



# Mark Chapter 4

[crossroadoftruth@gmail.com](mailto:crossroadoftruth@gmail.com)

# What is a Parable

---

- **Parable Definition**

- takes an abstract spiritual truth & compares it to a regular situation to make it understandable.
- Always at least two or three layers of meaning (face value meaning; meaning to a particular audience in the context; meaning in how it applies to us today).
- A very short parable may be just a metaphor or analogy.

- **Parable Interpretation**

- Need larger literary context – i.e. Previous Chapter/Passage
- Do not build doctrine on a parable (too many interpretations)
- Only look for the major spiritual truth and avoid allegorizing the details (applying meaning to symbolism; it's there for vividness).
- The Truth in Jesus' parables comes as a revelation from God if you have been receptive to gospel.

# Mark 4: 1-20

## Parable of the Sower

### Overview & Context

---

- 10 parables in Mark, and 4 of these 10 are in Chapter 4 and all relate to the Parable to the Sower. Only 6 of Jesus' 46 parables are repeated in at least 3 of the Gospels, and this is one of them.
- Jesus says in in Mark 4:13, “**Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?**”. Therefore Jesus considered this to be extremely important to understand.
- It was difficult for the disciples to understand why so few people believed in Jesus (Pharisees, His family, etc.), especially since so many miracles were witnessed. Jesus explains in this parable that rejection of the Word is more widespread than it appears (large crowds), the reasons for this rejection, and not to worry because this is to be expected.
- The **fear of man**, along with the **high cost of discipleship**, caused many who were initially attracted to Jesus to eventually fall away (John 6:64-66). By the end only 500 followers remained in Galilee and 120 in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:6). Luke 13:23 - “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”. The Sermon on the Mount talked about the narrow gate and that only a few would find it.
- This would prepare the disciples and all followers for evangelistic work by encouraging them that even though most will reject the gospel of salvation for various reasons, that once the seed is sown, the knowledge of God is at work in their hearts of the ones He has chosen.
- The difficult and very important verses in Mark 4:10-12 that follow the parable of the sower and introduce its explanation, implies that depending on the response to His Word, Jesus will enable people to understand or not, and uses the judgement verses from Isaiah 6:9 to explain.

# Sower Parable Summary

---

- A sower sows seed; some falls on the **Path** (wayside), **Rocky Ground** and among **Thorns**, and is lost, but when it falls on **Good Soil** it grows, yielding a harvest of 30, 60 and 100 fold.
  - SOWER** = Preacher of the Gospel, scatters the Truth
  - SEED** = Word = Gospel of Jesus Christ
  - SOIL** – Condition of the listener’s Heart determines response
- Parable suggests that only a small percentage of those who hear the Word will actually become followers.
- The **main point** is even though most seed doesn’t grow, some does, and eventually there is a great harvest.
- So as sowers fulfilling the Great Commission, we should not be discouraged, our efforts will eventually yield results even if we don’t see them, if we leave the harvest to God.

# Why is this Seemingly Simple Parable so Difficult to Understand?

---

- Today, many Christians, pastors, and churches still fail to apply the principals of this parable.
- The main message is **NOT** about the **Sower** (i.e. charismatic preacher style), or the **Seed** (i.e. intellectually or emotionally pleasing or prosperity ways of explaining the Word); but is it about the **SOILS** (the condition of the listener's heart determines their response to the Word).
- Jesus states this important statement in middle of the parable in Mark 4: 9-12; which is a judgement against unbelievers and a messianic quote from Isaiah 6:9-10  
    *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!...To you it has been given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are **outside**, all things come in parables, so that **“Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand;”** (Isaiah 6:9-10)*
- Jesus says He is teaching in parables because He does not want everyone to understand them, only those who are His Followers (insiders). Those outside the group are not meant to understand them.
- **Mark implies that some hearts are hardened so they cannot understand, not only Jesus' parables but the Word in general – it's a judgement against unbelievers.** But when the heart is open, it receives not only what God is saying, but even more (Mark 4: 24)
- **This parable is essential to understand all other parables as it makes clear that what is necessary to understand Jesus is a prior faith in Him, and that He will not enlighten those who refuse to believe.**
- Not knowing people's hearts, it is the sower's (Christian's) job to scatter seed on all grounds and leave the fate of the seed to the Master. We are not responsible for the harvest, only for the care in which we scatter the seed. We are all bound to preach whether people hear or not, on the hard path as well as the ploughed field.

# Old Testament Significance

---

- **Isaiah's prophecies warned of judgement** (9:8; 10:4), called Judah to repentance and trust in God alone (7:9; 8:19; 20:5; 40:27-31), anticipated the gospel (40:1-11), and that the result would be a hardening of hearts rather than faith (6:9-10)
- In OT, parables were connected to judgement.
- [Isaiah 6:9-10](#) is quoted once each by the four gospel writers—and once by Paul in [Acts 28:26-27](#). All occur in the context of national Israel's unbelief in Jesus as Messiah and the kingdom of God He presented as "near"
- Context – Chapter 3 - Religious leaders of Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah when they attributed His miracles to Satan. A national rejection of Jesus was occurring. In Matthew 13:13-14 Jesus says the prophecies of Isaiah are being fulfilled.
- For believers, it was a revelation of grace that made the spiritual truth (mystery) clear. **The mystery is the Kingdom of God in the context of salvation – only those who believe in faith, both Jew & Gentile.** Creates an "**Insiders**" and "**outsiders**" situation where parables are now given to conceal the truth from unbelievers. (Spiritual Blindness can only be healed by faith)
- Psalm 78:2 – "I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old."

## John 9:35-41

# Spiritual Blindness

---

- Throughout the whole Bible, blindness is used metaphorically to represent the human condition of fallenness, spiritual ignorance and the inability to comprehend God and divine truth. Isaiah 43:8, 56:10; Jer. 5:21
- **All people are naturally spiritually blind and living in darkness until they believe & see the Light of Jesus.**
- **God came to give sight to the Blind:** [John 9:39](#); Acts 26:18; Eph 4:18

## 3 Kinds of Blindness

1. **Natural Blindness** – Adamic nature of the unsaved man.
2. **Satan's Double Dose of Blindness** – to those trying to see the light
3. **God's Blindness as a Judgement** to those who persistently reject the Light

## John 9:35-41

# 3 Kinds of Blindness

---

## 1. Natural Blindness – Adamic nature of the unsaved man

### 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>14</sup> But the natural man **does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because **they are spiritually discerned**.

Psalm 82:5 <sup>5</sup> **They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness;**

### John 3:19

<sup>19</sup> And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and **men loved darkness rather than light**, because their deeds were evil.

### John 8:12

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. **He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness**, but have the light of life.”



John 9:35-41

## 3 Kinds of Blindness

---

## 2. Satan's Double Dose of Blindness – to those trying to see the light.

### 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

<sup>3</sup> But even if **our gospel is veiled**, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup> **whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe**, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

### Mark 4:14-15

<sup>14</sup> **The sower sows the word.** <sup>15</sup> And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. **When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.**

## John 9:35-41

# 3 Kinds of Blindness

---

## 3. God's Blindness as a Judgement to those who persistently reject the Light.

### John 12:36-40

<sup>39</sup> Therefore **they could not believe**, because Isaiah said again: <sup>40</sup> **“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts**, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.”

### Isaiah 44:18

They know nothing, they understand nothing; **their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.**

### Mark 4:11-12

“To you it has been given to know the **mystery of the kingdom of God**; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, <sup>12</sup> so that **‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand;**  
Lest they should turn, And *their* sins be forgiven them.’ ”

### Mark 4:25

**Whoever has will be given more**; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

# Why don't many things in the world make sense to people?

---

- Why is it so many people refuse to believe in Jesus, the Gospel and the Bible?
  - **Parable of the Sower** explains
  - **Spiritual Blindness** – Mark 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 2:14; Matthew 11:27; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Psalm 82:5; John 12:36-40
  - **Hard Heartedness** <https://www.gotquestions.org/hardened-heart.html>
  - **Rom. 1:18-32** (suppressing the truth of God)
  - **John 3:19-20** (Evil deeds hate the Light)
- Why don't people understand why seemingly strange things in this world are happening?
  - **Lack of understanding of Bible Prophecy**



# Parable of the Sower

## Soils

## Parable

## Explanation

## Application

### 1. Path/Wayside

- Hard Clay, Seed cannot penetrate

- **Birds** Ate



- Satan takes back Word
- Hearer rejects Word with Hard Heart

- No Repentance
- Temptations
- “Wide Gate”

### 2. Stoney Ground

- Shallow soil, seed grows quickly, no root

- Immediately Springs Up but **Sun** Scorches



- Immediately receive with joy
- No root, endures for a while
- **Tribulation or Persecution** for Word’s sake, they stumble
- **Being ashamed** of Jesus for fear of being mocked or worse

- False Converts
- No true repentance
- Emotional, prosperity message, Wrong expectations of Following Christ

### 3. Among Thorns

- Hidden at first, chokes

- **Thorns** Grow & Choke



- **Cares of the World**
- **Deceitfulness of riches**
- Desire of the flesh
- No Fruit

- PRIDE
- Selfishness
- Trying to serve 2 masters

### 4. Good Soil

- Ploughed, deep, moist

- **High Yield Crop**



- Hear, Accept & Bear Fruit...30, 60 & 100 Fold

- Fully Surrendered
- Fruits–Soul Winning, Preaching the Gospel, Love, Joy, Service

• A sower sows seed; some falls on the **Path** (wayside), **Stony Ground** and among **Thorns**, and is lost, but when it falls on good soil it grows, yielding a great harvest of 30, 60 and 100 fold.

• **The main message is NOT** about the **Sower** (i.e. preacher style), or the **Seed** (i.e. intellectually or emotionally pleasing or prosperity ways of explaining the Word); but **is it about the SOILS** (the condition of the listener’s heart determines their response to the Word). 12

# WAYSIDE – HARD PATH

## (UNCONVERTED SINNERS)

---

- Hard, uncultivated dirt trampled on by feet – is compared to a hard, stubborn, unbroken, unreceptive heart who is indifferent or outright unbelieving – the seed of the gospel is unable to penetrate.
- **God Himself prevents the truth from being received, and allows Satan to take the Word away.**
- The same sun that gives life to the seed planted in good soil, hardens the clay of unbelievers.
- When they hear, immediately **Satan comes and takes the Word away (birds)**. Satan has blinded them. Satan uses various means to accomplish this (i.e. Pharisees opposition – false teaching, hypocritical) (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). Simultaneous blinding by both God & Satan – Satan disguised as an angel of light, concocts false religious systems that hold people in blindness to the truth.
- In Luke 8:12, an important extra clarification is added, **“lest they should believe and be saved”**, indicating that **people in this group do not believe and are not saved**.
- **Satan’s tactics** include encouraging people to use human reason to justify faith in Jesus (philosophy), but man cannot understand spiritual truths through intellectual reasoning, only by revelation from God. (1 Cor. 1:18).
- No conviction of sin, resistance to temptation or heart repentance to allow roots to take hold.
- This is the only Soil where **no seed “sprang up”** at all. In all other soils, there is some growth.

# STONEY GROUND

## (FALSE CONVERTS)

---

- People who, in spite of their initial excitement, reject the gospel
- Faith is not genuine – **they immediately receive it with joy**, but their superficiality is revealed when **Affliction or Persecution** arises because of the Word and they fall away when they are forced to count the real cost of following Christ.
- In Luke 8:13, he further adds “...**who believe for a while and in temptation fall away**”. In Luke 8:12, “**believe**” is linked to being “**saved**”, so this would indicate that there could be salvation for those on Stony Ground.
- At first the soil looks good and the initial response is very emotional and dramatic (charismatic preachers, prosperity preachers, dramatic presentation using props and emotional pleas).
- External appearance indicates genuine faith, but faith is shallow. Feelings were affected but their hearts were not transformed and lifestyle is unchanged and not one of obedience.
- Faith collapses at the first sign of self-sacrifice and suffering.
- Faith lacks a genuine sorrow over sin, sincere repentance or hunger for righteousness and a deep love of Jesus.

# THORNY GROUND

## (THE DEFEATED CHRISTIAN)

---

- They hear and believe, but the **worries of the world and deceitfulness of riches** and desires for other things **choke the Word**.
- Sermon on the Mount – “do not store up treasures on earth...”
- **Double-minded** – Many Christians want to serve both God and worldly desires such as the Love of Money and Material things. (Rich Young Ruler)
- Materialism is choking both believers and unbelievers and making us think we don't need to suffer, and can have both lots of things and Jesus too. But before we realize it, Jesus can be crowded out.

# GOOD SOIL

## (THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN)

---

- **Fully Surrendered Hearts** – they humbly turn from sin and trust in Jesus and His will.
- Hearts that receive the Word, takes it into their minds and hearts and then puts it into action!
- Truth takes deep root and is not easily thwarted by Satan
- These people do not merely accept the gospel, but are transformed by it through being **Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit** (daily repentance, surrender, obedience & faith).
- **Fruit in the context of the parables that follow in Mark 4 is probably more related to our obedient efforts of being a faithful witness to Him and sharing the Gospel message of salvation and sowing of seed in the hearts of unbelievers**
- Fruit bearing is the ultimate proof that someone genuinely believes – fruit includes “**fruit of keeping with repentance** (Matt 3:8), “**fruit of righteousness**” (Phil 1:11, Col 1:6); “**fruit of the Spirit**” (Gal. 5:22-23) and “**Fruit of obedience**” (Eph. 2:10, Matt 7:16-20)
- “**Fruit of Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22-23)



# Parable of the Lamp

(Mark 4: 21-25)

---

After explaining the expected responses to the Word in the Sower, Jesus instructs us to **LISTEN** carefully to the truth contained in this parable, and go out into the world and tell others about Him.

## • LET THE LIGHT SHINE

- The pre-Great Commission, Commission
- The lamp is first lit (Sower parable, good soil, salvation), now He tells us to let the Light shine (Jesus is the Light, we are the Lampstand).
- Light scriptures: **Psalm 119:105, John 1:3-7, 3:19, 8:12; Matt. 10:27; Philippians 2:15-16**

## NOTHING HIDDEN WILL NOT BE REVEALED

- Don't hide the Light under a basket or a bed, (or vessel, Luke 8:16-18) – note these three examples seem to represent the necessities of life (food, water, shelter) which would represent the Thorny Ground (worries of the world).
- Light of Jesus is hidden from those on the “Outside”, but will one day be revealed to all.
- This is a word of Judgement, in relation to the Sower parable, that while those who now see and do not perceive (v.12), one day “every eye will see” (Rev. 1:7), and “every knee will bow” (**Romans 14:11**). Judgement of sin will also be revealed (Eccl. 12:14)

# LET THE LIGHT SHINE

---

## Psalm 119:105

- “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a **light** on my path.”

## John 1:4-5

- <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the **light** of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The **light** shines in the **darkness**, and the **darkness** has not overcome it.

## John 3:19

- <sup>19</sup> This is the verdict: **Light** has come into the world, but people loved **darkness** instead of **light** because their deeds were **evil**.

## John 8:12

- “**I am the light of the world**. Whoever follows me will never walk in **darkness**, but will have the **light** of life.”

# Parable of the Lamp-Con't

---

## “TO YOU WHO HEAR, MORE WILL BE GIVEN”

- In verses 24-25 Jesus tells us that the more the Light shines, the brighter it gets, and the less it shines, the darker it gets.
- The Light shines by how we hear and respond to His Word, and we will be judged and rewarded by how much we give to determine to understand and apply the truth of the Word. It's not enough to just want more, **we must first use what we have.**
- It is our responsibility to HEAR with FAITH, and OBEY what we hear.
- **The more we HEAR & OBEY, the more Jesus will reveal to us, and if we don't, we will lose what we have.**
- Principle of the Measure applies to all spiritual gifts, but this is in the context of the Sower parable & producing transformation in our hearts and bearing fruit.
- The principle of a person being given or deprived according to what they have done with what they have is so important that Jesus also illustrates this principle in the parable of the talents and pounds (Matthew 25:29, Luke 19:26), and also in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:6 – “blessed are those who hunger for righteousness”).
- Therefore, He has given us the Light, and He wants us to know that He expects us to Let it Shine.

# Parable of the Growing Seed

(Mark 4: 26-29)

---

- Man scatters seed, goes to sleep and the seed sprouts, but he does not know how.
- This is the principle of the Sower Parable explained with more clarity.
- The seed is the Word as in the Sower Parable, and here we learn that the Word has a unique power to “sprout and grow” in the heart and life of believers, convicting us of sin, and we don’t know how or how long it will take.
- We may not be alive to see the saving impact of our sowing, but if we obey with perseverance, we can trust with faith and patience if it’s God’s will, the seed will grow & the ultimate purpose of the Word will be fulfilled in the harvest.
- **Genesis 1:11; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 1 Corinthians 3:6-7**
- There can be no substitute for the power of the Word of God in our hearts. While analogies and explanations by ministers help us understand it better, we should be careful to remember that it’s not about preacher charisma, a prosperity message, gimmicks, catchy music or intellectually dazzling explanations – **The Word itself is a “Hammer, Fire & Sword”**
- When we scatter seed (the Word) in people’s hearts, we are sowing life itself, and when Jesus returns He will reap the harvest and separate the wheat from the tares.

# Parable of the Mustard Seed

(Mark 4: 30-32)

---

- **Context** – First Jesus gives us the parable for the **Sower** (soils) to show us that the Kingdom would grow even though it may seem that few believe; then the parable of the **Lamp** where He tells to let the light shine and share the gospel with others; then the parable of the **Growing Seed**, that teaches us to trust that even though we don't know how, the seed will grow.
- Now in the parable of the **Mustard Seed**, He teaches us the **magnitude of the growth to expect** from such a small initial seed.
- **This parable could be interpreted to mean the growth in Christianity on earth, or the growth in faith in a person's heart.**

# Parable of the Mustard Seed

(Mark 4: 30-32)

---

- To the disciples at this time, they saw very few true believers in what appeared to be a tiny Kingdom, but it would grow like a Mustard seed to encompass the world for future generations. It also has prophetic meaning (**Ezekiel 17:23** also mentions tress, branches, birds, fruit.).
- The words, “tree”, “birds” and “branches” are mentioned, which all have other scriptural meaning, providing more depth to possible interpretations.
- **Trees** are used in Daniel 4 to describe King Nebuchadnezzar’s earthly kingdom, and **Birds** represent earthly creatures who dwell in it.
- **Birds** were mentioned in Mark 4:4 and interpreted by Jesus to refer to **Satan**. Therefore it’s reasonable to think that the same meaning in this parable can be applied. This may indicate that these birds (enemy of the sower) could be demons within the church, false prophets or deceptive religions that appear to be resting under the shelter of Christianity. Or it could just mean all the nations of the earth will receive the gospel.

# From Parables to Miracles

---

➤ Jesus shows His Power, Authority and Lordship over all creation with 4 Major Miracles:

1. **Nature** (4:31-41 – calming sea)
2. **Demons** (5:1-20 – demon possessed man)
3. **Disease** (5:24-34 – bleeding woman)
4. **Death** (5:35-43 – raising girl from the dead)

➤ Main lesson is that **Faith** is the key that unlocks God's power, and to not fear even in desperate situations.

# Wind and Waves Obey Jesus

(Mark 4: 35-41)

---

- Up to now, Jesus had displayed power over disease, demons and knowledge, but not Nature itself on a cosmic level.
- After a long day of preaching all the previous parables by the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum, they Cross the sea in a boat to the Region of Gerasenes or Gadarenes (to teach disciples a lesson of faith & for a divine meeting with the demoniac)
- V 37 “ a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling”. Up to seven of the disciples in the boat were fishermen, and they were all terrified.
- **Jesus was sleeping** on a pillow, & the disciples seemed shocked that **Jesus didn't appear to care** that they may all die. But Jesus was likely showing His great trust in God and He was about to fulfill the words of [Psalm 107: 23-31](#)
- Seems connected to the Jonah story (Jonah was asleep and awakened by Captain)
- The disciples had no legitimate reason to fear, given they had witnessed the divine power of Jesus on many occasions, but **in the midst of a storm, their faith was replaced with fear and doubt.**



# Wind and Waves Obey – Con't

(Mark 4: 35-41)

---

- Mark 4: 39 – “Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “**Peace be still**” and the wind ceased and there was a great calm”. ... The word “rebuke” is strong - used in Mark 1:25 when Jesus rebuked the demon in the synagogue .
- Even more quickly than the storm had come, Jesus had calmed it in an instant, then He teaches all of us a great lesson in v.40, that even in great storms and helpless situations, we can trust Him “**why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?**”
- The **Disciples became afraid**, not of the sea anymore, but **of the power of Jesus**: Mark 4:41 – “And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “who can this be, that even the wind and sea obey him?”” The only one who can control the wind & the sea, is the one who created them, God Himself. (Prov. 30:4)
- **Fear** and feelings of unworthiness is the **natural response** for sinful humans whenever they are in the presence of God and His power and holiness – it’s a sign of awe and reverence rather than terror (Abraham, Daniel, Peter, John, Paul)