MARK 4

Mar 4:1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

Mar 4:2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:

* The parallel between Mark and Matthew continue with Mark 4 opening almost exactly like Matthew 13.
  + The crowds have surrounded Jesus once again.
  + He got into a boat and taught them from the water.
* Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God in parables.
* A parable is a relatable earthly story that communicates some kind of spiritual truth.

Mar 4:3 “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.

Mar 4:4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.

Mar 4:5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

Mar 4:6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

Mar 4:7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

Mar 4:8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

Mar 4:9 And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

* Jesus’ first parable is about a sower.
* Sow: “plant (seed) by scattering it on or in the earth.”
  + Modern farmers don’t “sow” their fields the same way farmers in the 1st Century did.
  + Modern farmers use tractors.
  + Ancient farmers would prepare their field and then scatter seed by hand.
* As you may imagine, throwing seed with your hand isn’t the most precise practice, especially when you are working on the edge or corner of your property.
* It is in that lack of precision that we can learn a spiritual lesson.
  + Some of the seeds fell on the path on the edge of the plowed field and the birds gobbled it up.
  + Some of the seed fell on rocky ground and plants don’t grow well in rocks. They were scorched and died when the sun came up.
  + Some of the seed fell on thorny ground. It started growing but was soon killed by the thorns.
  + Some of the seed fell on good ground and produced a harvest for the farmer.
* Jesus concludes the parable with a phrase He used before to encourage His listeners to consider His words, “He who has ears, let Him hear.”
* Jesus will explain the meaning of the parable as we progress through the chapter.

Mar 4:10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

Mar 4:11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,

Mar 4:12 so that “‘they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.’”

* After presenting the parable of the sower to the crowds, Jesus and His Apostles departed to a more private place.
* His Apostles asked Him about the parables.
* Matthew’s account tells us they asked Him why He used parables to teach the people.
  + He responded by telling them they were privy to the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven but those on the outside were not given the same detailed insight.
    - In chapter 3, we discussed the privileges the Apostle’s were given and why Jesus permitted them more intimate access to His work.
    - Events of Jesus’ life, details about His mission, and explanations of His words were given to them but were withheld from the general Jewish public.
  + Jesus presented some of these detailed insights to the people but only through parables.
  + And Jesus invites those with “ears to hear” to consider the parables and mine out their meanings (verse 9).
* Verses 12 is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10.
* Let’s take a moment and try to understand the origins of this quotation in Isaiah.
* God tells Isaiah to preach to the sinful people of Judah.
* His message:
  + Keep on hearing but not understanding.
  + Keep on hearing and not perceiving.
* God had been calling His people (the Jews) to repent for years, but their sinful stubbornness prevented them returning to Him.
* The effect of their continued exposure and rejection of God’s instruction would be a dulling of their senses.
* Isaiah’s preaching would have the effect of making the ears of the people dull, their ears heavy, and eyes blind.
* How? It wasn’t a direct hardening (Isaiah didn’t have that kind of power).
  + But through his continual exposure of his audience to God’s message, which they would repeatedly reject.
  + Similar to saying a person has a hardened conscience.
  + The first time a person is pricked by their conscience there is a real feeling of guilt or conviction to change, but we can dull ourselves to that feeling.
  + After 100 times denying the direction of our conscience, we may no longer feel it prick us.
* The hearts of the people of Judah were stubborn against their God and they had allowed their senses to grow dull through repeated rejection of God’s message.
* I think the last line of Isaiah 6:9-10 is the most difficult.
  + Isaiah’s preaching would dull the senses of the Jews, “lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.”
  + It almost sounds God wants their sense dulled so they don’t turn from their sin and ask God to heal them.
  + It is not God who desires their senses to be dulled but themselves.
  + By dulling their sense it allowed them to live out of touch with reality, reality being God’s will.
  + Like those in Romans chapter 1, who gave themselves up to a debased mind.
  + The Jews of Isaiah’s day were dulling their senses **lest** they see clearly, because a person who is sees clearly will recognize God’s authority.
    - God created the human senses to help us grasp the reality of His sovereignty.
    - But we dull the senses to permit our imaginations to make us sovereigns.
  + If their eyes had seen properly, if their ears had heard properly, and if their hearts were softened by Isaiah’s preaching (instead of hardened), they would have turned to God so their nation could be healed.
  + But they wouldn’t permit it.
* Now you may ask, why interpret Isaiah 6 this way? Why not just take the obvious reading and say God took an active role in hardening the hearts of the Jews through Isaiah?
  + 2 Reasons! The interpretations of this passage by Matthew and the author of the book of Acts (Luke).
  + Mat 13:13-15  This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “‘“You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and **their eyes they have closed**, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’
  + Act 28:26-27  “‘Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, **and their eyes they have closed**; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’
  + Both of these references to Isaiah 6:9-10 suggest the rebellious Jews took the active role in dulling their own senses.
  + They did not want to “come to their senses” because it would mean submitting to the authority of God.
* In light of the context of Isaiah 6, Acts 28, and Matthew 13, let’s turn our attention to Jesus’ use of this quote in Mark.
* First, let’s acknowledge the difficulty of verse 12.
  + As in Isaiah, Mark 4:12 makes it sound like their inability to perceive and understand is Jesus’ intention.
    - That His reason for using parables is to prevent people from understanding.
    - He wanted to prevent people from turning and finding forgiveness.
  + But Mark 4:9 leaves us with the impression that those who wanted to understand had the opportunity to understand.
  + So, again, we ask the question, who is preventing them from perceiving and understanding?
    - Jesus?
    - Or themselves?
* If it is fair to take the verses in Matthew 13 (same context as Mark 4) and Acts 28 to understand Mark’s means (which I believe it is), I interpret Mark 4:11-12 as follows:
  + Jesus spoke plainly to the Apostles.
  + He spoke in parables to the Jewish multitudes.
  + They were offered an opportunity to “see” and “hear” about the details of the Kingdom through the parables.
  + But the condition of their rebellious hearts prevented them from perceiving and understanding the importance of Jesus’ message.
  + By choice, their senses had been dulled.
  + Otherwise they would have turned to Christ for healing.
* Jesus taught in parables so those who were “about their senses” could understand some of the details of the Kingdom.
* But those who had closed themselves off to God’s revelation would hear stories but never perceive their spiritual meaning.

Mar 4:13 And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?

Mar 4:14 The sower sows the word.

Mar 4:15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

Mar 4:16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

Mar 4:17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

Mar 4:18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,

Mar 4:19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Mar 4:20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

* It is interesting that Jesus’ own Apostles don’t completely grasp the meaning of the parable.
  + But they their hearts were open to Jesus’ instructions.
  + In several other texts we find the Apostles coming to Jesus and asking for interpretations of parables.
* Now Jesus moves to explain the parable of the sower.
* Four types of ground were mentioned and each represents a type of hearer.
  + (1) Seed falling on the path
    - Seed falling on the hard unplowed path cannot grow and is quickly found by birds and eaten.
    - This represents when the gospel is preached to harden hearts that do not wish to understand or consider it.
    - As soon as they hear the message, they discard it as nonsense.
    - Wherever the gospel is being preached, you can be sure the devil will be there trying to sweep it away before it takes root.
  + (2) Seed falling on rocky ground
    - The seed that fell on the rocky ground sprouted quickly and began to grow.
    - However, it quickly died because it’s roots couldn’t grow past the rocks to reach nutrients and stability.
    - This illustrates those who heard Jesus’ message and gladly accepted, but upon the first sign of resistance and persecution, abandoned it because they had no foundation and stability.
    - This would be a person who knows they need Jesus but doesn’t count the cost of following Him.
    - There are a lot of people like this!
      * It should be a reminder our work is not done when someone “is converted.”
      * It is only the beginning.
  + (3) Seed falling among thorns
    - The seed that fell on the thorny ground sprouted quickly and began to grow.
    - However, the new growth is quickly chocked out by thorns.
    - This illustrates those who gladly accept the gospel but are quickly distracted by the entangling temptations of the world.
    - In the end, they cannot escape the thorns of temptation and they never bear fruit (produce harvest).
    - Many new believers start off with tremendous potential but find the allurements of the world more enticing than genuine soul satisfaction in Christ.
  + (4) Seed falling on good ground
    - The seed on good ground sinks down into the soil and produces an abundant harvest.
    - This soil represents a heart that is ready and willing to accept the gospel message.
    - But not only are they ready and willing, they also have the endurance to overcome persecution and the lies of the devil.
    - The end result of the gospel and an honest heart is a harvest of righteousness.
    - That harvest looks different for every person, but all are productive workers.
  + APPLICATION:
    - We often spend a lot of time discussing the effectiveness of the sower and forgetting about the soils.
    - Congregations often spend a lot of time debating their approach to spreading the word.
      * Is the style of our preacher relevant?
      * Are our programs culturally penetrating enough?
      * What adjustments do we need to make to teach and preach more effectively?
      * What do we need to adjust to keep more people coming back?
    - Don’t get me wrong, all of those questions are important and should be considered, but we should make sure we are also factoring in the soils.
    - Jesus never tells us we won’t lose converts if we employ the right preaching style.
    - Consider what Jesus has just done with this parable:
      * He sowed the seed.
      * Not all of those who heard His words responded positively.
      * Jesus was content to draw those whose hearts were prepared to receive His message.
    - This is an important point to remember in our evangelism.
    - It can keep us from becoming discouraged when not everyone turns out to be good soil.
    - SIDE NOTE: Don’t use this as an excuse to be lazy!

Mar 4:21 And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?

Mar 4:22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.

Mar 4:23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

* Similar words to these appear in Matthew 10 but in a different context.
* Here, Jesus appears to be saying, the secret things of the Kingdom shared with the Apostles in private will one day be brought into the light (made known widely).
  + Jesus was sharing His light with them and it was not meant to be covered forever.
  + He shed light on the parable for them so they would be able to grasp their future role.
  + They would soon be sowing the seed in the world and sharing the light with others.
* Jesus’ statement, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,” is a call for the Apostles to devote thought to the words just spoken
* They are important and shouldn’t be allowed “in one ear and out the other” (unconsidered and forgotten).
  + This is a favorite phrase of Jesus’
  + We see this several times in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation.
  + Jesus may have taken it from Ezekiel 12:2.
  + Eze 12:2 “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.

Mar 4:24 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

Mar 4:25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

* Jesus wants them to pay attention to “what they hear.”
  + We no longer use “weights and measures” to establish the value of things, but in this culture it was common.
  + They needed to value these words properly.
  + Give them the weight they deserved.
  + If they did, God would increase their understanding.
* In verse 25, who is the “one who has?”
  + I understand this to be a person who “has” an open heart and properly considers the words of Christ (like the Apostles).
  + A person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness (5:6).
  + God will use a person like this and continue feeding and refining them.
  + They will receive an “abundance” and they “shall be satisfied.” (5:6).
* Who is the “one who has not?”
  + In contrast, this would be a person whose mind and heart are closed off to truth.
  + This person’s heart is not good ground for growth.
  + They hear Jesus words, but they do not take root and any semblance of growth is “taken away” by Satan.
  + It may also be God who does the “taking away.”
    - Like the man who did not properly steward his master’s talent in Matthew 25.
    - If we are given opportunity and teaching and knowledge from God and we do not steward it properly, what we have will be taken away.
    - Mat 25:28-29 - So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Mar 4:26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

Mar 4:27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

Mar 4:28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.

Mar 4:29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

* This parable is not found in Matthew.
* God’s Kingdom is compared to a man who sowed seed on the ground (like the last parable).
  + He sows the seed in field and the days pass normally.
  + As the days pass, the crop starts to shoot out of the ground.
  + The farmer doesn’t know how it works (this was before the days of modern biology), but he is confident the process works.
  + First the leaves come up, then the ear, and then the mature crop.
  + When the time is right, the field produces a ripe crop.
* In this parable we see the partnership of God with man working in the Kingdom.
  + We are told to sow the seed (spread the gospel).
  + How the word of God works in the individual lives of the people we reach, we don’t know.
    - We don’t know all the details of how the word of God works in light of verses like Hebrews 4:12.
    - Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
    - If you asked 100 people how the word of God worked in their lives to bring them to Christ, you would get 100 different answers.
    - The process of the word convicting people’s hearts is known only to God.
  + Like the farmer, we do not understand all the details but ought to trust the process.
  + Sowing seed will produce growth.
  + And God will have a harvest of souls from the sowing.
    - The Bible isn’t just an instruction manual or a list of rules to follow. It lives and works its life into us. It has hidden and mysterious power to change our life. This book has wrestled with me; this book has slapped me around. This book has comforted me; this book has overwhelmed my heart with the joy of heaven itself. This book has healed me; this book has wounded me. This book has smiled on me; this book has frowned on me. This book has wept with me, and it has sung joyfully with me; it shouts to me, whispers to me, and preaches to me. The idea that a preacher lends life to God’s Word is wrong; the only thing a preacher has to give to the word is a voice. Like a seed, the word of God has a hidden and mysterious power. (David Guzik).

Mar 4:30 And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?

Mar 4:31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,

Mar 4:32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

* This parable is found in Matthew’s account.
* The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed.
* 
* The exact species of tree or shrub Jesus references is still being debated. Some suggest it is *Salvadora perisica* and others suggest *Brassica nigra.*
* Either way, it was a tree/shrub that germinated from a very small seed and grew to significant size.
* Unlike the parable of the sower, Jesus is not going to provide us with the meaning of this parable, therefore we must do our own thinking and considering.
* So, what is the meaning of the parable?
* The mustard seed is very small and yet grows into a large living tree which provides shelter and a home to those who enter it.
  + Jesus’ arrived on earth in a quiet and subtle way.
  + The Kingdom of Heaven had very humble beginnings with its start in Galilee and then beginning in Jerusalem.
  + Yet, it would no remain a small thing.
  + In a generation the gospel message would be taken throughout a huge portion of the known world.
  + It would be a place of shelter and refuge for the people of the world who found a home in its branches.

Mar 4:33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.

Mar 4:34 He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

* Mark concludes this section by reiterating Jesus methods.
* Jesus taught the people in parables.
  + Notice the end of verse 33, “as they were able to hear it.”
  + I believe this reinforces our interpretation of verse 12.
  + Jesus’ intention was not to prevent His audience from turning to Him for forgiveness.
  + Anyone who wanted to hear and understand was given opportunity.
* Jesus spoke to the larger audiences exclusively in parables but explained the parables to His Apostles in private.

Mar 4:35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”

Mar 4:36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.

Mar 4:37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

Mar 4:38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Mar 4:39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Mar 4:40 He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”

Mar 4:41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

* Here is a good example to show the gospel writers did not always record all of the events they wrote about in chronological order.
  + In Matthew:
    - Jesus teaches in parables in chapter 13.
    - Jesus calms the storm in chapter 8.
  + In Mark:
    - Jesus teaches in parables at the beginning of chapter 4.
    - Jesus calms the storm at the end of chapter 4.
  + There is no problem with the events being in a different order.
  + There is no rule that a person can only record the life of Jesus in the order of events as they happened.
  + But it is something worth noting.
* Jesus wanted to go across the sea of Galilee “to the other side.”
  + He and His disciples got into a boat and left the crowds, venturing out on the water.
* Jesus’ vehicle
  + In 1986 a 1st Century Galilee fishing vessel was discovered during a drought
  + The boat is 27 ft long and 7.5 ft wide
  + It is now housed in the Yigal Allon Museum in Kibbutz Ginosar
  + A close up of a basket

    Description automatically generated
* During their trip a windstorm came up.
  + It must have been a pretty nasty storm if experienced fishermen couldn’t handle the waves.
  + The Apostles were afraid they were going to go down with the ship and were shocked that Jesus was sleeping through it all.
  + They woke Him up and said, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”
  + Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind, and everything went still.
  + He then turned to His Apostles and rebuked them for their little faith.
* APPLICATION:
  + The Apostles were in this situation because they were being obedient to Christ.
  + It is not the case that fearful/hard situations are always the consequence of some sin of ours.
  + Sometimes, as illustrated here, God leads us into storms to refine our faith.
* APPLICATION:
  + I thought the Shepherd was going to lead me beside still waters and make my life easier?
  + Psalm 23:1-2 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
  + Isn’t God promising there that He will make my path smooth and comfortable if I follow Him?
  + Psalm 23 is not about where we are led and where we lay our heads, it is about the shepherd who accompanies us!
    - Isn’t it interesting, Jesus, the Shepherd, acts like He is lying down in the green pasture by the still waters in this story?
    - But His disciples are having a meltdown.
    - He is almost certainly getting hit with water.
    - The wind noise must have been significant.
    - But the Shepherd sleeps while the sheep perceive danger.
  + Was Jesus a bad shepherd?
  + No, His sheep didn’t trust Him.
  + Their perception was incorrect.
  + They weren’t in danger if the Shepherd slept.
  + Does that have any application for us? Yes, I think so!
* APPLICATION:
  + I find it interesting that Jesus calmed the storm.
  + Why? Because the storm wasn’t a threat.
    - The storm wasn’t going to destroy the boat.
    - Jesus knew it.
  + The danger existed only in the imagination of the Apostles.
    - They were believing something that wasn’t true.
    - The devil was threatening to take what God held in His hand.
    - But He couldn’t do it.
    - It was an empty threat.
  + So, why did Jesus calm the storm?
  + Why did He pull them out of the situation?
  + Has God ever done that for you?
    - You were trying to live for God…
    - But some circumstance in your life started making you anxious…
    - Your mind perceived some danger…
    - Was that danger going to overcome you?
    - Not if God’s promises are true…
    - But rather than allow the imaginary danger to continue to plague you until you learned to overcome it, God took it away!
    - Why might God do that?
      * So, like the Apostles, we could look back at this occasion and realize God had everything under control.
      * That all of our anxiety was pointless.
      * That the shepherd wasn’t off guard.
      * So next time, it would be easier for us to suppress the anxiety, knowing the precedent of God’s care for us.
    - No doubt the Apostles looked back at this event and drew strength from it when they encountered other anxiety inducing circumstances in their future.
    - I have found this true in my life.
    - The longer list I have behind me of the times God has brought me through some perceived danger, the less I buy into the empty threats of the storms I encounter.
  + We need to remind ourselves of all the times God has calmed the storms.
  + We need to preach God’s past faithfulness to ourselves to starve the validity of our anxieties.
  + How many times has God calmed the storm in your past? Let that statistic be what fills your mind the next time the wind and waves try to fill it with fear!