



The Parables of Jesus

Key idea:

Jesus often taught in parables to uncover the surprising mystery of God's Kingdom to those who would listen carefully and humbly respond, but the same parables hardened and judged those who refused to listen and receive His Word.

Key text:

Mark 4:1-12

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." ⁹ Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹² so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

Key points:

1. Mark 4 and Mark 13 are the two large sections of the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.
2. Although others had taught in parables before Jesus, He is the main person associated with teaching in parables because He did it so often and was the Master Teacher of the parabolic form.
3. There are five main things we should keep in mind as we consider Jesus' use of parables and as we try to hear, interpret, and learn from them:

- a. A parable is a story/saying that compares two things
- b. Parables are NOT allegories
- c. The main subject of the parables is the Kingdom of God
- d. Parables require close listening and thought
- e. Parables reveal and reinforce the state of the heart

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. When I think of Jesus' teaching, which passages of Scripture come to mind first? Why?
3. Am I surprised to learn how often Jesus taught using parables? Why do I think Mark stresses Jesus' use of parables so much?
4. Can I think of some well-known parables others than those taught by Jesus? How are they similar to His? How are they different?
5. When I have tried to understand parables, have I ever been tempted to read them as allegories? What is the danger in doing this?
6. Why is it important to keep in mind that the main focus of most of Jesus' parables is the nature of the Kingdom of God? What is the danger if I try to make the parables about something other than the Kingdom (unless Jesus or the author tells me to do this)?
7. Why does Jesus stress the word "Hear!"/"Listen!" so much in this chapter? Is that only relevant for reading parables?
8. What is my heart posture when I read the Word of God or hear someone else read or teach it? How can I grow in this area?
9. What distractions, habits, or attitudes make it hard for me to HEAR the Word of God properly? How can I let God's Spirit help me in these areas this week?
10. Who will I call or see to invite to gather with the church this week?