

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 5

## BEGINNING OF THE PARABLES

### I. The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20)

#### A. The idea of a parable

1. Parables are largely extended similes. They are somewhat like allegories, except they are usually less complex and more flexible in meaning.
2. A parable tries to portray an idea more clearly by using a common example, but with an uncommon element.
3. They do not so much give a clear answer as they give ideas to consider.
4. They were common in Jewish literature. See, e.g., Judges 9:7-16.

B. Mark gives this parable prominence by placing it near the beginning. Luke and Matthew also have this parable, but more in the middle.

#### C. The seed here is spread almost to the point of recklessness.

1. Ordinarily, one would make a field right for planting (e.g., by pulling up rocks and thorns). Here, the seed is spread and then the land responds.

#### 2. The different types of soils represent different responses to the word of God.

3. The parable should not imply a deterministic conclusion that people's responses are fixed. People can change fields, and especially God can do so. E.g., Isaiah 51:3, Psalm 107:33 ff.

4. A good harvest in those days would have produced fivefold fruit. The harvest Jesus describes is extraordinary.

D. In this parable, the types of ground are described, but the sower is not. It could mean the Father, Jesus, the Church, or each believer.

E. The Gospels record an explanation only of this parable. Jesus explained the other parables to the Twelve, but the Gospels do not record this explanation.

1. The explanation is probably given as an example of how to interpret parables.

2. Jesus explains the parable to the Twelve, evidently planning for them to explain it to others when they are ready.

3. By quoting Isaiah, Jesus seems to be indicating that He wants the people to have the parable now, but gain understanding only later when they are able to accept it.

## II. Parables of the Lamp, the Seed and the Mustard Seed

### A. Parable of the lamp.

1. The kings of Israel and God's word were often compared to lamps in the Old Testament. See, e.g., 2 Sam. 21:17, 22:29; 1 Kings 15:4; Psalm 119:105, 132:17.

2. There is a minor sandwich technique used here, with the outer sections on giving light to others and the inner one on hearing the word carefully.

- The implication is that the two build on each other

- This parable indicates to the Twelve that they should not keep the knowledge Jesus gives them.

3. The notion of receiving measures and giving them reflects the fact that one will receive understanding to the degree one is willing to share it. Similar sayings in Matthew (7:2) and Luke (6:28) focus more on forgiveness and generosity.

### B. Parable of the Seed

1. The emphasis is on both the need for human effort and the mystery of God's providence.
2. The harvest referred to could be either the individual coming to faith, a great advance for the world, or Jesus' final return to earth. The latter two meanings are reflected in the prophecies of Joel 3:13ff.

### C. Parable of the mustard seed.

1. The mustard bush was not a particularly prized plant. Thus there is a bit of humor here. There is a contrast with grand trees in Old Testament prophecies that stood for kingdoms eventually to be cut down. See Ezekiel 31:22ff.; Daniel 4:16ff.
2. This parable is building on a promise that God would restore Israel by planting a new tree after the old one was cut down. Ezekiel 17:22ff.