**Sunday, September 28, 2014 – New Heights Christian Church, Kent, WA – Micah Adamson**

**Mark 4 -** Jesus' Parables on the Kingdom of God

***Mark 4:11 (NIV84)*** *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…*

**Introduction:**

* **Overview of *Mark*:**
* Mark should probably be called “The Gospel According to Peter as told to John Mark” (2 Peter 1:15).
* The ‘messianic secret’ that Jesus is the Christ isn’t revealed to the disciples until the middle of Mark “Who do you say that Jesus is”? (Mark 8:27-29).
* William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker’s kingdom outline of Mark from *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark i*s King Jesus’: “Inauguration, Continuation, Consummation”
* 1 Timothy 4:13 – Good sermons include: “the public reading of Scripture”, “preaching”, and “teaching”
* ***Review of Mark***
* ***Mark 1:*** As the Son of God, inaugurated as the king of God’s kingdom, Jesus demonstrates His power and authority and calls us to repent and believe the good news.
* ***Mark 2:*** As the Son of Man, Jesus demonstrates the authority both to define and to forgive sin.
* ***Mark 3:*** As the Chosen One on whom the Holy Spirit rests, Jesus expands His ministry to more people and warns us not to harden our hearts or blaspheme the Holy Spirit.
* ***Mark 4*:** As the King of the Kingdom, Jesus defines His Kingdom as growing organically in ways that may be surprising to us. Jesus is growing His disciples even before their fruit is visible.
* **Intro to Mark 4:**
* I’m not sure why “The Sermon on the Mount” get’s an official title, but “The sermon the Boat” doesn’t.
* It’s not clear if all of these parables were told on the same day and/or if they got off the boat and back on, but the end of this story is Jesus crossing the lake and the next story happens on the other side of the lake.
* We get three out of four of Mark’s full parables in this chapter (including Mark’s only unique parable, the parable of the famer who doesn’t know how seeds grow) and then Mark rounds it off with a miracle as long as Jesus is in the boat.

**Body:**

* ***Mark 4:1-20 (NIV84) The Parable of the Sower* – God’s kingdom grows through the word**

***4*** *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!’”*

*13 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”*

* There are two reasons for parables, to make it harder for some to understand, and to make it possible for others to understand. Even this is part of the messianic secret in Mark.
* Jesus says that if we can’t understand this parable then we are going to have trouble with other parables.
* I admit I may be in trouble. Jesus explains this parable, but He doesn’t answer all of my questions.
* I hope you don’t think I’m cheating, but after thinking about it, I’m not going to try to answer all of my questions either since I don’t think they are the point of this parable.
* We aren't told who the farmer is (but God, Jesus, or any preacher, could be preaching God’s word.)
* Even what the grain and soil are is not entirely clear (People are compared to the combination of the grain on the soil, not merely the grain or the soil.)
* I’m going to read you the rest of this chapter before I come back and discuss this parable since I think the other parables in this chapter help me understand this story better since they are all about organic growth.
* ***Mark 4:21-25 (NIV84) A Lamp on a Stand* – God’s kingdom is for a purpose that will shine through**

*21 He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

*24 “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”*

* These short sayings are found in different places in different gospels, Jesus probably said most things more than once. Jesus spent days preaching and you can read all four gospels in a day.
* The lamp seems to be another example of the purpose of preaching. To light up the room. And like in the parable of the sower, in the end you are going to see the results.
* We get excited about quick visible growth (often caused by a lack of roots) instead of patiently waiting for slow growth that actually produces a crop.
* The truly hearing get more explained to them and produce more fruit than you thought possible.
* ***Mark 4:26-29 (NIV84) The Parable of the Growing Seed* – God’s Kingdom grows by itself**

*26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”*

* ***Mark 4:30-34 (NIV84) The Parable of the Mustard Seed* – God’s kingdom grows big from small things**

*30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”*

*33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.*

* Jesus is teaching in all three parables that growth in His kingdom is like organic growth, it happens slowly; often without us knowing how it is happening or without being able to predict the results. But, big results come slowly but surely over time, all because the sower sows the seed.
* Please note that these are a parables. Believe it or not, the inerrancy of the Bible has been questioned by respectable Christians and institutions because of Jesus’ hyperbolic statements about a mustard seed. From botany, we know that mustard seeds aren’t the smallest seeds in the world, and mustard plants aren’t the tallest plants you can grow in a garden. The ratio of mustard seeds to mustard plants isn’t even the biggest ratio of plants in the world. But, Jesus is speaking in a botanical context. There is an implied, mustard seeds are the smallest seed [that you guys commonly plant in your gardens] which turns into the biggest plan [that you guys commonly have in your gardens]. Jesus isn’t speaking scientifically, He is speaking experientially and proverbially. Remembering the rule of taking into account the context of the literary genre enables us to admit that there are smaller seeds and bigger plants without denying the inerrancy of the Bible (See the Biblical Council on Inerrancy for more details.) <<http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI.shtml>>
* You could also balk at the statement that a single grain resulted in 30 to 100 yield when the average is 22. <<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=93>>
* ***Mark 4:35-41 (NIV84) Jesus Calms the Storm* – Jesus is growing the disciples before their fruit shows**

*35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”*

*39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

*40 He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”*

*41 They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”*

* The disciples are only growing slowly. They don’t seem to be producing much fruit yet. They accuse Jesus of not caring about them, but conclude by asking themselves who Jesus is or what kind of a man Jesus is (implying that Jesus is more than a man, as Mark winks at us again as he keeps this messianic secret from the disciples).
* Notice that the disciples are more afraid after Jesus calms the storm than before.
* Notice that Jesus rebuked the weather just like He did demons and fevers.
* Jesus is demonstrating the same power over the weather that God showed in the story of Jonah.
* Jesus trusted God completely and slept through the storm.
* **The parable of the sower revisited:**
* I don’t know about you, but the first thing I wanted to know about the parable of the sower is if a seed sprouting is regeneration: I want to know if people who come alive spiritually can die again spiritually.
* It is certainly true that you need to be spiritually alive before you can truly produce fruit that pleases God, but producing fruit is what this parable is about, not merely being spiritually alive.
* I was tempted to go on a Systematic theology hunt all over the NT to answer the question of if regenerated people can die spiritually.
* (In case you are wondering, my conclusion based on passages like John 10, Ephesians 2, Romans 8 is that now truly regenerate person can die spiritually again, but based on passages like 1 John 2 and Hebrews 6 its possible for someone to be affected by the Holy Spirit and look like a regenerate person without being one).
* But, the more I study this parable, the more I think it’s the wrong question to ask for these reasons:

1. Jesus doesn’t answer this question in His explanation of this parable (one parable is not designed to teach us everything. It’s an analogy designed to compare a specific aspect of the kingdom of God to farming).
2. In this parable the end goal is producing fruit, not sprouting.

* Farmers don’t plant grain in order to feed birds, grow dry grass, or even green grass, but to grow grain.
* Some people point out that the seed is the word, so the fruit by which the plants should be judged is how much evangelism they do. Using grain to plan next year is one of the important things a farmer would do.
* However, farmers plant grain because they want to enjoy the fruit of their harvest, they want to eat it (what’s your favorite recipe with flour).
* God wants to enjoy the fruit of our lives in addition to evangelism (Galatians 5).
* So, if your first question, like mine, was what is the least amount of fruit I can produce and still get to heaven, you’re asking the wrong question.
* Instead, the question we should be asking is, “How much fruit can I produce for the King and for His Kingdom?”
* The thief on the cross teaches us that it is possible for some to waste their whole life and still make it into God’s Kingdom, but that shouldn’t be our goal (Luke 23:39-43).
* If you can live your whole life for yourself and still get into heaven, would you let your kids go to hell?
* God has designed it so that the next generation believing in Jesus is dependent on us telling them about Jesus. This is known as “the means of grace”.
* The sower in this parable doesn’t look like He is very careful where he throws seed.
* Doesn’t He know that grain won’t produce a crop if you plant it on the path, in the rocks, or in the weeds?
* Yes, but He know something more important, even good soil won’t produce a crop if it doesn’t have seed.
* It looks like the sower is willing to plant right up to the edge, and over the edge, in order to make sure that every square inch of good soil gets seed on it.
* ***Romans 10:13-15 (NIV84)***

13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

* George Whitfield famously said that we should preach the word of God “promiscuously” since we don’t know who will be saved. <<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/wesley.htm>>
* William Carry’s opponents and modern missiologists are in danger of denying the means of Grace.
* William Carry’s opponents said God could make people spiritually alive without preaching to them, since God can do whatever He wants. <<http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/giants/biocarey2.html>>
* Modern missiologists say that since God is so merciful He can accept fruit from spiritually dead people without coming spiritually alive through preaching.

<<http://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/2013/06/23/whi-1159-is-christianity-the-only-true-religion/>>

* I disagree with C.S. Lewis on some aspects of whether people can be saved without hearing about Jesus, but I agree with him that the means of grace are the solution if you’re bothered by this problem.
* C.S. Lewis said that objecting to the idea that only some people will be saved is a bad reason to not become a Christian, instead you should become a Christian to give the body of Christ more resources to work with in evangelism (Mere Christianity 64).
* What God could do, and what God has chosen to do are two different things.
* God can create things by speaking them into existence, but God has chosen to make procreation the normal means of creating new things so that seeds produce after their own kind (Genesis 1)
* We are dead without God’s intervention, but God has designed for us to come alive by believing in Jesus and then to produce fruit that He uses to make other people come to life (Ephesians 2).
* **What is our part in evangelism?**
* If all you had was the parable about things growing all by themselves, you would be tempted to think that there is nothing for us to do in Evangelism.
* But, if parable of the sower was all you had, you’d be tempted to think that the type of soil you are determines everything. Good soil people can be saved and produce God’s fruit, bad soil people can’t. You better hope you are good soil, and if you are not then tough luck.
* Jesus quotation of Isaiah 6 reinforces this idea.
* In Isaiah 6 God gives Isaiah a vision of His kingly glory that John 12:40-41 tells us is King Jesus’ glory.
* God tells Isaiah to preach even though God will harden the hearers hearts not to listen, which happens.
* It’s easier for me to think of God hardening hearts in response to sin like He did with Pharaoh in Exodus.
* In the Bible, God doesn’t take soft people’s hearts and harden them, He takes hard people’s hearts and makes them harder. The problem is that we are all born with sinful hearts that are already getting harder.
* In both Isaiah’s day and Jesus’ day, it sounds like God could harden hearts, which is bad news (and why we need to be careful not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit and seal the hardness of our hearts).
* However, a God who can harden hearts is also be powerful enough to soften them too.
* In fact, the Bible teaches that no one can believe in Jesus without the Holy Spirit’s enabling us to believe (John 16:8, 1 Corinthians 12:3, John 6:44)
* **Martin Luther “On the Bondage of the Will”** <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.html>>
* Luther taught that we don’t have free will, but our will is bound by sin not by God’s sovereignty.
* Our problem is not that our will (or chooser) is broken or under God’s control so that we are unable to believe in Jesus because God prevents us from believing when we want to.
* Our problem is that our heart (or wanter) is enslaved to sin and so we are unable to want to believe in Jesus without God’s help.
* We can only choose what we want, and we can’t want Jesus without the Holy Spirit’s help.
* This is why both prayer and preaching are vital parts of evangelism.
* The Holy Spirit speaks through His Word the Bible, but He must also open our hearts.
* Last week we saw that if you resist the Holy Spirit long enough, it sounds like there comes a time in this life when this sin becomes unforgiveable since the Holy Spirit won’t enable you to believe anymore.
* I trust that the Holy Spirit is strong enough to break through our resistance, but don’t try God’s patience. If you can still hear God’s voice, repent and believe the good news!
* **What is Jesus’ part in evangelism?**
* This Parable doesn’t teach us if this sower also plows the hard soil, removes rocks and weeds, shades plants, and sets bird traps.
* I started wondering what other things that parables teach us that Jesus did to birds, rocks, and weeds, and then I realized that I was asking the wrong question.
* Because, just because a bird is the bad guy in one parable doesn’t mean that the bird is the bad guy in every parable (the next parable about the mustard seed, ends with birds enjoying the shade of the plant, that’s not Satan benefitting from God’s kingdom).
* Instead, I should be asking what Jesus does to protect His people from Satan, persecution, and the deceitfulness of wealth. (These danger may map to the world, the flesh, and the devil Ephesians 2:2-3)
* In Mark 2, Jesus said that He is tying up Satan. This farmer is the kind of farmer who catches birds and puts them in a cage.
* In Mark 13, Jesus tells His disciples not to worry when they are facing arrest and persecution since He will be with them. This farmer is the kind of farmer who shades His plants to prevent rocky soil and the scorching sun from destroying them.
* In Mark 10 Jesus tells His disciples that rich people will have a hard time being saved. When they ask who can be saved then, Jesus says that what is impossible with man is possible with God. This farmer is the kind of farmer who protects is grain from the weeds.
* This farmer is the kind of farmer with a green thumb who can make grain grow where no one else can.

**Conclusion:**

* **Are you discouraged about your own growth?**
* Keep asking God to change your soil.
* Keep staying under the spreading of the seed.
* Tend your own soil so that when God’s word reaches your heart it will grow.
* John Piper says this can be as practical as going to bed early enough on Saturday night so that you are ready to listen in church. <<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/satan-takes-the-word-away>>
* I’m sure that Pastor Dan, would add that this can be as practical as reading the sermon text in advance of the sermon so that you can follow what is going on.
* **Are you discouraged about the growth of others around you?**
* Keep asking God to change their soil.
* Keep spreading the seed.
* Tend their soil through gentle, respectful persuasion (1 Peter 3:15).
* **In all cases, trust the farmer (Jesus).**
* He’s the one who sows seed (God’s word) all over the place.
* He’s the one powerful enough to change your soil type (heart).
* He’s the one who ties up Satan, protects through persecution, and protects from the deceitfulness of wealth.
* He’s the one who makes His Kingdom grow even if we don’t know how.
* He’s the one who makes His Kingdom grow bigger than we ever expected.
* He’s the one who can calm storms just by talking to them.
* Jesus can do anything!