

In Christ's Discipleship Class

Text: Mark 4:21-34

Introduction:

1. This chapter could be called the parable chapter in Mark. Mark focuses less on the parables in comparison to Matthew and Luke. There are 7 kingdom parables in Matthew 13 whereas Mark only records three in his Gospel.
2. Review: What is a parable?
 - A parable is really an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. They were a common method of teaching in the East and there are numerous examples of parables in the Old Testament (e.g. Nathan's parable delivered to David after his sin with Bathsheba).
 - The word 'parable' means "something thrown alongside of" so it has the basic meaning of a comparison or analogy. Christ told simple stories based on the experiences of his listeners to illustrate Divine truth.
 - Someone stated that a parable was like a doorway. *"Jesus' listeners stood at the doorway and heard Him. If they were not interested, they stayed on the outside. But if they were interested, they could walk through the doorway, and think more about the truth behind the parable and what it meant to their life."*
3. This section concludes the main parabolic section of Mark. He records no further parables until Passion Week. Mark records two more of the kingdom parables and highlights Christ's use of the parabolic method in the training of his disciples.
4. In this lesson, we will divide the text under three headings.

I. **The Challenge from the Parables (Vs. 21-25)**

A. **A Challenge to Herald (Vs. 21-22)**

1. Christ now tells the parable of a candle and candlestick. This was not one of the kingdom parables but a simple illustration drawn from the very familiar home scene of that day to impress upon the hearts and minds of the disciples their responsibility to the truth they were receiving through His teaching.
2. Christ asks two questions that are framed in such a way that the answer is clearly implied. The purpose of a candle is to provide light. To light a candle and then conceal it under a bushel or a bed would be unthinkable. The disciples had a privileged position of receiving truth at the lips of Christ but with that privilege came a responsibility to make the truth known. We likewise are to:
 - a. Shine forth the light of *Truth* (the message) – Mark 3:21-22
 - b. Shine forth the light of *Testimony* (the messenger) – Matthew 5:14-16 ***"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill***

Christ the Servant – Mark Series

*cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see **your good works**, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

c. Philippians 2:15 *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, **among whom ye shine as lights in the world.**”*

3. The believer possesses the light of the living Word (John 1:4-9; 8:12) and the light of the written Word (Psalm 119:105, 130)

B. A Challenge to Heed (Vs. 23-25)

1. “take heed” = translated from the Greek word meaning “to see, behold”.
2. This challenge had been given previously to the whole multitude (Vs. 9), now it is given to the disciples. Christ appeals for spiritual perception on the part of His disciples. Hearing the truth comes with solemn responsibilities for the listener. They are to listen attentively with a view to putting God’s Word into practice. *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”* (James 1:22)
3. “for with what measure ye meet” = Christ used the same maxim in Matthew 7:2 to teach the results of hypocritical judgment. “Here it is applied to the reward for diligent effort. The measure of their diligent attention to the teaching will be the measure of the profit they derive from it.” (Hiebert)
4. “unto you that hear shall more be given” = God generously rewards the diligent hearer, the one who receives the Word of God with a receptive heart and a teachable spirit.
5. Light received brings more light; light rejected brings darkness. “Truth received and carefully assimilated enlarges one’s capacity to receive more truth.” (Hiebert)
6. Challenge: Is your Christian growth being hindered by your attitude to the truth? Submission to the light you already have is vital if you desire for God to give you more light.

II. The Communication of more Parables (Vs. 26-32)

Mark now records two more of the kingdom parables given by our Lord. The previous parable of the sower provides the keys to understanding the other kingdom parables (See Vs. 13)

A. The Parable of the Sown Seed (Vs. 26-29)

1. Reminder: The ‘mystery’ parables “all record failure and a mixture of good and bad. They portrayed the Jewish rejection of Christ that

Christ the Servant – Mark Series

was taking place and also the present church age that fills the period between the postponement of the kingdom and the inauguration of the kingdom.” (Phillips) “The time period covered by the parables in Matthew 13 extends from the time of Israel’s rejection until Israel’s future reception of the Messiah.” (Pentecost)

2. What does the seed represent? Answer: The Word of God (Vs. 14)
3. What does the soil represent? Answer: The heart (Vs. 15)
4. This parable focuses on the operation of the seed in the heart. We note several truths about the seed:
 - a. The *planting* of the seed (Vs. 26) – This highlights the work of the sower. After this point, there is little more he can do until the harvest is ready. Our job is to sow the seed of God’s Word and then trust the Word of God to do its work in the heart. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers, *“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”* (1 Cor. 3:6-7) We can plant and water but only spiritual life can come from God.
 - b. The *power* of the seed (Vs. 27-28a) – “of itself” The seed has within itself the energy and life needed to grow. Our English word ‘automatic’ is based on this word. It is translated “of its own accord” in Acts 12:10. This process of growth is largely a mystery to the farmer and is something outside of his control. The seed of the Gospel has life giving power. We can sow it with confidence!
 - i. Romans 1:16 *“For I am not ashamed...”*
 - ii. Colossians 1:5-6 *“For the hope which is laid up for you...”*
 - c. The *progression* of the seed (Vs. 28b-29) – This highlights the principle of time. Patience is required on the part of the sower. An important factor to bear in mind with soul-winning! The growth of the seed is in stages.

B. The Parable of the Small Seed (Vs. 30-32)

1. The Lord’s question (Vs. 30)
2. The Lord’s explanation (Vs. 31-32)
 - a. “mustard seed” = refers to a common mustard-tree grown in Palestine about the size of a grain of sand.
 - b. “The smallness of the seed is emphasized to help show the greatness of the contrast between the seed and the size of the tree it produces.” (Butler)
 - c. “Palestinian mustard trees sometimes grow to a height of ten to fifteen feet or more.” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary)
 - d. This parable pictures the kingdom starting from something very small and then growing into something very large.

Christ the Servant – Mark Series

- e. It pictures the success and growth of the Gospel as well as its corruption by evil. The “fowls of the air” are identified in the parable of the sower as representing Satan. This interpretation is consistent with what we see in church history in the church age as well as other clear Scriptures that predict great corruption and departure from the faith in the last days (2. Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1)

III. The Coaching in the Parables (Vs. 33-34)

These verses contain the summary of this parabolic section. In the training of the disciples our Lord gave attention to:

A. The Maturity of the Disciples (Vs. 33)

1. “many such parables” = there were other similar parables our Lord used to impress these truths upon the hearts and minds of His disciples. Our Lord was a thorough Teacher!
2. “as they were able to hear it” = Christ gave consideration as the Master Teacher to where the disciples were at in their maturity and taught them accordingly.
3. *“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”* (John 16:12)

B. The Molding of the Disciples (Vs. 34)

1. “when they were alone” = Christ gave special time and attention to his inner circle of followers to teach and mentor
2. ‘expounded’ = to unloose or untie. Word was used of the solving or interpreting of problems, riddles or dreams. Christ revealed the mysteries of His parables to His disciples through careful teaching and instruction.

Conclusion:

1. What are we doing with the light we have been given? Are we shining it forth for Christ or are we seeking to conceal it?
2. What is our approach to God’s Word? Do we have a passion to learn and apply the truth to our lives or are we resisting the truth and thereby stunting our spiritual development?
3. Do we have confidence in the power of the seed of God’s Word to accomplish the work? Are we sowing that seed in hearts for God’s glory?