

**KINGDOM PARABLES**  
**How To Study The Bible**  
**Part 5**  
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We're in the gospel of Mark tonight. We have been for the last four Sunday nights. Tonight we're at Mark 4. We're trying to use the gospel of Mark as a means for more effective study of the Bible on a personal level. One of the things I've suggested we do each time with the scripture and we've blocked out a period of time – ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes – whatever that period of time that we've got blocked out is. Before we dive into a fresh portion of God's word that we take a moment to consider where we've been. Sort of contextualize, put a background and focus on what we've covered.

One of the things we're trying to do through the 116 paragraphs in the gospel of Mark is sort of short memorize the book so that it becomes part of our everyday life and we can know the scripture. One of the ways by the way that we keep out of heresy is that when we begin to commit God's word to our heart there's a spiritual antenna that develops when people start talking and teaching and preaching. They've got ideas that sound a little different. Nothing against different necessarily but it is a tremendous thing to be able to focus on what is being said and then as we think through God's word it comes to us... "But wait... in the gospel of Mark, I remember such and such. Jesus didn't think that way." It helps us guard our lives so that we make sure that our doctrine is pure as well as our way of living is pure.

We've looked at the first four paragraphs in the gospel of Mark – Mark 1-13 – and called those four paragraphs Preparation. The next seven paragraphs from Mark 1:14-1:45 we called Opening Events. The next six paragraphs of chapter 2 and the first paragraph of chapter 3 develop the theme of Opposition to Jesus. Then five paragraphs – 3:7 to the end of chapter 3 develop the theme Counter Opposition.

So now we've memorized the first three chapters of the gospel of Mark through some headings – Preparation, Opening events, Opposition, Counter Opposition. And within a matter of a very short time Mark has set the stage for the growing conflict of Jesus' ministry and helps us understand why at an early stage the lines had already been drawn and the cross had been necessitated.

Now Mark backs off. In a section in Mark 4 we're sort of in the peaceful waters. There is no opposition or counter opposition. Instead we find Jesus laying down the platform of his kingdom – what the guts of his teaching really consist of. These come to us in a series of paragraphs – six paragraphs in totality.

Someone has mentioned the fact that the paragraph titles I'm using differ from the paragraph titles the New International Version is using or maybe the other translations you're using. Remember that I said that all of us fall back to the Bible we cut our spiritual eyeteeth on. If you were brought up on King James you still have a rough time getting used to other translations. When you quote scripture or you're praying, you think King James language. It just naturally roles out of you. When I'm dealing with the gospel of Mark since I cut my spiritual teeth on the gospel of Mark in the Revised Standard Version it becomes impossible for me to think of this gospel in another translation. So when I trot out the gospel of Mark I've got to do something I'm familiar with.

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What the NIV is doing is notice they do more paragraphs than are in the RSV. The reason they're trying to sub break down into groups. They're trying to make tighter units of thought. But that means there's more paragraphs to memorize. If you've got 116 paragraphs in the gospel of Mark and all of a sudden you stretch that to 150, like me you're go to take the shorter translation. So 116 paragraphs I'll stay with.

The first paragraph, 4:1 "He began to teach beside the sea and a 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. He taught them many things in parables. In his teaching he said to them, 'Listen. A sower went out to sow and as he sowed some seed fell along the path and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where there was not much soil and immediately it sprang up since it had no depth of soil and when the sun rose it was scorched. Since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell on good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty fold and sixth fold and a hundred fold.'" And he said to them, 'He who has ears to hear let him hear.'" That paragraph is maybe one of the easiest paragraphs to title in the gospel of Mark because it deals with a story. There's a central figure in the story so the paragraph can actually be reduced to one word gathered around the central figure. The central figure of the parable is a Sower. So one word we've got this whole paragraph memorized and we immediately think of the component parts to it.

By the way, the crowd that Jesus talked to were not students in a Bible college or a religious classroom or a secular college for that matter. They weren't students who had come to the lecture with a textbook tucked under their arm, a notepad and ready to take tests on what he was saying. They were people that were out of common life. They weren't going to school. They didn't have notepads. They were of all ages, all interests. Probably most of them couldn't even read or write. Although there was high literacy rate in Jesus' day in Palestine but that's why they had scribes – scribes that could read and write for people. You still see that in third world countries. People in the post office waiting for somebody to transcribe their letter.

Also Jesus probably didn't have time to organize an Early childhood department so along with the masses of people you have little kids in the crowd. Jesus had kids in the crowd. He had people probably in the crowd that were sort of the hangers on and were just there to see what he was going to do in terms of miracles. Yet the amazing thing about his teaching is that it appears so spontaneous, so natural, so unprogrammed, non lectureish. Yet when he's done people go away talking about what he has said and remembering what he has said.

How did that happen? Because Jesus always took truth and put it on the level of the concrete. A concrete application illustration. He took terms and instances from real life. You've got crowds, people coming. People weren't taking notes but he's telling stories that you could see. If you were there today you could see the various levels of soil represented in the story. A concrete application of truth.

I'm sure that there were people who didn't catch his stories. They walked away. They went home and somebody said, "What did the Rabbi from Nazareth say today?" I don't really know what he said. He was talking about some farmer throwing seed on the ground!

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Who remembers all the meals they've eaten? We don't remember all the meals but if we hadn't eaten we wouldn't be here today. It's the same way with sermons. We don't remember all the sermons we heard but if we hadn't heard them we wouldn't be here today either.

One paragraph – the Sower.

Second paragraph “When he was alone, those about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. 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 so that they may indeed see and not perceive and indeed hear but not understand lest they should turn again and be forgiven. He said to them, do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word and these are the ones along the path when they hear Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which was sown in them and these are like men the ones sown upon rocky ground. When they hear the word immediately receive it with joy 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. Others are ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word but the cares of the world and the delight in riches and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty percent or sixty percent and a hundred percent.”

That parable is also the central figure. This paragraph is the same person. We've got two paragraphs dealing with the Sower. How do we distinguish the paragraph? The second paragraph explains or expands. So simply call this Sower Explained. In three words we have memorized the first twenty verses of Mark 4 – Sower, Sower Explained.

Then the third paragraph. “He said to them, ‘Is a lamp brought to be put under a bushel or under a bed and not on a stand? For there is nothing hid that will not be made manifest. Nor is anything secret except to come to light. If any man has ears to hear let him hear. He said to them, ‘Take heed what you hear. The measure you give will be the measure you get. And still more will be given to you. For to him who has will more be given and from him who has not even what he has will be taken away.’” Notice the NIV divides that into two paragraphs because they're almost seem to be two units of thoughts. There's both the measure and then there's the lamp and the bushel. Call this paragraph what you will. I call it Lamp and Bushel.

Verse 26 “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground and should sleep and arise night and day and the seed should sprout and grow. He knows not how. Ears produces of itself. First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.” That parable, the central element of the parable is not a person but seed. The central thing is seed. But what kind of seed? Scattered seed!

Then we have the paragraph beginning with verse 30. He said “With what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it? It's like a grain of mustard seed which when sown upon the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on earth yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches so at the birds of the air can make test in its shade.” This is a parable about the mustard seed. We've had scattered seed, mustard seed. “With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.

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He did not speak to them without a parable but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.” Title for that is Many Parables.

Let’s walk through these six paragraphs. The first paragraph is Sower, the next paragraph is, Sower Explained. Third paragraph is Lamp/Bushel. Fourth paragraph, Scatter Seed. Fifth paragraph is Mustard Seed. And the sixth paragraph is Many Parables.

Now we know where we’re going.

Let’s go back and take a moment and gather these paragraphs together. All the paragraphs are dealing with what theme? He was talking about the Kingdom. Therefore the title for this section 4:1-34 is Kingdom Parables.

It’s interesting how Jesus talked about the kingdom. It’s terminology we can get a hold of. He actually in his stories blows to smithereens the common concepts of the kingdom that people held at that moment when they listened to him. They had a whole different idea altogether of the kind of kingdom God would bring on earth. It certainly wouldn’t be something small like a mustard seed. And it certainly wouldn’t be something that had to be voluntarily received. The kingdom that was being looked for was political, it was powerful, it was external, it was visible. The kingdom Jesus was talking about was invisible, internal, small, needed to be received, and had potentiality of growth.

The first parable, the parable of the sower, we see it introduced by the fact that a great crowd is with Jesus. As you go through the gospel of Mark you cannot help but pick up the tremendous surging popularity of Jesus. It begins at Capernaum when after he casts the demon out in the synagogue and the Sundown healings, the people were gathered all about the door. Then by the time he’s healed the leper at the end of Mark 1, how can no longer openly enter a town but was out in the country and people came to him from every quarter.

Then when he tried to get back in the town the place becomes so packed that somebody’s dropped through the roof. Then great crowds start following him, 3:7, from all over the place. From as far south as 150 miles away in Idumaea and north up to Lebanon – Tyre and Sidon. All around he’s drawing people. In fact the crowds become so great that they are crushing him.

Now we see again this phenomenon of a great crowd. If you don’t have a PA system and you’ve got a great crowd on your hands where is the natural place to go so that everybody can hear what you say? The natural place is where there is built in natural amplification. That’s why Jesus so often taught by the Lake of Galilee. Water naturally magnifies the voice. Or a hillside allows there to be a natural carrying of the voice. The voice travels over the water.

Water was also a very good thing for Jesus to be around because it was not safe for him. He’s continually hanging around the lake because if he needs to get a boat and get on the other side and get away from people he’s ready to take off. But also in this earlier paragraph, 3:7, they had tried to crush him there were so many. So now he is using a safer crowd control technique. He is out in the boat and they’re on the shore listening to him.

It’s interesting that Mark here in relating to us the ministry of the Lord. It says Jesus took a significant amount of his time to teach. Remember earlier at the beginning of this gospel in

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Mark 1:14-15 Mark tells us that Jesus began his ministry by preaching. What he was preaching was the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe the good news. Those were all phrases designed to produce a response and change. That was preaching.

But here Jesus appears to be teaching as teaching is not so much immediately seeking a response from people to make a decision. That's the idea in preaching. Make a decision. Respond. But teaching is to provide a content, a body of knowledge upon which now you build your life. You've made your decision to follow him now here's what you need to know about what is involved in being a Christian. Or being in the kingdom of God. So Jesus is teaching.

We'll see next week that Jesus will pass from his teaching ministry to a doing ministry. Because Jesus is more than just in the business of giving information. He's in the business of changing lives.

We have this first parable, the parable of the sower which Jesus says to the disciples, If you don't understand this parable how are you going to understand anything else I'm saying? He says that because this is the foundational parable of his ministry. This is the core of what it is to talk about the kingdom of God.

When we look at the themes of Jesus' ministry what was the central burden of Jesus' teaching ministry? What was the things he keyed in on, that he talked the most about, that was the core of the material he had to present. We might get a lot of answers: being born again, believing, forgiveness – granted Jesus talked about all those things and all those aspects are essential. But they are all part of a central theme that he addressed his ministry to which was the kingdom of God. He was dealing with the kingdom. Forgiveness is being part of the kingdom. Born again is being part of the kingdom. Christian lifestyle is part of kingdom living. There are a lot of people today in the body of Christ, especially the charismatic part of the body of Christ talking about the kingdom and have never I think, some of them taken time to actually read what Jesus said about the kingdom.

The Sower tells us the foundational view of the kingdom. And by the way, this story of the sower is called a parable. "Parable" comes from two Greek words. The "ble" part comes from the Greek word *ballo*. *Ballo* means "to throw." That's where we get the word ball from. From the Greek word "to throw." A ball is something that is thrown. "Para" means "alongside." So therefore a parable simply means "to throw alongside."

As it is used by Jesus it is meant to identify a story which he tells to throw alongside of a truth so that we get the truth through the window as the story.

One of the things that I get concerned about myself in preaching is the fact that simply the communication of information is never sufficient. It seems that God has made our reality such that we need to be reached through stories. Not only do our minds need to be informed which is the idea of the communication of information. But our hearts need to be stirred and we need to visualize things in a concrete way. So Jesus is throwing stories alongside of the truth. The truth is the kingdom of God. The story thrown alongside of it is a parable.

A parable is in contrast to a hyperbole. Again the same root. Able is to throw. "Hyper" means "over active." So hyper means over a hyperbole is an overthrow. It's an exaggerated statement

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intended for effect. It's a literative devise. It's not meant to be taken literally. Jesus said, If your right hand offends you cut it off. That is hyperbole. It's exaggerated statement. Jesus did not mean for it to be taken literally. If he had meant it to be taken literally all the disciples in the first generation would have been walking around as amputees. He says, If you see a speck in your brother's eye, pull the log out of your own. That's funny if you think about it – hyperbole. Exaggerated statements for effect.

This is a parable, and within the parable division there is what might be called in this instance an allegory. An allegory is where you develop every point in the story. Every point has a meaning. Therefore the parable of the sower from the standpoint of interpreting the text is an allegory because Jesus goes on and gives every point in the story a special meaning.

The sower went forth to sow. What's he sowing? He's sowing the good word of the kingdom is actually what's happening. It's meeting various responses. The sower is meant to be identified with himself. He is sowing the word, the good news of the kingdom. Incredibly that kingdom is not something that is received by someone sticking a gun to your head and saying "Believe it!" It must be received voluntarily. No psychological manipulation. This is one thing those of us in the teaching and preaching ministry must be extremely careful that we're sensitive to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit appealing for people to come to Christ. But we avoid human psychological manipulation which is designed to produce numbers so that we can look good. Jesus is very careful to talk about the kingdom in terms of non-manipulative ways. It is something which is presented to us and then we must decide how we're going to handle it.

So anybody can see the sower going along and throwing out the seed. Some of it falls on the footpath, the beaten path. The birds come along and eat it. Jesus clearly identifies in the story what the birds represent. The birds represent Satan, the evil one or the devil. Three gospels use three different terms for him. But isn't that typical. Whenever we have the gospel come into our heart whenever we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we go away from a church service what happens when you go away from the atmosphere and context in which you gave your life to Christ? Immediately the doubts begin.

The first attack will always be the attack of the devil to take the seed which has been sown away from us. Like Paul I believe we must use all kinds of means to reach all kinds of people. There are some forms of seed sowing which at their very nature produce a large numerical response from people. They're gadget oriented, they're gimmick oriented and they're show-biz oriented. The huge response comes in. You can write about hundreds of salvations. Some will indeed to be good soil. But when the evangelism ministry occurs in that kind of context it will probably by the masses simply be walking down an aisle, filling out a card and that's the end of it. I have seen instances of revival meetings where there's been scores and scores or hundreds of "salvations" but the follow up has been almost no baptisms. Almost no serious discipling in anyone's life. Why is that? Because the devil's first strategy is to come and take it a way from us. If we don't provide any soil in our life for God to work and it's just a surface kind of thing, if we just responded because it's the emotional thing to do at the moment and there's no longing within us for God. And no hunger within us for real reality then what we decide simply remains on the surface level of our life. Anything on the surface spiritually that we receive is not going to stay on the surface long. It is either going to go deeper into our life where it will take root. Or it's going to be washed off and gone. Jesus know this.

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And too, Jesus has his eye on the people that are gathered around him in his ministry. The context in which he ministers. He sees the beaten path. They're obviously the Pharisees and scribes who no matter what Jesus says is saying, Shine it off! I don't believe a word you're saying. They don't ever take time to let the spoken word become a word which gets internal to them.

Then the Lord goes on to talk about the seed that is sown on the shallow ground or the rocks. It has no depth of soil. When the sun comes up its root is withered away. He indicates that these represent those who hear the word gladly but when persecution arises on account the word they themselves immediately fall away.

Again the Lord is recognizing a very common phenomenon that there are persons who initially come to him on the basis that Jesus is now going to take all the reverses and instantly make them successes in their life. They may not realize that when the Lord saves us he starts as a master sculptor to work out over a course of days and months and years the potential in our life. That we go through a transformation process. And there are some things that happen to us that are instantaneous in nature but other things like the formation of character is gradual in nature. We learn how to sin and it takes time to learn not to sin. That doesn't do away with the fact that God will intersect our life with miraculous provision and bring us on occasion instant lift. But there is a sense that if you come to Christ you can know that there are going to still be trials. There's going to be persecution. People are not going to like what you've done. There will be heat put on you. The Lord says if you don't make room for the seed to go deep in your life.

We choose what kind of soil we want to be. It's not preordained or preformed. We will choose whether we want to be the beaten path or the rocky soil or the thorny soil that the seed falls in and for a while it's doing well. But the thorns close in on it because they represent the cares of this world, the delight in riches – the desire for material things.

The good things aren't wrong in themselves. But if they keep us from making genuine commitments to the Lord and to his body then that is part of this being crowded out. The being caught up in this age and no longer being of service to the Lord.

Then the Lord says there's some good soil. Wherever the soil is good it produces tremendous. One seed grows thirty percent, sixth percent, a hundred percent which is Jesus' way of saying not ever disciple produces at the same rate. That's why we ought never to compare ourselves to one another. I am worst at that. I'm always comparing my worth on the basis of what somebody else is doing in the kingdom. Maybe I'm just a thirty- percent person. So we ought not to cast ourselves down if God is using our life to the limit that our potential has then great.

Those are four levels of response. Jesus was seeing the Pharisees and scribes as the beaten path, the multitudes were the rocky soil that were enthusiastically following him but they never got into the inner message. Then there were those who were like the disciples. Remember Paul spoke of Demus "Demus having forsaken me having loved this present world..." But some followed him and John 6 tells us no longer went with him because the way was getting tough. Then there were the disciples themselves, the twelve and others associated with them. They were gathering close to him and learning from him and following him with a whole heart. They were going to prove to be productive. We choose which kind of soil we're going to be and have you found it the case in your life that sometimes in our life all four soils are present at once? In

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some areas of my life I'm incredibly receptive to God's word and I'm willing to do it. In other areas of my life I find the word of God coming to me and I don't want to change in that area. In other areas I'm gun ho enthusiastic. God's spoken a fresh word to my heart. But the minute someone criticizes what I feel God has put in me I kind of shrivel up and forget the word of God because it's been criticized. It's withered with the persecution. The sun has shown on it.

What we need to do is as farmers of the heart ask God to keep making as much good soil out of us as he can.

This story I've just explained, I owe the explanation to the Lord who told us what he meant. When Jesus first told the story straight without interpreting it the disciples were scratching their head and saying What does this mean? So he tells them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God." Kingdom of God? That is simply a phrase that means where God rules. Jesus in his ministry goes on to define the kingdom of God as his present reign in our life which must be voluntarily received. In the age to come it will be over all. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But now it's in seed form in the world. It's penetrating the world. It's not something that's covering everybody because it must be voluntarily received. "To you has been given the seed of the kingdom of God. But to those outside everything is in parables so that they may indeed see but not perceive and may hear and not understand unless they should turn again and be forgiven."

Jesus sounds so cruel here. What do you mean you're teaching so that people won't hear and they won't perceive? What the Lord is doing in that passage is quoting from Isaiah 6. Isaiah has had his call. He's been in the temple the angels and seraphim are worshipping and Isaiah has just had this tremendous experience where God has said, "Who will go for me? And who will I send?" And Isaiah says, "Here am I, O Lord. Send me." Isaiah was a young man. He was willing to dedicate himself to the Lord. He's going to be the prophet of Israel. That's a wonderful thing, to get to preach to people and be the prophet of Israel. The Lord tells him in the midst of his excitement of being called as a young man he's going to have a forty plus year ministry. He says, "Here's what's going to happen, Isaiah. You're going to go to these people. And instead of them really hearing they're not going to hear at all. Instead of them perceiving they're not going to perceive at all. They in fact the end result is going to be that when you're all done with your ministry the land will be deserted and not a tenth of it will remain and the people will be carried off into exile. You're going to have a marvelous career Isaiah! No great results to write home about. No opportunity for Isaiah to be a pastor of one of the hundred largest churches in Judah. Bad results. Everybody going away. Maybe we ought to reorient our view of success. If success is when everyone is gathered maybe success sometimes can be when everybody leaves.

God is saying these people have already decided to go away from me. All your preaching is going to do is confirm their choice. You're going to be so strong and so hard and so right on that you're going to confirm the direction they've already chosen in their heart. The end result is they won't see and they won't perceive.

That's what Jesus is saying in his ministry. He's looking at his opponents who have already made up their minds about him. He said they're going to hear these stories but not have the foggiest idea of what I'm talking about. Instead they're going to go away with a disposition that

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sets their mind against me. They're going to regard me as a teller of stories but never going to see the truth that I'm presenting. They're going to become hardened through my teaching.

Someone has said the same sun that hardens the clay melts the butter. The disciples around Jesus are the butter. The opponents are the clay. And the sun represents his teaching. Some are being hardened in resistance to him while others are yielding. That happens in every gospel service. Every time we gather together we're either moving Christ or moving against him. Moving away from him. The preaching of the word will confirm that direction. Either that proclamation of God's word is going to produce a choice in our heart to want to serve God more from the core of life, from the wholeness of life. Or it's going to produce in us a desire to not make any decision at all and wander farther from him.

So the parables are meant to either conceal or reveal truth. It will be revealed to those who have a hunger to know what it is. It will be concealed from those who don't really care to meet God in a vital way.

That then brings up the subject of the lamp and bushels. What Jesus is in effect saying in the lamp and bushel paragraph is that what he's saying in other words privately to the disciples represents that thing which is hidden. In fact he will soon tell them to not even tell anybody who he is. That was a temporary injunction Jesus placed on them. He said there is nothing secret but will come to light. What he's been telling them in the house the interpretation of the parable, which he has been telling them privately will come to light. Jesus sees that it's going to have tremendous influence. That his teaching isn't going to be just something known and believed by a group of people gathered behind closed doors. But it's going to light the world. So take heed what you hear. The measure you give will be the measure you get and more will be given to you for to him who has more will be given.

Mark 4:24-25 are my two favorite verses in the gospel of Mark. As a person who sometimes tries to fit in the role of educator it seems to me what Jesus is saying at this point is foundational educational philosophy. Not economic philosophy. Some people look at this text and say what Jesus is saying is the more you have the more you get. That's the way it seems to be by the way. Jesus in the sermon is not talking about money. He's not talking about economics. He's talking about educational philosophy. To him who has will more be given.

If you don't use it you lose it. Anyone who has struggled with a foreign language knows that's the case. That's what Jesus is saying in regard to the kingdom. He's saying I'm tell you this stuff in secret. With the measure you give that'll be the measure you get. If you show up at my teaching, Jesus says and you've got a thimble full of curiosity, just a thimble full full, that's all you're going to get. If you bring a bucket you're going to get a bucket. If you bring a bathtub you're going to get a bathtub. He's capable of giving you whatever you want. If you use it, you'll get more. To him who has more will be given. The measure you give will be the measure you get. What you bring as a desire and hunger that'll all be filled up. Use it. Keep using it. If you are going to college don't just set in the classroom. Get in a church. Get to work. Get busy. Don't let it all go in the head and wind up in the haunches! Use it or lose it.

Scattered seed. Jesus is saying the seed is potent. It's going to go here, there, everywhere. The kingdom is going to have growth. It's going to grow up. As the seed goes to work to work in your life it'll be first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn shall appear. It's going to be

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development. Growth and potential. Growth and potential in the person in whom the seed is planted and Jesus foresees that his seed, his word, is going to take root in the world. That he's not going to be a forgotten prophet. Think about how many prophets there are whom we don't even know. Because they taught a few people then vanished from human history. Jesus did not vanish from human history. He says my word is going to take effect.

He also say to us that the kingdom of God will not only have this automatic growth of the scattered seed but it will have extensive growth like the grain of mustard seed. The mustard seed are so small. They're like a little black dot. A very small seed. Jesus says it grows up into a great shrub where the birds of the air can find their nest.

In biblical interpretation one of the things you have to do is not go further in the interpretation of the story than the Lord intended. The purpose of a parable, for example, is to deliver one basic unit of truth. Unless it is an allegory which is meant then for every part of the story to be interpreted. Whenever it's an allegory the Lord interprets what the meaning is.

There are some who follow a method of biblical interpretation called the law of first mention. That law has some validity to it but it's not iron clad. The idea is that anytime the Bible mentions something the first time then that becomes the controlling use of that word in all later references in the Bible. So you've got the mustard seed and the branches and the birds. The birds come into the branches and sit in the shade of the tree. So the law of first mention is they focus on the word "birds." The mustard seed is the word of the Lord and becomes the shrub. It is the visible church of Jesus Christ, which is something that's fast and world wide. How are birds mentioned? In our text today where were birds mentioned already in Mark 4. They were mentioned as a representative of Satan the law of first mention says that the first time Jesus referred to birds means Satan. When the word "birds" occurs again it is Satan. So what Jesus is saying the institutional church, the visible church is always going to be corrupt because the devil is going to roost in its branches. That may not be all wrong. But the problem is that birds can also be used by the Lord in positive reference. The Lord's care for example of the sparrows and his feeding and caring for the birds of the air which do not gather grain into grainary but whom the heavenly Father feeds.

What probably Jesus is simply saying here is that as his church grows in visible proportions, that those aspects of mankind and nature which need refreshed and replenished and need rest are ministered to and helped by that which is the creation of his life, his blood, his death and his resurrection. The church of Jesus Christ, the mustard seed grown up ought to be a sheltering place. It ought to produce the kind of people that shelter one another, who provide shade for people who are worn down with the heat of life. It also can extend even to the creative order of the animal and fowl world where the Lord's people care for the things which he has made.

Jesus however has great faith that something is going to happen through his ministry. His church is going to grow. So he says with many parables he spoke the word to them. As they were able to hear it. Isn't that nice? I sometimes forget I keep on talking when people are no longer able to hear it. Someone has said, The brain cannot endure any more than the seat can tolerate. Jesus spoke parables as long as they were able to hear it. And he did not speak to them without a parable but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. He's building a base for his kingdom. He's really challenging his disciples to think of the kingdom not in a political sense. And Christians today are all caught up in bringing the kingdom of God politically in existence in

## **KINGDOM PARABLES**

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America. If we were to take Jesus' teaching seriously that we were to be salt and light obviously we are to be involved in the political process.

But let's not delude ourselves that Americanism or capitalism or anything else is Christianity. Christianity exists separately from all that. The kingdom of God is not something that's external and visible. It's internal. It must be received by an act of volition in our own life. It will grow as we nourish it and become the kind of good soil in which it can take root and flourish. And as he many of us together become the good soil we collectively become the mustard seed. That which starts out as very small but becomes extremely dynamic and sheltering for others and for the world that God has made.

Our Lord, we think of that which you have taught us, that the measure you give will be the measure you get. Lord, we just want to take a moment in your presence to evaluate the hunger in our life for you. For your presence in us. We want to come to you with more than a thimble full of expectancy, with more than a thimble full of commitment, with more than a thimble of inquiry or curiosity. We want to come to you, Lord, with as wide a measure as we can find. We want to say, Lord fill me up. I've got a million questions but I've also got a whole heart that wants to commit itself to you and to be used of you. Lord, here I am. Fill me up. Expand me and use me for your honor and glory. We want to do that in our life. We want to see you at work in us to will and to do your good pleasure. We want to see the church that we're a part of, that visible expression of the invisible fellowship we have with you. Something like the mustard seed that grows up and becomes sheltering place, something that is noticeable and visible to those who need your help. Help us to become like that, Lord. May the kingdom of God truly reign in us. May your power and your authority and your majesty rule in our life so that without any external laws, whether the ten commandments or the moral code of some kind, without any external laws but simply from an internal heart to please you we let your kingdom reign totally and completely in us that our lives are not driven by some external standards that someone else has told us what to do and what not to do. But our lives are driven by what the Holy Spirit has made real to us about your word so that we do what we do that is righteous not because we're being forced to do it but from our heart there is a desire for your kingdom to rule and reign in us. Lord, thy kingdom come. Come in me. Come in this church. Come in this community. Come in this world. Thy kingdom come. We ask it Lord in your name, grateful for your power and your mercy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.