

Chapter 34

Mark 4:1-20

The Story so Far

Jesus' birth was very unique because He had no human father and prophets predicted His birth 700 years before it actually happened. Jesus is the long promised King from David and Abraham's families, and His name "Jesus" identifies Him as the promised Rescuer-Ruler. Jesus overcame Satan in the desert and so proved Himself as the final obedient Son who could establish God's Kingdom. Where Adam and Israel failed Jesus did not fail, but proved Himself as the perfect Son. His message was simple: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near". The reason the Kingdom had arrived was because the King was now here. Jesus demonstrated His authority as God's King through His miracles. He showed God's rule over Satan, sickness, sin and creation.

Objectives

- To understand parables
- To explain that these parables show God's Kingdom is here
- To convey the challenge of the parable

Connections

- God's Kingdom is here in Jesus

Summary

The Kingdom of God has broken into the world, like seed sown on a ground. Our response to Jesus and His Kingdom determines whether we understand who He is, or whether we are under God's judgement.

Parables of the Kingdom

Understanding parables

A parable is a **challenging story** that communicates an **important truth about the Kingdom of God**. Parables are not meant to be just nice stories – they are meant to challenge us. They are not stories about anything – they are mainly stories about the Kingdom of God. Parables usually have one main point but some can have two or three main points.

The parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-9)

Jesus starts and finishes His parable with the same challenge – Listen! v3. Hear! v9. This is one of Jesus' main points – “listen carefully to what I am saying”. The 12 disciples and some other people are very interested to know what the parable is about so they ask Jesus to explain it. Jesus gives a strange and difficult response before explaining the parable. But let's first look at the explanation – see diagram at end of chapter.

The secret of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11)

Jesus has given the secret of the Kingdom to His disciples and other interested followers. But what is the secret? So far in Mark's Gospel there have been various responses to Jesus' identity. Not everyone sees that He is God's King.

The people are amazed at His teaching and miracles (Mark 1:27; 2:12; 3:8), but His family thinks He is mad (Mark 3:20-21), and the religious leaders think He is bad (Mark 3:22). We have not yet been told if the disciples actually understand who He is. Not everyone sees Jesus' identity. This is the secret of the Kingdom – that Jesus is God's King come to set up God's Kingdom. But only those to whom Jesus decides to reveal Himself will see this.

Hidden identity (Mark 1:25, 34b, 37-38, 44; 3:12)

Numerous times Jesus has hidden His identity from people. Here again we see Him doing the same thing. Except this time, it is not by silencing demons, but by speaking in parables.

The parables as judgement (Mark 4:11b-12)

Jesus says that to people outside of His Kingdom everything is said in parables so that they won't understand His message. Jesus

quotes a part of the Old Testament written by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had been sent to rebellious Israel to announce judgement on them for disobeying God. God had repeatedly spoken to them and yet they remained disobedient. Isaiah's words to rebellious Israel served to make them more blind and deaf. They do not deserve to be forgiven. So whilst Isaiah went with good news to Israel – "repent and God will forgive you" -- his very message made them more stubborn and blind because they would not listen. God used His message to be the means of bringing judgement on Israel. Because they would not listen, God judged them.

The same is true with Jesus. He is God's last prophet – God Himself – sent to His rebellious people Israel to tell them to repent (Mark 1:14-15). He is even showing them miracles to prove who He is. But people like the Pharisees won't accept God's King and His message. Instead, Jesus' very message is bringing judgement on them. This is why He speaks in parables. He is blinding them even more, and yet for those who listen well, there is the hope of forgiveness.

God's choice and people's responsibility

There are two sides to what Jesus is saying here:

1. Jesus is choosing whoever He desires - see Mark 3:13. Jesus decides who to reveal Himself to. He chooses who to explain the parables to.
2. People are responsible for listening and responding to Jesus. We see this because Jesus says – "Listen! Hear what I'm saying!" (Mark 4:3, 9). Jesus' choice does not make people into robots. People still have choices to make. They can choose to listen and ask more questions. Or if they are too disobedient they will ignore what Jesus is saying. If they choose not to listen – this is God's judgement on them. Jesus' teaching will remain a parable to them.

A warning (Mark 4:13)

In order to understand other parables we must first understand this parable. If we don't understand that the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus, then we will not understand any of the other parables, because the other parables are all about the Kingdom of God. This

first parable is showing us that the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus and His message. We can say that this parable is an explanation of Mark 1:14-15. How we respond shows whether or not we see who Jesus is.

The Kingdom of God has broken into the world, like seed sown on a ground. Our response to Jesus and His Kingdom determines whether we understand who He is, or whether we are under God's judgement.

| Parable | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Sower | Seed | Soils | Harvest |
| A farmer sowed some seed | | <p>#1 – Hard soil Seed on path is eaten by birds</p> <p>#2 – Rocky (shallow) soil Seed grows immediately, sun then dries it, and it dies</p> <p>#3 – Thomy soil (weeds) Seed grows up, but chokes before it produces grain</p> <p>#4 – Good soil Seed grows and produces a large crop</p> | End of the season there is a large crop despite all the wasted seed |
| Explanation | | | |
| Sower | Seed | Soils – different responses to Jesus | Harvest |
| Jesus | The message that God's Kingdom has come in Jesus | <p>#1 – Hard soil = people who hear Jesus' words but Satan takes the word away immediately (Pharisees, Mark 3:22-27)</p> <p>#2 – Rocky (shallow) soil = people who hear and respond immediately but do not persevere during persecution (Sick who just wanted healed, Mark 3:7-9)</p> <p>#3 – Thomy soil = people who hear, respond, but worries, wealth, and other things distract (Judas Iscariot, Mark 3:19)</p> <p>#4 – Good soil – people who hear, accept who Jesus is, and obey him (the disciples who will follow Jesus to the end, those who do God's will, Mark 3:34+35)</p> | End of history when God's kingdom will be finally complete and all the results seen. <i>Note the contrast between the big harvest and the wasted seed.</i> |

The kingdom of God has broken into the world, like seed sown on a ground. There are various responses.



Think it through & discuss

1. Explain what each of the soils represents.
2. What is the secret of the Kingdom?
3. What happens to those who do not understand Jesus' identity and therefore do not respond properly to His message?
4. Why is it important that we listen to Jesus' teaching?