

The Gospel of *Mark*

The Servant Leadership of Jesus

The Servant's Ministry in and around Galilee (cont) (1:14 – 9:50)

A Period of Popularity: *The Parable of the Lamp* (4:21-25)

4:21 Jesus followed His explanation of the parable of the sower ^{v.13-20} to His disciples (the "Twelve and the others" ^{v.10}) with two questions to the large crowd by the lake ^{v.1}: His second question gave the obvious answer to the first question: no one in their right mind would hide the light of a lamp, when it could (and should) be brightening a room. ^{Matthew 5:15}

The text implies Jesus went back to teaching the crowd, because He began to speak in parables, which He chose to use for the crowds, for the reasons He explained earlier ^{v.11-12}.

The 1st century lamp was a small clay bowl with some oil for fuel and a spout holding the wick. The homes of that time period were quite dark, as a result of sparse windows and dirt floors. The best way for the lamp to light up a room was to place it high on a lampstand, which was either a shelf on the wall or an ornate stand. Lamps are used symbolically in Scripture as: the Word ^{Psalms 119:105}, John the Baptist ^{John 5:35}, Holy Spirit ^{Revelation 4:5} and Jesus ^{Revelation 21:23}, and the lampstand is used to describe the church holding up God's light ^{Revelation 1:12-13,20}.

22 Jesus continued with simple statements about the exposure of things that are hidden ^{Colossians 2:2-3}.

Humans hide two types of things: (1) something valuable, but hiding them is a wasteful use of their worth ^{Matthew 25:14-30} and (2) "secret sins", but they are all revealed to God ^{Hebrews 4:12-13}.

Jesus used a Hebrew poetry technique called *synonymous parallelism* (repetition of thought).

23 This phrase appears seven times in the Gospels and at the end of Jesus' 7 letters ^{see notes on Mark 4:9}.

24-25 Jesus taught the disciples that the spiritual advances in their ministries would be in proportion to their efforts in spreading the wisdom and truth they were learning from Him ^{Proverbs 11:18, James 3:18}.

These verses summarize the principles Jesus taught in the parable of talents ^{Matthew 25:14-30}.

A visual image of this lesson is found in the (non-Biblical) parable of the two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Both of the seas are fed by the same Jordan River water; however, (1) the Sea of Galilee both takes in and gives out Jordan River water, and as a result, the water and the surrounding land are abounding with an abundance of animal and plant life, whereas (2) the Dead Sea only takes in, resulting in the water and adjacent land being barren of life.

A Period of Popularity: *The Parable of the Growing Seed* (4:26-29)

26 Mark is the only Gospel writer who records this parable, which is an extension of the parable of the sower ^{v.3-8}, explaining in more detail the results of physical growth for seeds planted in the good soil (i.e., the great spiritual growth when the Word of God is planted in the fertile heart of a seeker).

27-28 How the Word of God (the seed) matures within a person is a great mystery. The responsibility of the sower is to do what he/she knows to do and leave the results to the Holy Spirit ^{John 3:1-8,6:63-65}.

It takes great faith and patience to be a farmer, because while he knows to prepare the soil, to plant the seed and to keep the weeds out, the farmer has no idea how the seed germinates and grows, so he trusts God for the results. Similarly, while God's workers do the best they can to prepare the heart (soil ^{v.14 notes}) of a person, it is God who created the soil ^{Philippians 1:4-6}.

Jesus spoke about maturing Christians, who persevere ^{James 1:2-4} and grow in grace ^{2 Peter 3:18}.

29 Experience tells a farmer when to harvest, but God's omniscience knows the perfect harvest time.

Two main interpretations of this parable: (1) the way believers present and God matures the wisdom of salvation in an individual's life until Jesus saves him ^{Psalms 3:8, 2 Corinthians 6:2} or

(2) a Christian's maturation from the initial presentation of the Gospel ^{1 Corinthians 15:3-4}, through sanctification ^{1 Thessalonians 4:3-8} until Jesus gathers the final (future) harvest ^{Revelation 14:14-16}.

A Period of Popularity: *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* (4:30-34)

30-32 Jesus told another kingdom parable about the very small mustard seed which was planted in Jewish (food) gardens and grew very large, which allowed birds to enjoy the shade it produced.

The mustard seed is the smallest seed of all the plants sown in a Jewish garden. The mature plant is not a tree, but a very large bush (up to fifteen feet high, with large branches), and the largest of garden plants. The leaves are used as a vegetable and the seeds as a condiment.

There are three widely conflicting interpretations of this parable, and there are respected Christian scholars on all sides of this debate. The three perspectives are as follows:

1. The tree illustrates God's provision, used incorrectly by the world ^{Ezekiel 31:3-12, Daniel 4:20-23}, and the birds are Satan and his evil ministers ^{v.4, 15} who are always present and in a position to distort the messages of creation and salvation (J. Vernon McGee).
2. The tree illustrates the sphere of salvation that provides every need of man, and the birds are people who rest in the branches of God's bountiful provision (John MacArthur).
3. The tree is the provision of salvation, but the birds are Satan and his ministers ^{v.4, 15} who distort the messages of creation & salvation (in and out of the church) (Warren Wiersbe).

Jesus also used a mustard seed to illustrate His great ability to utilize even a tiny faith ^{Luke 17:6}.

33-34 Jesus repeated the decision He stated earlier, He spoke to the crowds only in parables ^{v.11-12}.

Mark also emphasized that Jesus spoke "as much as they could understand" at that time ^{John 16:12,25}.

A Period of Popularity: *Jesus Calms the Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (4:35-41)

35-36 At the end of a long day of teaching, Jesus decided to leave the crowds behind and go with His disciples across the Sea of Galilee ^{Mark 5:2} in the boat He had been teaching from ^{v.1} near Capernaum.

Most cities were on the north & west shores of the lake, so going to the opposite shore would give Jesus and His disciples a respite from the intensity of teaching and healing the crowds.

Mark is the only Gospel that curiously mentioned "There were also other boats with him."

37-38 A violent storm (*laleō* : whirlwind) ^{Acts 27:14-20} came up quickly, nearly swamping the boat.

Jesus was unconcerned and sleeping, but His disciples were terrified, so they awakened Jesus.

The Sea of Galilee was down in a basin (almost 700 feet below sea level), with hills all around. However, strong storms were common on the Sea of Galilee, because cold air from the mountains to the north would roll down the valley and hit the warm humid air over the lake.

The fear of the Apostles, especially the experienced Galilean fishermen (at least Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John ^{Mark 1:16-20}), indicated the unusual severity of the storm.

39 In another curious part of the story, Jesus 'rebuked' the wind and told the waves "Quiet! Be still!".

Some scholars have concluded from the great fear of the lifelong seamen, Jesus speaking to the lake in the same way He addressed a demon-possessed man in Capernaum ^{Luke 4:35} and a "Legion" of demons drowning pigs in the lake ^{Mark 5:1-17} that the storm had a demonic origin.

40 Jesus confronted His disciples for their fear of what the storm could do to them, even though He was with them in the boat. Jesus even equated their fear with a lack of faith. He was saying they "still have no faith" in Him ^{Mark 16:14}, even though He had performed many miracles in their presence.

Fear is a sin, indicating a lack of trust in Jesus. Intellectually saying God is sovereign is much easier than living a life of total trust in that fact (Elijah ^{1 Kings 19:1-18}, Peter ^{Luke 22:31-34,54-62}).

41 The fear of the disciples indicated here was a reverence for the supernatural power Jesus displayed. The questions they posed among themselves revealed their astonishment at the true identity of Jesus

A key message: the storms of life come up quickly, but they never take Jesus by surprise.