

Mark 4:1-12 The Purpose for Parables

Well, today we are back in Mark chapter 4. Today we are taking, Lord willing, verses 1 through 12. Mark chapter 4 verses 1 through 12.

Remember the time frame, as the Lord's ministry went public He experienced more and more opposition. And the more opposition He faced the more private He became in His ministry to those who were disciples of His. Today we have a tremendous text that just opens up this whole area of the Lord ministering to people and people's hearts as we study the communication and circumstances surrounding the parables going from verse 1 through verse 34.

So we will be taking the parables of Jesus over the next couple of weeks. And He spoke in parables and stories so that the general public would not understand the spiritual truths that He was ministering, but it would come out later in His explanation and we will study that a little later on.

I can remember when I first received Christ the pastor of the church that I was in said that he was told that when he graduated from Bible school, "Whatever you do, do not teach the parables for at least thirty years until you gain understanding." Well, thirty years later, after he first taught the parables, he had to get up in front of his church, his people, and say, "Everything that I have taught you about the parables in the beginning was wrong." So he did not take the advice in graduating and waiting thirty years.

Everybody has their opinions and their interpretations and applications as to what the parables of Jesus mean. Well, the Lord says, **If you understand the parable of the sower**, that is the first parable, the parable of the sower, **you can understand all parables**. And that is very important. Next week when we get into verses 13 through 20, verse 13 is going to be the key to all the parables in understanding the parables. When Jesus says, **Do you not understand this parable?** and **how can you understand all parables?** So if you understand the parable of the sower, you will understand all the parables as the truth applies to each one. So this is very important, if not the most important parable and teaching of Jesus as far as understanding the working of God's Spirit and His Word.

So we begin at verse 1. Verses 1 and 2 is the circumstances surrounding the parables.

Verse 1 says, **And again He began to teach along the sea; and a large crowd was gathered to Him, so that He having entered into the boat to sit in the sea; and all the crowd was at the sea upon the land**. So you have this little amphitheater set up, where Jesus is sitting in the boat on the sea, and everybody else is on the shore. So that they can push Him out a ways, and He will not be crowded in by the people, and more people can fit in there on the shore. We know back in chapter 3 verse 9 is when Jesus first told the disciples to go back and get a boat and have it ready just for this type of occasion.

Verse 2 says, **And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching**. And He went on to talk about the presentation of the sower sowing His seed. So Jesus began to speak in parables. We saw that in the last chapter. In chapter 3 verse 23 it says that the more opposition came against Him, that He spoke to them in parables when there was a growing opposition.

The word *parable* means *to place or cast alongside of*. That is what the word *parable* means, *to place or cast alongside of*. That is just what the word means. How does it apply? Well, it means to take a spiritual truth and incorporate that spiritual truth into a story that everyone is familiar with. So taking an everyday story of events that happen in society, in the country—in this case farming. Taking a story that everybody is familiar with and putting spiritual truth into that story. Placing it long side of the story of farming. Not everything in a parable has to do with spiritual truth. Spiritual truth is contained in the parable itself.

Notice verse 3, as we study the communication of the parables running through verse 34. But The Parable of the Sower is in verses 3 through 9, the first and most important of the parables.

Notice what it says. Verse 3, "**Hear!**" Now most English translations will say *listen*, but we translated it *hear* because that is what the word **ἀκούω** (*akouō*) means. It is in its imperative form, which means it is a command form. So He is activating the hearing of those people who are hearing the word.

Look over in verse 9 in your study guide. When He got through with speaking this parable He was saying to them, **The one having ears to hear let him hear**. That is the same word, **ἀκούω** (*akouō*). So He is activating here. He is saying, **Listen** or **Hear**, and by giving that command those that had ears to hear could hear because Jesus commanded it to be so. So this word *listen* means *to hear* and it is the key to this whole parable. It is one word, it is what this parable is all about.

Jesus spoke this parable and He said in verse 3, the same as in verse 9. This is all He is talking about, hearing God's word. It is different than listening. Anybody can listen, but not everybody can hear. So you can have a church or a theater full of one thousand people who are listening to the message, but not necessarily hearing it. That takes the Spirit of God in revelation and spiritual form.

So he says in verse 3, **Hear, command. Behold, the one sowing went out to sow**. He is not talking about a seamstress sewing. He is talking about sewing or planting seed. A farmer went out to sow his seed or to plant his seed. **And it happened in the process of him sowing that some indeed fell along the road, and the birds of the heaven came and devoured it.**

Now we are going to use some examples here. In fact, driving out here to church and driving home you should notice that alongside of the road - immediately on the side is the hardpacked soil where cars pull over and that is the first of evidence of the seed here. Then there will be the next part over towards the field will be rock or stone with a little bit of dirt on top. And then you will have, at the fence post on either side of the fence post you will have the land or ground with weeds growing. And then on the other side of the fence you have the cultivated fields that the farmer cultivates. Jesus is going to use all four kinds of soil. We will see next week these four kinds of soil represent people's hearts. These are conditions of people's hearts.

So, It happened in him sowing that some indeed fell along the road, and the birds of the heaven came and devoured it. This is the part of the road where we would consider the cars would pull over—hardpacked, packed down. And if seed were to fall on that

hardpacked ground, it would just sit on the surface. Well, Jesus said the birds of the air just come down and pick up the seed and eat it. If you do not cover those seeds, birds will come down as soon as you are finished, as soon as you go in the house. Even if you are watering, you will get a flock of birds coming down just picking those seeds right up.

I can remember a time—and most of you know my profession in earning a living was a gardener. I was a gardener for over thirty-five years. But it is interesting, when I first started out I did not know a thing about gardening. And this one family hired me to mow their lawn, so I mowed their lawn. And then they said, "We want to re-seed our backyard, can you do that?"

"Yes, that is extra, but I can do that."

So the process of planting a lawn is that, first of all, you cut it short, but then you put the seed down, and then you put the top dressing on top of it—some manure or some type of top dressing you put on top of the seed—so that it covers the seed, number one, and number two, as the water that hits that top covering it pushes the seed down into the ground, but it makes it so the birds cannot get it.

Well, this was my first lawn. So I cut the grass short, then I put the top dressing down, not the seed first, but the top dressing down. Rolled that on and then I whirly-birded the seed in on top of the top dressing. And wouldn't you know it, birds came down and had a feast because the seed was just sitting out there for them. In fact, the family that I did this for came out and said, "Aren't you supposed to put the seed down first and then put the top dressing?" And I was like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, okay, I forgot." So I spent hours at that house watering in that seed and chasing the birds away. But you put the seed out there where there is no penetration or no covering, the birds will come and eat it, eat the seed.

So, that is what Jesus says here. The seed that falls on the hardpacked ground represented a hard-hearted heart where the birds come and take the seed, and we will see next week the seed represents the word of God in all these instances.

Verses 5 and 6, **And another seed fell on the rocky place.** Now this is not stones mixed with earth. According to the original text, the Greek text, it is actually a rock bed. It is a solid slab of rock as a foundation with a small thin layer of dirt on top of it. So, **Another seed fell on the rocky place where it was not having much earth; and immediately it sprang up, on account of not having depth of earth. And when *the* sun rose, it was scorched, and on account of not having root, it withered.** So can you imagine? You are driving out, you see this rocky ground soil where you have got some hardpack underneath, and you have got a little thin layer of dirt on top. Have you ever seen that in the street? I have seen instances in the street where there is a thin layer of dirt down in the gutter, just a thin layer of dirt and grass growing because seed had fallen down and into that dirt.

It does not take much dirt at all to grow seed, but it takes depth of earth for the grass seed to sprout its roots in order to last a long time. And Jesus said it does not have much root because it does not last very long. But there is great grass growing the little, tiny patch of dirt barely visible, but it grows quickly and then it dies out because it has no root. So you have to be aware of the outward expressions of excitement, and the more you see, probably the less depth there is.

We will see next week as we get into the explanation of the parable of the sower, people get all stimulated by all the excitement but have no depth in their heart, and so they flame out, they burnout very quickly. Jesus is making the emphasis on depth, and we are going to cover that next week, how important it is to have depth in Christ.

Verse 7, **And another fell into the thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it and it did not produce fruit.** So there is another kind: seed falling into the thorns. You can notice that right at the fence line. On properties either on the side or on the other side, right in front of the cultivated fields here all these weeds growing up. You can see all these different areas of soil and they have different kinds of content. Either the rocky soil, the hardpacked soil, or falling into the weeds and it grows inside the weeds, but the weeds choke it out.

Verse 8, **And another fell into the good ground; and was producing fruit while growing up and increasing, one was bearing thirty, that is thirty times more than the original seed, one bearing sixty, and one bearing a hundred.** One hundred times more than the original seed. Bearing a crop. Then you look out and you see the beautiful, cultivated fields. Those farmers—you do not touch a farmer's straight line—they cut the straight lines in the fields. Do you ever see them out there when they take all the efforts to level the ground, and cut the straight lines just perfectly, and see the fertilizing that goes on with helicopters and trucks and tractors, and all kinds of things to fertilize that soil, to make sure that the soil is ripe to receive the seed. Why plant a seed? It is so that the seed will produce fruit or a crop. That is the whole purpose of it.

Verse 9, **And He said to them, "The one having ears to hear, let *him* hear."** That is a command. It is activating. **Those who have ears to hear let them hear.** Not *listen*, but *let them hear*.

So remember that first word in verse 3, we translated it *hear* because it is the same word that is here in verse 9. Instead of *listen* it is the word *hear*. Here at the end of the parable was *let the one having ears to hear let him hear*. It is actually the parable of hearing, not the parable of the sower. It is known as the parable of the sower, but the whole parable is centered around hearing the word. There are four different conditions of soil, or hearts, that hear the word. The word remains the same. It does not change. It is the hearts that are receiving the word that are different.

So this brings us to verses 10 through 12, the purpose for parables. And if you have noticed, I gave you some explanation of what some of the things in this story tell us about spiritual truth and parables. The explanation does not come until verses 13 through 20. But Jesus just gives the parable, that is all He does. He does not explain it, He just gives the parable. And then, now there is a little intermission here that explains a whole lot, verses 10 through 12. Before explaining the parable He presents the purpose for parables. There is a twofold purpose for parables:

- 1) It draws out those who belong to Christ that have a heart to hear and receive God's Word.
- 2) And secondly, it turns people away who do not have a heart to hear what God's Word has to say.

Twofold purpose, to draw people who have a heart for Christ, and to cause people that do not have a heart for Christ to turn around and leave, and go away.

Verse 10 says, **And when He became alone, the ones around Him with the twelve** — so it was not just the twelve apostles, but it was the all the other disciples who responded, they came with the twelve, they came to Him and — **asked Him about the parable.** This is key, as we continue on. You see, they are seeking answers. They are seeking what He meant. The rest of the people were not interested. They listened, but they did not hear. The disciples and the twelve are coming to say, "What is this parable all about?"

Verse 11 says, **And He was saying to them, "To you *it* has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those, that is, the ones outside, all things are done in parables.** Interesting. In other words, and here is the thing that I am impressed with about the Lord's ministry, He presented the truth in story form. That if you have a heart for the Lord you are going to seek Him, to seek Him out, and find out what that means. So the Lord told the story and then He left. And those who had a heart to find out what spiritual truth is contained in the story and what it meant, they went after Him alone, with Jesus. They had a heart to go and hear more of the Word, to find out what the Word was saying. And Jesus said, notice in verse 11 again, **"To you *it* has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God."**

Jesus said *it is a mystery*, the things of the Lord are a mystery. The Greek word is the word **μυστήριον** (mustērion) and it means to have something revealed to you so that you can know the answer. You cannot know it by intellectually searching it out. You cannot know it just by head knowledge. It takes revelation from God for the mystery to become known. It cannot be figured out. It is a mystery.

The natural man in his natural way of thinking cannot understand spiritual things. In I Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14 Paul said that the natural man, the natural way of thinking, cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God for they are spiritually understood. They come by revelation not by intellect only. Intellectual things you can study intellectually the things about the Bible and spiritually not understand spiritual things. Intellectual things, yes, you can study intellectually, but again not understand spiritual things.

So Jesus said, **I spoke in parables so that everybody outside of Christ will not understand.** Did you catch that? Jesus purposely presented the parables in story form so that people outside of Christ would not understand. You see, we think differently. We think everybody needs to know, everybody needs to listen to me tell them about Christ. That is not the way Jesus was, and it is not the way He is.

Let us continue reading verse 11. **"To you *it* has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but to those, that is, the ones outside, all things are done in parables."**

In John chapter 6 Jesus told those who opposed Him, John chapter 6 verse 44 He said to them, "You are not drawn by My Father so you cannot come to Me." So if you are in opposition to Christ, then the Father is not drawing you. Jesus did not argue with people. This is not a religious argument. It is not a philosophical debate. **You cannot come except the Father draws you,** John chapter 6 verse 44. The Lord is not under any pressure whatsoever.

He said in John chapter 10 verses 4 and 5 that His sheep hear His voice. They will not listen to the voice of the stranger. So, Jesus went out and spoke in parables. Those sheep that were His are those sheep that heard their shepherd's voice, and they said, "I have to go find out what is going on. I have to go find out more," and they were drawn by the Father to learn and to receive what God revealed through His Word. So when Jesus spoke in parables it was to draw out those who had a heart for Him, and that was manifested by the fact that they came to seek Him. They came seeking Him.

But there is another group. Not only the ones that belong to Christ that are drawn out to find out more, there is another group. He spoke in parables so that Isaiah chapter 6 verse 9 might be fulfilled. That is quoted in verse 12 [of Mark 4]. Isaiah chapter 6 verse 9, **That seeing they might see, and not perceive; that in hearing they might hear, and might not understand; that not at any time they should be converted, and the sins be forgiven to them.** Interesting, "I am speaking in parables so that while hearing and while seeing—it shows a process of people continually being involved in hearing and seeing—that they may not see and in hearing constantly they may not understand. Jesus kept them from understanding the word as He is giving it.

Do you realize that Jesus spoke spiritual truths in a hidden way, in a hidden presentation, so that people would not turn and be forgiven? You would think He would want it the opposite, and want them to come and turn and be converted and to be forgiven for their sins. But Jesus said, "Not the people that have that kind of heart." It is only people that have one kind of heart, a heart to be receptive to the Word.

Now I am going to share with you this morning, just for a minute, of my personal experience in the Word and with dealing with people, watching God work in my life. There are two ways of knowing that I am supposed to speak to somebody about the Lord. Two ways that I know that I am supposed to speak to someone about the Lord, because not everybody is supposed to hear. We evaluate people and say, "Well, this person is not saved, I need to tell them about Christ." And we put pressure on ourselves, and we feel guilty, I should have told them, but I did not tell them. That is an indication that God's Spirit was not revealing Himself to them. Sure, they do not know Christ, but the Lord knows better than we do what kind of heart they have, whether they are open to receiving the truth about Christ. But there are two ways in which I know that it is Lord.

First of all, according to I Peter chapter 3 verse 15. It says, **Be ready to give a defense or an answer to those who ask you for the hope that is within you.** I know that the Lord wants me to share with people when they ask. And that includes being with people that know that I am a Christian, they know I belong to Christ, many of them know I am in ministry, but I do not share with them. They can ask. If the Lord wants me to tell them about Christ, they can ask and I will tell them about the hope that is within me.

But does that hope show? Does the person really know that I have hope? I like to put it that way, I do not like to advertise my walk with the Lord. I do not put stickers on my car or put it on my shirts or hats. Some people feel led to do that. I do not feel led to do that. I want Christ to show. If He is not manifesting himself in a way where people ask me, you know, "What is with you? You are different." Or, "I hear you are a Christian, what makes you a Christian? What is Christianity? What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ?" They come and they ask - that is the Lord making a presentation for me to tell people about Christ.

Secondly, is what I call free flow. And what I mean by that is that I can be talking with somebody and then all of a sudden it is just a free flow of words and sharing about the things of the Lord. Without human motivation, without human pressure, without human effort it just came out. I did not know how to say it. It was not human effort. It was the flow of God's Spirit. And I can tell is God's Spirit because, like I say, it flows freely about the things of the Lord.

I share these two things with you because it is not true that God wants a Christian to tell everybody that they come across about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not do that. He spoke in parables so that only people that had a heart for Him would come and ask. Notice they came notice alone to ask Jesus what the parables meant. And so we have the explanation here of the purpose for parables, it is so that people will not understand the truths of the kingdom of God except those who seek out the truth. And Jesus provides that by His Spirit to minister truth to us. So is that not interesting that Jesus put it out there and His teachings were in such a way so that people would not understand.

And we are so anxious, even striving to get people to believe and to get people to understand. And Jesus, He just put the truth out there in story form, and He just withdrew, and waited for those who had a heart for the Lord to be drawn to Him so that He personally could reveal the truths of the kingdom of God to them. He comes personally. It comes when Jesus personally reveals by His Spirit His truth of the Word and truth through the Word.

That is why we spend so much time emphasizing in our times together. Yes, we sing in worship. Yes, we pray. Yes, we fellowship. But the main emphasis is the Word, going from cover to cover, chapter by chapter, book by book, verse by verse, studying the whole counsel of God. I trust that those who are drawn are coming in order to hear more and to understand more truths of the kingdom of God. Even this morning, we see a truth of the kingdom of God. Jesus does not always reveal Himself to every single person. I can put a guilt trip on myself. I can feel guilty about not talking to people about the Lord but that is the Lord's work. He will minister to them if He wants them to hear about Christ. It will not be my human effort. It will not be my striving, my anxiety over what my job is for Jesus. It is all up to Jesus. We will study next week, again, that the sower who sows the seed is the Lord, not me. I do not sow the seed. We do not sow the seed in people's hearts. Jesus does. It is Jesus's ministry.

I can remember a time, and I will close with this story. I have told this story before of how I went to work for Ford Motor Company. And during the break time in the cafeteria, being a new guy and it being my first day there, I had my lunch, and I just kind of bowed my head. I did not make a big spectacle out of it, I just stopped, closed my eyes, and said a word of prayer. And all of a sudden the guys that I was sitting around noticed me and said, "Oh, you are one of those Christian guys?" I did not know that the Christians had a certain table that they sat at. I just went in and sat down. I did not know what the seating arrangement was at the time. So they began to mock me. They said, "Oh, you are one of those Christians, I guess, huh?" They were looking at each other laughing, and elbowing each other. And the one sitting across from me challenged me. He said, "Well, go ahead and witness to me. You are supposed to witness to me, right?" I said, "No, I am not. I am not supposed to witness to you. I am not going to witness to you."

"Well, come on, you are supposed to share with me about about the Lord, right, ha, ha, aren't you? Supposed to try to save me, convert me?"

I said, "No. It is not my job. It is not my responsibility."

And so, what is interesting—it ended there, at the break time it ended there. And the next day I was working on the assembly line for the cars and this same guy who was sitting across from me, with a couple of men in suits, obviously management, started walking down the side of the line where we were working. And I noticed them and I noticed who it was, but I just kept working, and they walked right up to me. And the fella, the worker, said to me, "I just want to thank you." He says, "They just fired me for being late too many times, and so they are escorting me out, but I first wanted to come and say goodbye to you." And I was shocked, I did not know what to say, which usually means it is Lord. I did not know what to do, I did not know what to say. He says, "Last night I received Christ." He says, "Now I know why the Lord had me working here." He says, "Your testimony of not giving into my taunts and my mocking proved to me that you have got the real thing. So I received Christ last night. I just wanted to let you know I got saved." And, of course, I am shocked. Wow. Is that what that was all about?

So here is an example of somebody who I refused to witness to, refused, to his face, and yet it produced him and the Spirit of God coming together and Christ saving him. And, of course, he went on—I did not hear anything about him after that. But I thought that was interesting, how God can save a person just by not witnessing to them, refusing to share the truth, because they are mocking, and they are challenging. They really do not want to know. So that was a testimony to me that it is all of the Lord, all His doing, in His time and in His way.

Let's close with prayer.