

Lesson 4 21 August 2011

Jesus Teaches by Parables

Lesson Scope: *Mark 4:1-34*

Lesson Focus

The setting of this lesson indicates that opposition to Jesus was becoming far more definite and hostile. This opposition was originating with the rulers, but it was undoubtedly affecting the multitudes.

As a result of this opposition to His teaching, Jesus resorted to the use of parables in an effort to reach those who were opposing Him. The purpose of parables or stories was to illustrate truth and make it easy to understand. According to verse 11, it is God's desire to reveal the mysteries of the Gospel, those things which were formerly hidden. He used parables to accomplish this.

The person who hears the truth and receives it will receive more enlightenment. But the one who refuses to appropriate truth will lose the understanding he once had.

Jesus' use of parables was definitely for the purpose of helping the people understand. In our studying the Scriptures we must realize the importance of hearing properly and responding to truth (Mark 4:23-25).

Another emphasis of this lesson relates to the response to truth. Many popular religions and churches today give little attention to this truth and don't emphasize that spiritual enlightenment comes through submitting to the Spirit of God and conforming to the Word of God. Also, a spiritual brotherhood is a great help to enlightenment and consistent application. A final challenge to us all is to continue in openness to truth. Only as one remains open to truth can he be assured of God's blessing and of eternity with Him.

Lesson Aim: To see the varied responses of those who hear the Word.

Theme Verse: *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.

Lesson Text

The Sower

Mark 4:1-3 ¹ And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. ² And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, ³ Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

Mark 4:10-14 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. ¹³ And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? ¹⁴ The sower soweth the word.

The Soil

Mark 4:15-20 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.

The Harvest

Mark 4:23-29 ²³ If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. ²⁴ And he said unto them, Take heed what ye 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. ²⁶ And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; ²⁷ And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. ²⁸ For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. ²⁹ But when the fruit is brought forth, im-

mediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

Mark 4:33-34³³ And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear *it*.³⁴ But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

Questions for Study

The Sower

1. What was Jesus' purpose for using parables?
2. What qualities are essential in the hearers of the Word so that the Word can have a good effect?

The Soil

3. Why is Satan able to take away the Word that was sown in the hearts of those by the wayside?
4. Is it possible to receive the Word too quickly? Explain.
5. How can we avoid allowing the cares of this life to choke out the Word?

The Harvest

6. What are some principles about hearing (Mark 4:23-25)?
7. What is miraculous about the growth of the Word in the heart?
8. What determines how one is able to receive the Word (Mark 4:33)?

Analyzing the Passage

The word parable comes from a root word meaning "to throw alongside." The place of parables in Jesus' teaching becomes clear as we compare the Gospel accounts. Matthew 13:10-17 indicates that Jesus used parables to help those who were hardening their hearts to the truth. The parables, or earthly stories, were used to capture the attention of the listeners and to place spiritual truth on a level they could relate to.

Those who are offended (Mark 4:17) are ensnared or "tripped up." They have not become well rooted in their understanding of truth.

The parable of Mark 4:26-29 is found only in the Gospel of Mark. It illustrates that the sowing of the seed is the work of man, but the growth of the plant is the work of God alone.

Principles and Applications

The Sower

1. Mass gatherings to hear the Word are at times a result of curiosity and peer pressure (Mark 4: 1). We are glad when people desire to hear the Word preached. Whatever the motive for their attendance, the Word is able

to penetrate the individual conscience.

A personal response is necessary, however, for the Word to have a good effect in one's life. The parable of the sower indicates that, as the Word goes forth, there are varied responses.

2. The Word is able to reach the sincere seeker (Mark 4:2-4, 10-13). The Spirit of God drives home the same truth to various people with varied needs. The person who desires to know truth will always be able to find it. But the person who is ruled by fleshly passions can hear or read the Gospel and yet not understand.

The Soil

3. The hard heart resists the truth (Mark 4:14-15). When the Word reaches a hard heart, it cannot grow, just as compact soil does not support natural life. A resistant heart and Satan's snatching away the seed of truth leaves the wayside heart void of spiritual life. To be productive, the hardened soil must be broken up by submission to the Spirit of God.

4. An emotional response to the Word does not last very long (Mark 4:16-17). Even though emotions are definitely involved in responding to the Word, an emotional response alone is not sufficient. People must be convinced of their personal need and of the Lord's ability to meet that need.

When anyone shows interest in truth, it is well for others to encourage him, but not to unduly pressure him to make changes to conform to a Biblical lifestyle. It is very important for a person to think through Scriptural concepts. Those concepts must become personal conviction.

5. A singular love for the Word is needed to avoid allowing other things to crowd out the Word (Mark 4:18-19). When a person becomes too busy with the material things of life to give proper time to personal, family, and collective worship, his priorities are unbalanced.

A proper response to the Word will help one to relate properly to the cares of life and material needs. As we bring these cares to the Lord, He will help us remain single-minded in our love for Him.

6. A right response to the Word results in a fruitful Christian life (Mark 4:20). Those who hear and gladly receive the Word can be used as vessels in the Lord's hand. The natural result will be the production of fruit unto life eternal.

The Harvest

7. A person's will and understanding affect his response to the Word (Mark 4:23-25). One must let his ears hear. A significant key to understanding the Word is a willingness to do what one already understands (John 7:17). Conversely, when a person resists truth, he will lose even that which he

once understood.

8. The work of the Word in the receptive heart is miraculous (Mark 4:26-29). God uses men to present His Word. But only the Holy Spirit can convince the hearer of the truth of the Word. Even when we are not aware that the Word is having an effect, the Spirit is at work in men's hearts. Let us be faithful in giving the Word and leave the results with the Lord.

9. How we respond to the Word determines our future (Mark 4:29). There will always be a harvest for the seed that is sown. In the natural sense, a long time may elapse until the harvest comes, but the harvest is always certain. Just as certain will the spiritual harvest be, according to the choices each person has made in life.

10. The Lord speaks to individuals as they are able to hear and receive the Word (Mark 4:33-34). God is always faithful in revealing truth (John 1:9). May we develop a mellowness to the Word so that the Lord can continue to reveal more truth to us.

Important Teachings

1. Mass gatherings to hear the Word are at times a result of curiosity and peer pressure (Mark 4:1).
2. The Word is able to reach the sincere seeker (Mark 4:2-4, 10-13).
3. The hard heart resists the truth (Mark 4:14-15).
4. An emotional response to the Word does not last very long (Mark 4:16-17).
5. A singular love for the Word is needed to avoid allowing other things to crowd out the Word (Mark 4:18-19).
6. A right response to the Word results in a fruitful Christian life (Mark 4:20).
7. A person's will and understanding affect his response to the Word (Mark 4:23-25).
8. The work of the Word in the receptive heart is miraculous (Mark 4:26-29).
9. How we respond to the Word determines our future (Mark 4:29).
10. The Lord speaks to individuals as they are able to hear and receive the Word (Mark 4:33-34).

Answers to Questions

1. What was Jesus' purpose for using parables?

He was endeavoring to reach those who were hardening their hearts. By using everyday illustrations, He sought the attention of His listeners so that

He would be able to convey spiritual truth.

2. What qualities are essential in the hearers of the Word so that the Word can have a good effect?

The Word will benefit one who has a teachable spirit—an openness to learn and a willingness to obey the truth.

3. Why is Satan able to take away the Word that was sown in the hearts of those by the wayside?

The Word did not penetrate deeply, because the ground was hard and compact. The soil first needs to be prepared with prayer and a desire to learn.

4. Is it possible to receive the Word too quickly? Explain.

There is danger of receiving the Word superficially without sufficiently thinking it through. The principles of the Word must be comprehended so that they become a part of personal conviction. The teaching of this parable is not about a ready acceptance but about a failure to develop depth of commitment. Delay can be dangerous.

5. How can we avoid allowing the cares of this life to choke out the Word?

We need to commit our cares and concerns to the Lord. He is able to supply all our needs and work out all the issues we face. When we commit them to Him and allow Him to work, He will give us rest.

6. What are some principles about hearing (4:23-25)?

Each person decides to hear ("let him hear"). It is important what we hear (4:24). Deciding to hear and receive the truth opens the door for more enlightenment.

7. What is miraculous about the growth of the Word in the heart? 78

The Spirit of God works upon the conscience in a quiet way, convincing the person of truth. Even though the Spirit's work is not evident to others, there are evidences in the life of the one who responds positively to truth.

8. What determines how one is able to receive the Word (4:33)?

The choices a person makes controls his ability to receive the Word. We must respond properly to the truth we have received.

Research Guide

1. Read Scriptures relating to the conscience in Nave's Topical Bible.

2. Read in The New Unger's Bible Dictionary on page 961 the section "The Parable as a Means of Teaching."

Summarizing the Lesson

Not by Thy mighty hand,
Thy wondrous works alone,
But by the marvels of Thy Word,
Thy glory, Lord, is known.

Forth from the eternal gates,
Thine everlasting home,
To sow the seed of truth below,
Thou didst vouchsafe to come.

And Thou wilt come again,
And heav'n beneath Thee bow,
To reap the harvest Thou has sown,
Sower and Reaper Thou.

That, when in Thy great day
The tares shall severed be,
We may be surely gathered in
With all Thy saints to Thee.

—J.R. Woodford