

Commentary on Mark Chapter 4, by Chuck Smith 12.5.21

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December memory verse, Isaiah 9:6 (NKJV) For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

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Beginning in chapter 4, we have the beginning of the ministry of Christ in parables. There is often times a mistaken opinion as to the reason why Jesus went to parables. The purpose of a parable is really not to veil the truth, but to illustrate the truth. And many times when people become dull of hearing, where they will not receive just straight teaching, when you've lost the attention of your students, a method by which attention can be drawn back again to the subject is by illustration. Tell a story. We are, all of us, very interested in life and in things of life, and when you start to tell a story, suddenly people are paying attention again. And in the story you are able to subtly able to illustrate the truth that you are trying to point out. In each of the parables of Jesus there were truths that were being illustrated, truths that the people would not listen to on just a straight teaching method. And so, the parable form of teaching was adopted, that you might continue to bring them the truth. Only now in a more subtle way.

Some of the parables the people understood, understood very well. In fact, in some of the parables of Jesus, the Pharisees got very angry with Him when they realized, "Uh-oh, that one hit us." And many of the parables were directed against the Pharisees and their attitudes. Sometimes the thought that was being illustrated still went right over their head, but Jesus would then explain it to his disciples when they'd say, "Lord, what were You trying to get across?" And He would explain the parable to them in their private sessions.

Now, Jesus said that these are pretty much the key to all of the parables, these parables concerning the kingdom of heaven. We covered these in Matthew's gospel, chapter 13. And Mark does add just a little bit that Matthew did not give to us.

And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land ([Mar 4:1](#)).

We remember last week that He ordered a little ship that He might be in it, because at this point the crowds were beginning to throng Him. Someone had discovered that by touching Jesus they were healed. And so, everywhere Jesus would go, people began to reach out to touch Him. In verse 10 of the previous chapter, "For He had healed many, insomuch that they pressed upon Him to touch Him, as many as had plagues." And so, it became a common practice if you had something wrong just to touch Him. And you

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can imagine how, after a time, that could be pretty vexing when people are pushing and shoving to get near you just so that they can touch you.

And so, when the multitudes were gathered... and multitudes means multitudes. And we'll be getting to that in a little bit. When they were out on the other side of the sea, when the people gathered, it said there were five thousand men beside women and children. So, if you assume that for every man there was a woman and maybe one child, you could have as many as fifteen thousand people that had gathered in a deserted area to hear Him. So, you can imagine the tremendous crowds that were now moving with Him, necessitating His having to get a little boat and just shove off and be out in the water just a little bit so that He could address all of the people without being thronged or pressed by them. "And so, he began to teach by the seaside. There was gathered unto Him a great multitude so He entered into a little ship and sat there in the ship by the shore; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land."

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, [that] some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear ([Mar 4:2-9](#)).

Now, these people were basically an agrarian society. Practically everyone was involved in some way or other in agriculture. Even those who lived in the cities had their plot of ground in the country. And they all had their stone houses on their plot of grounds with their towers. And they would go out and plant in their fields and they would harvest, and live sort of out during the period of planting and harvesting, and then move into the towns in the winter times. But they were, all of them, close to the soil, an agrarian society. And thus, as Jesus is talking to them about farming, about sowing seed, He's taking something that is very familiar and very common with all of them. And as He describes the various types of conditions that the seed falls on, it was something that was extremely familiar to all of them.

What Jesus said made a lot of sense. He was talking to people about things with which they are familiar, and that is so important. As He is giving this parable. They all had experienced these very things as they sowed their seed. And He was talking about things that were just down-home.

And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing

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they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them ([Mar 4:10-12](#)).

Now, is Jesus trying to hide the truth to keep man from conversion? No. As I said, parables are used to attract attention and to illustrate truth. But they were not listening to the teachings any more. And yet, it was important that they still hear the word. And so parables were adopted, even though in hearing, they did not understand. Yet, it was important that they hear. God will be fair when He judges man. Everyone will have a chance to hear, even though they have closed their minds, their hearts. It's an amazing thing when a person's heart is closed to God and to the gospel. It's amazing how we perceive what is being said.

You know, there are people that come to Calvary Chapel out of constraint; their friends have constrained them to come. And it's amazing what they hear me say. Because they're just looking for something to jump on and to get angry about. And they're not really listening at all to the content of the message that we bring. But they are only listening to find something to fault, something to disagree with, something to get angry about, so that they can say, "I'll never go back there again." And they want an excuse not to come back. And so, they're not really hearing and not really wanting to hear.

Now, And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? ([Mar 4:13](#))

And Jesus is now giving us a key. And in parables there is this expositional constancy. "If you don't know this parable, how are you going to know all parables?" Here is a key to the parables, that is: the word... or the seed is the word. This is one of the keys to parables. Whenever in a parable you get to the seed being planted or whatever, know that the seed is the word of God. So He's saying, "Don't you know this parable? Then how are you going to know all parables?" So, He's telling you now this expositional constancy of what represents what.

The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the wayside, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts ([Mar 4:14-15](#)).

So, the fowls of the air that come and pluck out the seed is actually Satan, who takes away the seed that is sown. It doesn't even have a chance to get root.

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard [received] the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and [but they] have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word,

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and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred ([Mar 4:16-20](#)).

So, the parable of the sower is how the word of God is received in the hearts of different people. With some people, the seed never has a chance to even root. They're not open to the word of God at all. As soon as it is sown, their mind is set against it, and Satan plucks up that which was sown. It has no effect. There are others who get all excited, receive it with gladness and joy. And of course, we've observed these people. And they start off with a bang, but when persecution comes, a trial or testing, they fall away because there's no real depth. All they've had is an emotional experience. They've had the gladness, the excitement, but there's no real depth at all. And thus, there is that falling away the moment testings come. This third category is the category I'm interested in, because I think that this category covers probably a greater number of people in the church than almost any other category. Those who receive the word; it begins to develop in their lives, but it is among thorns. And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things choke out the effectiveness of the word in their lives, and so there is no real fruit brought forth by them.

Now, it is the Lord's desire that each of us bring forth much fruit. "Herein is the Father glorified" ([John 15:8](#)). Now, it is the Lord's desire that each of us bring forth much fruit. "Herein is the Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." But I think how often a person's work for God is thwarted or limited. That their lives are not really productive for the kingdom, because their hearts are drawn away. They're not sinners, they're not out and out rebellious against God. They love the Lord. They have the right desires for God, but they also have desires for the world, for the things of the world. And thus, their lives never achieve what they should and could achieve for the glory of God because the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for these other things have choked out that full fruitfulness that God would have them to bring forth for Him.

It is so difficult to maintain the right priorities in this world today. The pressures of the world are heavy, and it is so difficult to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in all of the pressures that we are faced with in our culture and society, based as it is so much around material things. That's the one that I would study and be most concerned. In my own life, this is the thing that concerns me most in the parable.

Jesus said to His disciples, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should be My disciples, and that you should bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain." The greatest desire I have is that my life bring forth fruit that does remain.

"Now these are they which are sown on the good ground; they hear the word, they receive it, and they bring forth fruit in varying degrees, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred."

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And then he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear ([Mar 4:21-23](#)).

The statement that Jesus is always making as He is speaking, is, "Hey, if you have ears to hear, hear." And unless our ears are open by the Spirit of God, we don't have ears to hear. It is only as the Spirit gives us the capacity. For the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them; they are spiritually discerned. But all the way through in the book of Revelation, when Jesus is talking to the church, again over and over, He is saying, "He that hath an ear to hear, let Him hear what the Spirit says to the church."

Now, you are the light of the world. A light is intended to illuminate the darkness, not to be hid under a candlestick. A light that God has given to you is not something that you are to just hold for yourself. It is intended to bring light to others.

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear ([Mar 4:24](#)):

Now, there is a common thing today of people saying, "Well, you know, let's hear what he has to say." You know, they turn on the TV and some guy is talking with his high squeaky voice. And he's got his flowers and, "Well, let's listen and let's see what he's got to say." The Lord said, "Take heed what you hear." You know, someone says, "Well, I want to hear what they're saying. I want to know what they're saying."

But you've got to be careful what you hear, because whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap. You cannot sow to your flesh, and reap with the spirit. Be careful what goes in your ears. It's going to leave its mark; it's going to have its affect upon you. I don't appreciate people just dumping garbage in my mind. "Be careful what you hear."

With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you ([Mar 4:24](#));

By whatever standard you are judging others, that is the standard by which you are going to be judged.

and unto you that hear shall more be given. [If you hear the truth.] For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath. And he said [unto them], So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed [that would be the word,] into the ground; and should sleep, and rises night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come ([Mar 4:24-29](#)).

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Now, what the Lord is saying is that there is this beautiful unconscious growth taking place as God's word is being planted in your heart. As you come Sunday nights, and as we go over the word, and as you're hearing the word, the seed is being sown, the seed is being planted. And you go home, you sleep, you live life as normal, but the word of God is having its effect. You can't always see it immediately, but there is that growth. First the blade and then the stalk, then the ear, then the full corn. But the word of God will have its effect in your life. And gradually you will see your life being transformed and changed just by the power of the word that is coming into your heart day by day. The glorious power of God's word changing a person's life. For if you sow to the Spirit, then of the Spirit you're going to reap.

Now, sometimes we get restless and we get impatient and we want to see the fruit immediately. You know, we want to plant our seeds like Jack and the Beanstalk and go out the next morning and climb the thing that's fully matured. We would like instant growth, but our spiritual growth is imperceptible many times. There's just that unconscious work on our part. But then we look back and we see how far we've come. "Wow! I can see the work of God; I can see how far the Lord has brought me." And this is just the beauty and the value of God's word being sown in your hearts. You know, without even realizing it, by your being here and God's word being sown in your heart, there are changes that are taking place, slowly gradually, imperceptibly, on a day-by-day basis. But over a period of time, you can see things developing and growing. And oh, how glorious when it begins to really bring forth fruit in your life, when you find that God has really changed your attitudes and things that used to just make you so totally angry and upset, it's just sort of, "Well, they need help. I'll pray for them." And you find that, "Hey, is that me saying that? Wow!" And you can see that God's word has had its effect, a life-changing effect. And it's so unconscious, really. It's not struggling, it's not laboring, it's not trying so hard. "I'm gonna do this now." It's not that big works effort, but it's just that beautiful unconscious work of God's Spirit, transforming me and changing me into the image of Christ, through the effect of the word of God being planted. The seed planted in my heart.

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? ([Mar 4:30](#))

So, this is a comparison now.

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth ([Mar 4:31](#)):

A mustard seed is a very tiny little dark seed. It looks like a carnation seed.

But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs ([Mar 4:32](#)),

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Now, they all had their herb gardens, and they all grew their mint and anise and cumin and rosemary and so forth, their spices, their mustard. And this grows up taller than the rest of those herbs that they grew.

and shooteth out great branches ([Mar 4:32](#));

Wait a minute! This isn't what a mustard plant does. So, here we have an abnormal growth.

so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it ([Mar 4:32](#)).

Uh-oh, things are bad when the fowls of the air...because remember what the fowls represent? Satan, coming in, taking away the seed that was sown.

Christianity is a term that was first used in Antioch by the people of Antioch who put this tag upon those who were living like Christ. They said, "Oh, they're Christ-like." And that is what the term Christian actually means, Christ-like. However, in time, the term has come to a much broader meaning. And it is a term that has been applied like in the Middle East, if you're not a Muslim, then you're a Christian. And in America, if you're not an atheist, you're a Christian. And we used to say a Christian nation, but it's far from a Christian nation.

And so we see very sad caricatures of Christianity or Christians. Such as what was in the Register this week, where you have this ghoulish looking character with a gun smoking and tramping over the bodies in refugee camp number two, and underneath the caption, "Onward Christian Soldiers." The Santa Ana Register is making an attack against everyone of you who believe in Jesus Christ. They are ridiculing your faith. It is a definite attack upon every true child of God. It's a blasphemous attack. It's an unfair attack. But they don't care about fairness in their war. But we, in being Christ-like, must obey and follow Jesus Christ. And we must love and we must forgive.

There is, throughout the world, still a very strong anti-Semitism feeling in the hearts of the many people. This has existed for centuries. And people are just looking for some excuse to hate the Jew or to be mad at the Jew. Paul the apostle represented the feelings of every true Christian where he said, "My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved. And I could wish myself accursed for God for my brother's sake, that they might know Jesus Christ." But unfortunately, in the name of Christianity, in the name of the church, the Jews have been persecuted through the centuries.

These attitudes that have arisen have not arisen from true Christianity, though many of them have prevailed in the church. And unfortunately in many churches today, there are still areas of strong feelings of anti-this and anti-that, and that's sad indeed. And so, within the church, under its shadow, all kinds of horrible things have found refuge. Within the church today, this super World Council of Churches, every kind of fowl exists. Things are being done in the name of the church or Christianity that have nothing to do

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with Jesus Christ. Enemies of Christ even, working from within the church. So, "when it is sown, it becomes greater than all of the herbs, shoots out great branches." That's abnormal growth. That's not the true growth, that's abnormal growth. "The fowls of the air may lodge in the shadow."

And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side ([Mar 4:33-35](#)).

Notice the words, "Let us pass over to the other side."

And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? ([Mar 4:36-38](#))

Jesus must have been extremely tired, having all of these multitudes of people pressing Him, grabbing Him, touching Him. So that, as they started to cross the sea, He fell asleep. And such a deep sleep, that as the storm came up and the ship was being tossed, he continued to sleep. Until finally, the ship was almost full of water. And so they came back and they woke him up and they said, "Master, don't you care if we perish?"

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm ([Mar 4:39](#)).

Tremendous power!

And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? ([Mar 4:40](#))

First He rebuked the wind and the waves, and then He rebuked the disciples. He rebuked them for having no faith. Why would He do that? The ship was full of water; it looked like it was going to sink. Why would He rebuke them for not having faith? Because you go back to the beginning, what He first said, "Let us pass over unto the other side." He didn't say, "Let's go under." He said, "Let us pass over to the other side." And when Jesus said, "Let us pass over to the other side," there's no way they could go under. You see, this is God speaking, and God's word must come to pass. And that's why He rebuked them; for little faith. Because they had His word that they were going to go over to the other side. He had told them, "Now, be careful what you hear." They weren't careful what they heard, you see.

And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? ([Mar 4:41](#))