

Parables of the Kingdom

Mark 4

Some stories or movies leave little doubt about the point they want to get across. Others have a way of arresting our attention while leaving us in sufficient doubt about their precise message in order to tease us into reflecting on them more deeply. Jesus' parables were often the later kind, vivid stories that captured people's attention but drew them into deeper reflection. The kingdom parables in Mark 4 invite us to see how the Kingdom takes root and works its way into all of life in unexpected ways.¹

Introductory Question

Q – Do plants tend to thrive or die under your care? Share a memorable experience you've had with growing a crop/garden (i.e. a bumper crop or a dreadful failure).

Discussion Questions

- 1) **Read Mark 4:1-20**, watching especially for words and phrases that are repeated. What idea or ideas seem to dominate these verses?²
- 2) Do you find anything in this parable surprising? Disturbing? Confusing?
- 3) Why do you think "the Twelve and the others around him" get a personal explanation of Jesus' public message (v.10) and "those on the outside" (v.11) don't?
- 4) Verses 11b-12 has sparked a lot of discussion because it seems to say that Jesus' *purpose* is to keep people from believing and being converted (anti-evangelism!). Others suggest that Jesus' is pointing to the *result* or *effect* his parables have on the hard-hearted. Are they *unable* to see and believe or *unwilling* to see and believe and therefore unable? How do you read it & why?
- 5) What light does Jesus' explanation (vv. 14-20) shed on his parable? On the responses in chapters 1-3?
- 6) When do you recall someone planting the "seed" of the Gospel in your life?
- 7) According to Jesus, why does God's Word sometimes: (a) not take root at all (v.15)? (b) take root but wither (vv.16-17)? (c) take root but get choked off (vv.18-19)? (d) take root and produce a harvest (v.20)?
- 8) What do you think the harvest produced by the good soil refers to?
- 9) **Read Mark 4:21-33**. Does the lamp/light in vv.21-23 represent Jesus, his message, his deeds, or something else? What connections, if any, do you see between the parable of the soils and Jesus' challenge in vv.24-25? Have you seen or experienced this in your own life? Explain.
- 10) What insight or challenge does the parable in vv. 26-29 add to your understanding or experience of the kingdom of God?
- 11) What insight or challenge does the parable in vv.30-32 add to your understanding of the kingdom?
- 12) Which of these parables do you find most (or least) compelling, and why?

¹ God's kingdom was not arriving, and would not arrive, with a "shock and awe" military campaign. It did not depend on military force or celebrity endorsements or marketing schemes but on the sower and his seed doing their work (vv.14-20).

² Key terms appear throughout this section, but the most important is the verb "to hear" (*akouo*), which occurs thirteen times (vv.3,9^{2x},12^{2x} in Greek & KJV,15,16,18,20,23^{2x},24,33 in Greek & in KJV)