

## Lesson 12: The Gospel of Mark Chapter 4

In our last lesson we saw the Pharisees and scribes following Jesus around as he preached, healed the sick and impaired, and exorcised demons. Jesus had appointed the Twelve and gave them the power to heal and exorcise demons. They had seen the crowds following Jesus and started rumors that Jesus was healing and expelling demons with the power of Beelzebul. Tension is rising with controversies between the Jesus and the Pharisees. Mark wrote that they planned to convict and kill Jesus. Why? In chapters 2 and 3, Jesus is accused of healing and plucking grain on the Sabbath. He is accused of blasphemy when he tells a man that his sins are forgiven. Jesus was seen dining with sinners and tax collectors. And then there is the accusation that he is in league with the devil. This lesson begins with parables. The first parable should be read in light of the above information. The Parable of the Sower is, in part, a reaction to how the Pharisees and Jesus' kin misunderstood Jesus and his mission in Mark 3.

1. **Read Mark 4:1-20 and footnotes. Share any interesting footnotes with your group.**
  - a. **Mark often portrays the Apostles as not understanding who Jesus is and what he teaches. Where in these verses does Jesus address the lack of understanding of the Apostles? (cite the verses)**
  - b. **Reflection: Why do you think “the Twelve and the others around him” get a personal explanation of Jesus’ public message (4:10) and “those on the outside” (4:11) don’t?**
  - c. **Verses 4:11-12 has sparked a lot of discussion because it seems to say that Jesus’ purpose is to keep people from believing and being converted. Others suggest that Jesus’ is pointing to the result or effect his parables have on the hard-hearted. Do you believe they unable to see and believe, or are they unwilling to see and believe?**
  - d. **Look at Jesus’ explanation of the parable in 4:14-20. Jesus explains that the Word works differently in different people and situations. Why would the Word not take root at all *in some people*? See 4:15.**
  - e. **Why would the Word take root at first but later wither? See 4:16-17.**
  - f. **What would cause the Word of God to get choked off? See 4:18-19.**
  - g. **When would the Word of God take root and produce a harvest? See 4:20.**
2. **Read Mark 4:21-23 and Matthew 5:14-15 on the next page. Compare the two versions of the parable.**

a. What is the meaning of the parable?

Read Mark again.

b. What does the lamp light mean in Mark's Gospel?

c. Does Matthew give the lamp light a different significance?

**Matthew 5:14-15** <sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

3. Read Mark 4:24-25. Read these verses in light of the *Parable of the Sower* at the beginning of this chapter. What message do you believe Jesus is trying to convey to his disciples in these verses?
4. Read Mark 4:26-29. This is another parable of the Kingdom of God. This one is only found in Mark's Gospel. Check footnotes for insights into the meaning here. (Hint the one who sows and the one who uses the sickle are the same person.) If what is being sown is again the Word of God, what is the meaning of this parable?
5. Read Mark 4:30-34. Mustard seeds are sometimes found in pickles. They are tiny round yellow seeds.
  - a. What does Jesus say about the Kingdom of God in this parable?
  - b. Reflection: What are the *benefits* of using parables and metaphors when teaching?
6. Read Mark 4:35-41 and footnotes. Share any interesting footnotes. This is not a parable. Healing the man with the withered hand in 3:1-6, and allowing the hungry disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath made Jesus "Lord of the Sabbath."
  - a. What kind of miracle is this?
  - b. This story would make Jesus Lord over or of what?
  - c. Which verses in this miracle story show that the Apostles still did not understand who Jesus was?
7. What in this chapter was extremely familiar to you?  
Is there anything in this lesson that you are seeing with new eyes or insights?