

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
8-14-24

Mark 4

The Parable Of The Sower – Verses 1-9

¹ 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, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." ⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

4:2 Jesus taught the people by telling stories called parables, using familiar scenes to explain spiritual truths. This method of teaching compels the listener to think. It conceals the truth from those who are too stubborn or prejudiced to hear what is being taught. Most parables have one main point, so we must be careful not to go beyond what Jesus intended to teach.

4:3 Seed was sown by hand. As the farmer walked across the field, he threw handfuls of seed on to the ground from a large bag slung across his shoulders. The plants did not grow in neat rows as they do with today's machine planting. No matter how skillful, no farmer could keep some of his seed from falling along the path, from being scattered among rocks and thorns, or from being carried off by the wind. So the farmer would throw the seed liberally, and enough would fall on good ground to ensure the harvest.

4:9 The hearing Jesus wants from us is not the kind we use when we listen to background music or when someone starts to recount a long story we've already heard. To truly "hear" Jesus' words is to believe them, to use them immediately in decisions and attitudes, and to base life on them— your recreation and work, family plans and money matters, praying and singing. To hear Jesus' words is to make Jesus your true Lord. What is Jesus saying to you?

The Purpose Of Parables – Verses 10-12

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!"

4:10-12 The twelve asked Him about the parable: The spiritual meaning of the parable was not immediately apparent. The disciples of Jesus, including the twelve, didn't know what Jesus meant and they asked Him about the parable. Jesus would answer the disciples' question about the parable, but first He would teach them why He used parables.

Parable Of The Sower Explained – Verses 13-20

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—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

4:14-20 This parable should encourage spiritual “sowers”— those who teach, preach, and lead others. The farmer sowed good seed, but not all the seed sprouted, and even the plants that grew had varying yields. Don’t be discouraged if you do not always see results as you faithfully teach the Word. Some people do not understand God’s truth because they are not ready for it. God reveals truth to people who will act on it and make it visible in their lives. When you talk with people about God, be aware that they will not understand if they are not yet ready. Be patient, taking every chance to tell them more about God and praying that the Holy Spirit will open their minds and hearts to receive the truth and act on it. Productivity is in God’s hands.

4:14-20 The four soils represent four different ways people respond to God’s message. Usually we think that Jesus was talking about four different kinds of people. But he may also have been talking about (1) different times or phases in a person’s life or (2) how we willingly apply God’s message to some areas of our lives but resist applying it to others. For example, you may be open to God about your future but closed concerning how you spend your money. You may respond like good soil to God’s demand for worship but respond like rocky soil to his demand to give to people in need. Strive to be like good soil in every area of your life at all times.

4:19 Worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for things plagued first-century disciples just as they do us today. How easy it is for our daily routines to become overcrowded. A life packed with materialistic pursuits crowds out God’s Word and leaves us unfruitful for him. Stay free so you can hear God when he speaks.

A Lamp On A Stand – Verses 21-25

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 them 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 they have will be taken from them.”

4:21 Many Christians today are hidden from sight, reluctant to be identified as Christians. Such a Christian is like a brand-new light that never leaves the carton it came in. If a lamp doesn’t help people see, it isn’t worth much. Does your life show other people how to find God and how to live for him? If not, ask what “bowls” have hidden your light. Complacency, resentment, embarrassment, stubbornness of heart, or disobedience could keep you from shining. What do you need to do to let your light shine?

4:24-25 The light of Jesus' truth is revealed to us, not hidden. But we may not be able to see or to use all of that truth right now. Only as we put God's teachings into practice will we understand and see more of the truth. The truth is clear, but our ability to understand is imperfect. As we obey, we will sharpen our vision and increase our understanding (see James 1:22-25).

4:25 Jesus' words may have been directed to the Jews who had no understanding of Jesus and would lose even what they had—their privileged status as God's people. Or Jesus might have meant that when people reject him, their hardness of heart drives away or renders useless even the little understanding they had; thus, any opportunity to share in God's kingdom will eventually be taken away completely. To understand Jesus' message, people must listen and respond. Those who listen casually, for whatever reason, will miss the point.

The Parable Of The Growing Seed – Verses 26-29

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."

4:26-29 God promises that his harvest will be magnificent and prolific—the best fruit ever grown. Your witness may be weak and your efforts may seem to influence so few, but the Word of God is a powerful growth agent. Keep your eyes on the great harvest to come and don't let bad soil or weeds discourage you from faithful service and witness.

The Parable Of The Mustard Seed – Verses 30-34

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 of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds 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.

4:30-32 Jesus used this parable to explain that although Christianity had very small beginnings, it would grow into a worldwide community of believers. When you feel alone in your stand for Christ, realize that God has faithful followers in every part of the world. Your faith, no matter how small, can join with that of others to accomplish great things.

Jesus Calms the Storm – Verses 35-39

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.

4:35-38 The Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills. Winds blowing across the land intensify close to the sea, often causing violent and unexpected storms. The disciples were seasoned fishermen, who had spent their lives fishing on this huge lake, but during this squall they panicked.

4:37 Problems occur in every area of life. The disciples needed rest, but they encountered a terrible storm. The Christian life may have more stormy weather than calm seas. As Christ's follower, be prepared for the storms that will surely come. Do not surrender to the stress, but remain resilient and recover from setbacks. With faith in Christ, you can pray, trust, and move ahead. When a squall approaches, lean into the wind and trust God.

Jesus Rebukes His Disciples – Verses 40-41

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!”

4:41 The disciples lived with Jesus, but they underestimated him. They did not see that his power applied to their very own situation. Jesus has been with his people for 20 centuries, and yet we, like the disciples, underestimate his power to handle crises in our lives. The disciples did not yet know enough about Jesus. We cannot make the same excuse.