In discussing this with His followers he quotes the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah comments on the people of his day who were also spiritually dead to receiving God’s message.

Isaiah 6:9-11

⁹ And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; And see ye indeed, but perceive not. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, And the houses without man, And the land be utterly desolate (KJV).

Here God told Isaiah that this hardening of the hearts of the Jewish people would continue until the end of the Great Tribulation as he said.” *Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, And the houses without man, And the land be utterly desolate.*” The people had not listened before and they would not listen now. The Lord does not delight in judging His people, but discipline and refining is necessary because of disobedience and failure to acknowledge Him. Interestingly the people, upon hearing Isaiah’s message, become even more hardened toward the Lord. The same thing happened in Jesus first appearance and is

still taking place today as this is written in 2014. Such is also the case of the people left after the Rapture who hate God and do not repent (Revelation 16:9).

JESUS GIVES THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Mark 4:13-20

¹³ And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will you know all parables? ¹⁴ The sower soweth the word. ¹⁵ And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. ¹⁶ And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷ and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. ¹⁸ And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, ¹⁹ and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. ²⁰ And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred (KJV).

By Jesus asking them, “Know ye not this parable? and how then will you know all parables?” He was saying to them that only the Holy Spirit of God could illuminate Spiritual things. Paul affirms this in II Timothy 3:16 by saying that, “All Scripture is God breathed out by God’s Spirit.” Jesus is God and was “breathing out” Scripture as He spoke these parables. If one is trying to reach God and has a strong desire in that regard he will understand. Further, if they did not understand this first parable of the sower they would not understand any of the Kingdom parables. Jesus then went on to explain the foundational parable of the sower.

The farmer is not identified in the Mark account as Jesus by name but the “Word” is used to reveal who is giving out the spiritual breath of God in the form of Scripture. Matthew’s account includes Jesus’ identification of Himself as the sower.

Matthew 13: 37

³⁷ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man (KJV).

Consider also John chapter one where the Word is defined by the apostle.

John 1:1 &14

IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (KJV).

Once the Lord had been here and He anointed His apostles to bring the Word to the world, they became the next generation of sowers. Then each successive generation of genuine

Bible teachers also became the sowers. So the Living Word, the written Word and all those who actually teach the entire counsel of God are the sowers.

Now Jesus wants His listeners to pay close attention to His explanation of the Parable of the Sower so they can catch the meaning of all the parables of the Kingdom.

The “ground” upon which the seed falls is clearly man’s heart or his receptiveness to God’s Word. This is also implied in Matthew 13:19a, “what was sown in his heart.” In each of the four instances recorded in the parable of the “ground” or “soil,” that is, the “heart,” of the person is different. The first three are negative responses for different reasons. Only the last one is positive.

The first type of ground the seed fell upon can be identified as an *unresponsive heart* (Mark 4:15). The second can be called *the impetuous heart* (verses 16, 17). The third is a *preoccupied heart* (verses 18, 19), and the last type of ground can be called *the good, responsive, or well-prepared heart* (verse 20). The character and interest of the hearer determines the effect of the word upon him.

1. The Hard Ground (or hardened heart) is not conducive to receiving God’s Word so immediately Satan who controls their life takes away the truth of God’s Word that was sown in their hearts. They do not have any need for God and they only care for this present existence and can’t see past it. Many of them will not have any guilt over sin or need forgiveness for it.
2. The Stony Ground folks are very common in that when they first are exposed to a clear exposition of God’s Word they immediately show some promise of growth and continuance in walking with Jesus and studying to show themselves approved (II Timothy 2:15). They are usually overly enthusiastic about what they are hearing and comment that they have never heard such things before. Initially they have an over excitement. They don’t allow God’s truth to penetrate too deeply into their hearts and so their enthusiasm wilts and they move on to other interests. The shallow roots are their willingness to take God deeply into their hearts and follow Him. They might have some superficial understanding of God’s Word but when any form of persecution for it even criticism they leave feigning offense at the Gospel. All who follow God experience some form of persecution up to and including death. When Jesus said we must take to our cross it means just that. We who are truly born again will follow Him to death. The sun wilts their interest as the parable says. There is a religious experience of sorts but no salvation.
3. The Thorny Ground people take the Gospel in and it seems outwardly to take root, bringing salvation and a dedication to God as well as an exercising of their spiritual gifts. However, their worldly cares in this life crowd out any deep digesting of God’s Word and developing a thorough understanding of it. They are robbed of any guidance they could receive from God’s Word and His people because of their pursuit of worldly interests. Such hearts are preoccupied. They have no room for calm and earnest meditation on the word or message of the Lord. Should any such serious study and reflection attempt to gain entrance, it would immediately be choked off. *Jesus cites cares as the* constant anxiety about worldly affairs—namely, about matters pertaining to the age in which they are living—fill such minds and hearts with strong care. One care He cites is wealth. They might

say if they were only rich they would be happy. When they are rich they find they need increasingly more riches to bring about satisfaction, which actually never comes. In fact, the attraction that pertains to riches is *deceitful*. The, *desires for other things* is referring to inappropriate desires. Such desires or cravings are wrong either because it is a desire for illegal activities such as drugs, or for intimate relations with another man's wife. It could also be a desire to have a legitimate activity but to do it too excess. Therefor the desire itself may be appropriate but the level of participation in some activity *to the neglect of everything else* makes it inappropriate. Luke's brief summary: "cares and riches and pleasures of life" (8:14) explains that Jesus is thinking of sinful pleasures in this verse. Luke's explanation closely follows with that of Mark. Anything normally desired in the world such as possessions, power and status as well as pleasure, destroys the effect of the good seed of the word. The apostle John states, "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*" (I John 2:16). In the days of Amos outwardly religious men would ask for the end of the new moon so they could sell (Amos 8:5). In other words, let's get through with this religious observance so we can go back to getting rich. They would also sell by cheating weights and measures of grain. The Pharisees did the same thing. They loved money more than God (Luke 16:14).

4. The Good Soil folks have hearts that are neither preoccupied nor shallow. They receive God's Word and immediately get involved. They study and find a competent Bible teacher that brings them the entire Word of God. They don't wait for circumstances to avail themselves of clear teaching. They are God's sheep and they desire His Word. So they gain true understanding. They put the message into practice and bear spiritual fruit following conversion; love, joy, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control. They immediately get involved in ministry activities and tell others what has happened to them. They do not let any cares of this world stop them because the message of God's Word has sunk deeply into their hearts and they are driven to serve the Master in some capacity. In doing so they bring others in to the fold as well.

THE MESSAGE IS MEANT TO BE SHARED

Mark 4:21-25

²¹ *And he said unto them, Is a candle (oil lamp) brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? ²² For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. ²³ If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. ²⁴ And he said unto them, Take heed what you hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. ²⁵ For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath (KJV).*

In ancient Israel a lamp full of oil was meant to be lit and shine so that it would illuminate the room. Jesus was in essence saying that He was not intending to hide the Gospel from anybody. If He were doing that it would be like lighting a lamp and hiding it under a bushel basket. What would be the point? It is interesting that the Scriptures frequently

represent the Holy Spirit as oil and by lighting the lamp the Holy Spirit goes out to illuminate the world (Leviticus 8:10, 12; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 25:1-13). The purpose of the Kingdom Parables is to fully explain the Church Age Spiritual Kingdom but not to purposely hide it from anybody who wants it. It will be withheld from those who do not want it because they will not accept it. Jesus said, “ *For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.*” Men may try to cover up things, but in this they will always be unsuccessful, for God brings everything out into the open. One day whatever is now concealed will be revealed. Men think they can get away with their evil thoughts and deeds. God sees everything and will reward men for what they have done. We must be aware of what we hear in God’s Word for we are responsible for it. We must act upon it and be as the people who had the good and fertile hearts upon which God’s Word came. The religious authorities of Jesus day and many today do the same thing. They use religion to condemn others. We call this legalism.

What measure were the religious leaders using? They were using a law that they had made up themselves which opposes the truth. These types of leaders whatever they have will be taken away. Their self-law will disintegrate, and they will be left in darkness. Therefore if a person accepts God’s teaching now God will give him or her a share in the Kingdom when it occurs in the world and if one rejects His word then their share will be taken away which they might have had. The Pharisees of Jesus day were such people. They had the oracles of God and were the chosen people. But because of the rejection of Jesus they would lose what they had.

NEXT WEEK: MARK: KINGDOM PARABLES

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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