



Mark 4

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Tape #8032
By Chuck Smith

Here in the fourth chapter of Mark, Jesus begins teaching in parables. Now there is a difference of opinion in the use of parables. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan makes quite a strong case for the reverting of Jesus to parables in teaching in order to continue to hold their attention, giving them truths, letting the truth come by use of the parable as more or less an illustration. We know that in many of the parables, the Pharisees recognized that this parable was directed against them. You really use parables to make your talk more interesting. If you see that you're beginning to lose the attention of the congregation, and it's easy to tell from up here. People start going, you know that you're losing it. And so if you are wise, you will start to tell a story. Once upon a time, and everybody, you know, what? They had accused Jesus of doing His work through the power of Satan. They really weren't listening anymore to His direct teaching. And thus, according to G. Campbell Morgan's opinion, Jesus began to tell stories in order that He might continue to give them truth and yet in sort of a subtle way, holding their attention with the story, and then allowing them to see but yet they did not perceive. Keeping their attention so they would hear, and yet they would not understand.

It is hard to believe that God would deliberately hide the truth from men if He wants all men to be saved. God is not willing, we know, that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. And so it would be difficult to believe that God deliberately hid the truth from people. But He put it in such an attractive way that they were drawn to listen, though in listening, they didn't always see or perceive what was being said many times until afterwards and then, the punchline, and it gets you. And suddenly you see the truth that has been illuminated by the parable. I find that Gail Irwin is a master at the craft of telling stories. He has a capacity of putting sufficient humor in it that you are just rolling in laughter. And while he has you just in fits of laughter, then he puts the knife in. He makes the point and you find yourself bleeding to death while you're laughing. But if you observe his method, great at storytelling but then the point comes home very vividly and very powerfully.

So he began [we read in verse one] 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 (4:1);

That is, in the ship just pulled it offshore a little bit.

and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land (4:1).

It had gotten almost out of hand. The fame of Jesus had spread abroad through Syria, through Tyre and Sidon, over in the Trans-Jordan area, down to Jerusalem, people were coming from all over and they heard of His power to heal. They brought all of the sick people and no doubt heard of the woman who touched His garment. So many were touching Him, pressing close so they could touch Him. They were so thronging Him that He could no longer just teach openly among them because of the press of the crowd. And so they got this little ship and He would be offshore just slightly, and the people there in the land. He would teach them from this little ship.

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine (4:2),

This is the beginning of the use of parables in the ministry of Christ and He begins with parables concerning the kingdom of God. I had a professor in seminary who said never attempt to preach on the parables until you've been in the ministry for twenty-five years. He said you really won't understand the parables until you've had a lot of experience. I disagreed with him and started out my ministry teaching on the parables of Jesus, I'm glad those sermons weren't recorded. I've come to see many things in a different light through the years. The kingdom parables beginning with this parable with which we are all familiar, it was in Matthew 13.

Behold, there went out a sower to sow (4:3):

For the most part, the people were an agrarian society. They were all farmers, even those that lived in the city had their little plots of land out in the country where they would go in the summertime and live in these

make-do houses where they would farm during the summer. And so they were all familiar with parables that had to do with planting, parables that had to do with taking care of sheep, and various types of herbs and so forth. So using now something that is so familiar to them, a man going out in a field to sow the seed.

And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth (4:4,5):

Over there in the holy land, the rocks--and it is a rocky place, even the fields that they plant in are just filled with rocks in many of the areas especially around Bethlehem—but these rocky hillsides are denuded of top soil. But there are these holes or little crevices that do have soil in them. And yet, they're only couple inches deep of soil and then it's just soil that's in these little hole in the rock or these little indentations in the rocks. And because the rock holds the warmth, these little places where there's a little bit of soil in the rock, are usually the first places where your flowers will bloom in the spring, the wild flowers. But they are also the first places to turn brown because there is no depth of earth and thus, it dries out very soon and very quickly. And so they were very familiar with the landscape and the soil conditions. And so "immediately it springs up because it has no depth of earth,"

But when the sun is up, it is scorched; because it has no root, it withers away. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundredfold. And he said, If you have ears to hear, let him hear (4:6-9).

Jesus so often used this phrase, He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear. Not everybody has an ear to hear but Jesus is giving the invitation.

Now when he was alone, those that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God (4:10,11):

You can know the mystery of the kingdom of God, that's for you.

but to those that are without, all of these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and yet not perceive (4:11,12);

They can see it, they don't perceive it.

and hearing they may hear, but not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them. And he said unto them, Know you not this parable? how then will you know all parables (4:12,13)?

In other words, here is more or less the key to the parables. You don't know this, then how are you going to know the others?

The sower soweth the word (4:14).

Now there is what they call expositional constancy in the interpreting of parables. Expositional constancy basically declares that where a figure is used to represent something, then there's this constancy that this particular figure always prefigures the same idea, the same thought. In other words, where the seed here is the word of God that is sown, "the sower soweth the word," so that the seed is the word of God. Thus, in the parables where you find the planting of the seed, it is the planting of God's word. And this expositional constancy is rather important in the understanding of parables because a little ways further, we are going to get the parable of the mustard seed and its growth into a tree and the birds taking shelter in the shadow of the tree. And as we look at the possible interpretation of this parable and its companion parable in Matthew of the leaven, this thought of expositional constancy is very important. So he sows the word.

And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; when they have heard, Satan comes immediately, and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts (4:15).

What was it that took the word? It was the birds that came, so birds in parables are representative of that which is evil, that which would take away the word, and in this case, Satan comes immediately, takes the word that was sown in their heart.

There is oftentimes criticism of mass evangelism, Billy Graham's crusades, criticism of the Harvest crusades, declaring that so many people go forward but not all of them remain. Many of them have an emotional moment in which they respond and go forward but so many then never follow through. I think that Jesus is basically pointing that out in this parable. You see, there are four types of soil upon which the seed

fell. Only one in four really brought forth fruit. Rather than being critical of the numbers of people that go forward, inasmuch as not all of them stay with it, we ought to rejoice in the fourth that do stay with it. Thank God, heavens rejoice over one who comes to true repentance. And so, I believe in these mass crusades. I'm thrilled to watch the Spirit of God as the seed is sown, there are those that do come forward, but immediately, they go back and their friends say, you went forward, man that's weird. Well, I just, didn't mean. And Satan comes to pluck it out and it's just a momentary thing, a momentary response but there is nothing that comes out of it. Just stops right there. That's the end of it as Satan comes immediately and plucks the word out before it has an opportunity to really even germinate.

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness (4:16);

You see, those that are just so excited, they're bubbling, they're rejoicing for a whole week.

But they have no root in themselves, and so they endure but for a time: but afterward, when affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they are offended (4:17).

No depth. No root. How important it is that we be rooted and grounded in the word of God because temptations are going to come. Persecution is going to come. There are some promises in the Bible that I hold on to and love and cherish, there are other promises in the Bible I am not too happy about. "They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12), now that doesn't excite me, and yet it's a promise. And so there are those who come in like a bomb or a skyrocket, but soon there are ashes, no root.

Then those which are sown among the thorns (4:18);

And this is the one that concerns me, I think, the most. Christians who come, who hear, who receive, there seems to be a certain modicum of development, but then they come to an arrested state of spiritual development. They don't die, they remain, but they remain in the same spiritual condition. I think they might be what Paul called "babes in Christ" where at the time when they should have matured sufficiently, to be able to take the meat of the word, they still are on the bottle, they can't handle more than the milk. They're looking always for those things that will excite them spiritually, spiritual kind of sensationalism but there is no real fruit that comes forth from their lives. You see them still in their carnal state as they are upset and angry it seems over something all the time in the church. They are not pleased, they want to be entertained. They have the itching ears. They want polished messages. Thorns, growing up with them, choke out fruitfulness. What are these thorns? These are they which are sown among the thorns,

such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire or lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful (4:18,19).

They are here, they attend regularly, but yet the divided heart. The cares of this world, the desire for riches and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things, just keeps them in an arrested state of spiritual development. They never go beyond that fact that I'm here, I'm still alive, but there's no fruit. These things choke out fruitfulness.

And these are they which are sown on the good ground; such as hear the word, receive it, and they bring forth fruit, [how glorious] some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold (4:20).

How glorious it is to see a fruitful Christian life! One whose life is just bringing forth fruit. A person who has God's love just radiating from their lives, the fruit of the Spirit just abounding in their lives. To see the maturity, the growth. There was a concern in the New Testament concerning the lack of spiritual maturity. The author to the book of Hebrews said, "Laying aside the first principles of the doctrines of Christ, the repentance from dead works, the laying on of hands and baptisms" (Hebrews 6:1,2). Let's go on into maturity. Paul tells us that the purpose of the gifted ministers, "some as apostles, others as prophets; and evangelists; and pastor/teachers; was for the perfecting of the saints [or bringing them into maturity], for the work of the ministry, building up the body of Christ: until we all come into that complete man in Christ Jesus, unto the stature of the measure of the image of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13). And so this necessity of maturing so that our lives begin to bring forth fruit.

And so it might be well for all of us to look at our own lives and ask, Is my life fruitful for Jesus Christ? Is the fruit of the Spirit coming forth from my life? Am I fruitful for the kingdom?

And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick (4:21)?

In other words, the purpose of light is to shine and to bring light to others. “You are the light of the world,” Jesus said, and in the Sermon on the Mount, “Man doesn’t take and put the candle under a bushel, but on the candlestick, that it might give light to all that are in the house” (Matthew 5:14,15). So your life, being fruitful, will be a light to the world around you. But if you are living as the world around you, if the interest of the world around you is the same as your interest, you’re so caught up with the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things, you see, you really are not shining as an example of the superiority of the spiritual life over the material.

For there is nothing hid, which will not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad (4:22).

Remember when Jesus addressed Himself to the churches in Revelation, with each church He said, I know thy works. That’s extremely probing. I know thy works. Thus, “there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.”

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear (4:23).

Again the repetition, if you have ears to hear, listen.

And he said unto them, Take heed what you hear: with what measure you mete, it will be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he has (4:24,25).

So if you have ears to hear, hear. But then be careful what you hear. And I think that really applies today. Be careful what you hear. People say, I like to be open-minded and I like to hear everybody’s opinion. Oh boy, are you a mark! People are looking for you. They want to dump their garbage into your mind. Be careful what you hear. Be careful. And be careful how you mete it out. In whatever measure you mete, it will be measured to you.

And then he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And he should sleep, and rise night and day (4:26,27),

that is the process of going to bed, waking up, going to bed, day by day passing,
and the seed should spring and grow up, and he knoweth not how (4:27).

The word of God planted is marvelous in that it brings to pass transformation and changes in our lives and we really, just day by day, as we’re receiving the word, those changes are taking place. And in the process of time, as we just are in the word, there comes forth that fruit. This is basically the whole principle of our ministry here at Calvary Chapel. It’s just the teaching of the word of God, the planting of the seed. And in time, time goes by, the seed begins to bring forth fruit. You look around and say, Look, isn’t this glorious? Well, this is just the result of planting and continuing to plant the word of God in the hearts of people. That unconscious growth.

Now, a seed is interesting in that there in the seed, there is the DNA molecule. And in the DNA molecules within the seed is all of the coded information to create a new plant similar to the one from which the seed came. But this life, the DNA, the information that is there, of producing new life and this form of life, whether it be a beautiful flower or whether it be wheat or a peach tree, the seed has the coded information to produce. It is glorious to me that the word of God being as a seed has all of the information coded in it, when planted in your heart, to make you like Jesus. And as the word of God comes in, there is that transforming power of the word and you are being changed into the image of Christ through the word. And so a man plants the seed, goes to sleep, rises, night and day, the seed springs and grows up and he knows not how.

For the earth bringeth forth the fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come (4:28,29).

And so the glorious harvest of the word of God that’s been planted in the hearts of people.

And he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it (4:30)?

I want to talk to you now about the kingdom of God. What can we liken it to, what can we compare it to? The idea is sort of searching for something now to give a comparison.

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in

the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and it shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it (4:31,32).

This parable has two interpretations and they are extremely diverse to each other. And this in Matthew is tied with the parable of the leaven, as He likens the kingdom of heaven unto a woman who had three loaves and she put the leaven in the loaves until the whole lump was leavened. And there is the first interpretation that the church would start very inauspiciously, very small like a seed planted into the ground. But over a period of time, the church's influence would continue to grow in the world until the whole world would be converted to Christianity. And this particular interpretation was a very popular interpretation by the more liberal element of the church who were advocating that the social gospel that they were preaching would soon bring the kingdom of God to the earth. That Jesus will not come to establish the kingdom, but the kingdom will be established through the church. And gradually, the influence of the church will extend until the whole world is brought under the influence of the church in Christianity. And this has been a common interpretation of this particular parable through the years. And it is held by many Bible expositors.

But in holding this particular position, you throw expositional constancy out the window because leaven in the scriptures, the Old Testament, is never a type of something that is good, always a type of that which is evil. It is the spread of evil through the rotting process which leaven actually expands and spreads by rotting, and thus, became a type of sin. Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Luke 12:1), talking about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Paul, using leaven in a whole, in a parabolic form, talks about "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6). You allow a little evil into the church and it's going to permeate through the church. It should be noted historically that the church has not been a true witness of Jesus Christ.

When I was in college, one of the real difficulties that I had was when the professors would bring up the things that were done by the church in history, the killings, the wars, the annihilation of groups of people, done in the name of Christianity. Done in the name of the church. To me, it is interesting to note that it didn't take very long for the church to deteriorate. When you read the messages of Jesus to the seven churches of Asia which were written just about forty years after the birth of the church or sixty years at least after the birth of the church, less than sixty, in sixty years the witness of the church had so deteriorated that Jesus had words of rebuke, stern words of rebuke, for five of the seven churches. They had left their first love, there were all kinds of spurious doctrines that were being taught and practiced. They had a name that they were alive but they were dead. They were wretched, they were miserable, they were blind. That's in sixty years. I do not believe that the church has been what God intended the church to be. I think that leaven was placed in the church before the first century was even over and permeated throughout the church. And there is still much leaven within the church today, toleration of evil, that has a tendency of permeating until it fills the whole loaf.

My personal opinion is that what Jesus is saying here is not a pretty picture of the church's influence gradually permeating the world, and the world being converted to Christianity. As we said, "birds" in the scripture are used of evil and the birds in the shadow of the mustard would not be good. It would be that it shadows and covers evil. And such has been the case of church history.

Now that's speaking in a very generalized form, thank God there are the faithful remnant through the years. Those who have broken away and allowed the Spirit of God to purify and to work. And throughout church history, there have always been those groups, often isolated, often shunned by the major churches, where God began to work in the hearts of the people a work of His Holy Spirit, a purifying work where they became established witnesses for Jesus Christ. But unfortunately, it seems that every move of the Spirit of God in time begins to be infiltrated by politics and other things by which the whole effectiveness of that move of God is stunted and God then goes outside and starts another movement.

It is significant to note that at the end of the messages to the seven churches, Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and if any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20). But He has been put outside seeking entrance. So in these parables, I see them as not saying that we are going to have this influence by which the whole world is going to come to Jesus Christ and we're going to bring the kingdom of God to the earth by this gradual, subtle influence for good that will permeate the earth; but unfortunately, there will be those influences that will permeate the church that will lessen its

effectiveness and its witness to the world. As I said, there are diverse interpretations of the same parable.

And so with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it (4:33).

Now go back up to verse twenty-four, “Unto you that hear shall more be given.” That’s a glorious thing of having an ear that is open to the word of God. The desire to learn, the desire to hear God’s truth. To you that do hear, more shall be given. And so, “He then spake the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.” He gave them as much as they were able to handle. At the end of His ministry to His disciples, in His final discourse to them He said, “There are many other things that I have to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now” (John 16:12).

There were things concerning His death and its atoning value for sin. They weren’t able to bear that. Everytime He talked about His death, they were offended, they get upset, they would just sort of turn it off. And so there were many other things He had to share with them but could not share with them because they weren’t able to handle it. It’s so important that we have an open heart to the Spirit to allow Him to teach us. It is our prejudices and preconceived ideas that many times close our minds to what the Spirit might be seeking to teach us of God’s word. And so if we have an ear to hear, we’ll receive more. More will be given to those that hear. And shares with them as they are able to hear it. God make us hearers of the word. Give us ears to hear.

But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all of the things to his disciples (4:34).

Publicly, He was now using parables. When they get together alone, then He would expound the truth of the parable to the disciples.

The same day, when the evening had come, he said unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side (4:35).

They have been around the area of Capernaum. And of course, He was in the little ship teaching. So now it was evening, the crowd was dispersing. He said, “Let’s pass over to the other side.” You’re at the upper end of the sea of Galilee, passing from Capernaum to Gennesaret on the other side is only a matter of maybe a five-mile journey in the little ship. It isn’t that far.

And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship (4:36).

He probably didn’t get out of it, they just took Him even as He was in the ship.

And there were also with him other little ships (4:36).

So a company of them started for the other side of the lake.

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full (4:37).

Two years ago when we were in Israel, there came one of these violent storms on the sea of Galilee. Waves ten to fifteen feet high began to crash into the city of Tiberias, quite a bit of damage was done at some of the beachfront hotels as the result of these huge waves that raised up in that small sea. The sea of Galilee is 600 feet below sea level and it is surrounded by mountains, the Golan Heights on the one side, and the mountains towards Lebanon on the other side. Because of the extreme temperature changes, you can get some very strong winds that come howling down the valleys and they stir up that sea and really make the water choppy in a hurry. And one such wind began to blow and the seas were raised. Great storm of wind. The waves beat into the ship so that it was now full, that is, full of water. It was now sinking, it was going down.

And Jesus was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow (4:38):

There in the back part of the ship, there was a little platform and usually a pillow and all and the Master would often sort of be relaxing back there. The helmsman was forward a bit so that he could see what was in front of them. And Jesus was back there asleep which was I guess somewhat of a miracle in itself. To sleep on those kind of seas isn’t the easiest thing for some people. Personally, we have been out on some pretty rough seas and I find sleeping very pleasant. It’s like the baby being rocked. But Jesus was asleep on a pillow,

and they awoke him (4:38)

no doubt panicked, and they more or less rebuked Him,
they said, Master, carest thou not that we perish (4:38)?

Aren’t you concerned with our plight? Doesn’t it matter to you that we are in big trouble? You ever said

that to the Lord? Lord, “carest thou not that we perish?” Aren’t you aware of our plight? Don’t you know what’s going on Lord? You’re just going to let us die here? There are many times that I had the feeling that Jesus wasn’t listening to me when I called. That the waters were filling the ship, they were times when I was certain I was going to sink. And somehow, I never did sink. He never let me go down. I’d been close to it, I’d seen the ship full of water, but the Lord has always been faithful. There is that testing of our faith and there is a value to the testing of the faith. How far are you willing to trust the Lord? How far before you jump ship?

So he arose, He rebuked first the wind, and He said to the sea, Peace, be still (4:39).

He rebuked the wind. The word “rebuke” there is the same word used of Jesus rebuked the demon. He rebuked the wind. And to the seas, He said, Peace, be still. And then He sort of,
the wind ceased, there was a great calm (4:39).

And then He sort of rebuked His disciples,

And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith (4:40)?

Don’t you know that working with those disciples must have been difficult for Jesus? They just did not always grasp the truth. There was much truth that they deliberately resisted. Even when Jesus was crucified, walking on the road to Emmaus with Cleophas and the other disciples, He said, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have said” (Luke 24:25), even at that point, they were still slow of heart to believe. After all He had taught them.

I would imagine working with those disciples would be just as discouraging as working with you and working with me. I wonder how many times Jesus just doesn’t shake His head and say, When are you going to get it? When are you going to understand? How is it that you have no faith? How is it that you’re panicking in the storm? How is it that you’re worried about you’re going to sink, you’re going to go down, how is it that you have no faith? Why are you fearful? And everytime we are facing those situations where we begin to panic and we get all fearful and upset, we begin to cry unto Jesus and say, Wake up, Lord, look what’s happening to me. He takes care of the situation but then He comes back and says, Hey what’s your problem? Why are you so fearful? Where is your faith?

Jesus expressed concern about His coming again. He said, “When the Son of man comes again, will he find faith on the earth” (Luke 18:8)? He expressed concern about that. Where is your faith? How is it that you have no faith?

And they feared exceedingly (4:41),

This is a different kind of fear. They now were awed by His power. You see, this is early on in the ministry of Jesus. This is before Peter’s confession that He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. At this point, they think that that’s a possibility, but now they’re beginning to see His awesome power.

What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him (4:41)?

Imagine speaking to the wind, Shame on you, stop! He rebuked it. And then to the raging waves, He’s saying, Peace, be still. And immediately the wind stops and there’s a glassy sea. What manner of man is this? He is the Son of God. He is God incarnate. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1,3). “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). More than a man. The Son of God. “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear. And to him that hath an ear to hear, more will be given. Those that don’t have an ear to hear, will be taken away even that which they have” (Mark 4:23-25). What a solemn, awesome warning. God give us ears to hear.

Father, we thank You for the opportunity of studying the word. Open our hearts, Lord, and our minds that we might receive. Give us ears to hear. In Jesus’ name, Amen.