

SEED THOUGHTS

Mark 4 1-32

Introduction:

Last week – introduced the parables of Jesus regarding the kingdom of God. Review/follow-up on some thoughts from last week:

Nature of parables – they are not allegories. Not every detail in a parable is intended to mean something. There is usually a main purpose or point to a parable. They are illustrations – given to open a window on a particular idea or thought. That is not to say that there is never any significance to the different ideas or elements in a parable. We certainly need to carefully search out the meaning. We will see today that Jesus interpreted his own parable about the sower and the seed by attaching meaning to various elements in his story.

Purpose of parables – Why did Jesus speak to the crowds in parables? That is the question the disciples asked – see v. 10; Matt. 13:10 – “Why do you speak to them in parables?” Jesus explained – it was to reveal the previously hidden mystery of the kingdom to those who believe, while at the same time concealing it from “those outside,” unbelievers, who would not believe or accept the truth.

I want to just mention vv. 21-25 – could be called another parable, but these verses are also a further explanation as to why Jesus taught in parables – *read vv. 21-25*. The whole purpose of something being hidden is so that it can be revealed at a later time – v. 22. A lamp is not hidden or covered up, except to bring it out at the appropriate time to give light to those who are in the house.

There is more that could be said about these verses, but what I want to get to this morning is the parables in our text that deals with seeds and sowing. There are actually three parables that mark gives us to show us secrets of the kingdom and the way that God works and is working even today.

We begin with the parable of the sower and the seed.

The Sower and the Seed – Sowing the Word

The parable – seed is the Word of God. The sower is the one who sows the Word – a testimony, a Bible lesson, a sermon, a word of witness... The seed of the Word lands in places of varying temperament and responsiveness.

Just a word about these heart conditions – these are not necessarily permanent conditions. A heart that is hard and unresponsive today may be fertile and ready to receive the word later on. We all go through various stages and changes in the condition of our heart during our lifetime.

Whenever we are confronted with the Word of God—the seed is sown in our hearts—we are in one of the four conditions described in these verses. So let’s take a quick look at them.

1. An Infertile Heart – vv. 4,15. These are indifferent hearers, they hear the Word, but do not respond. Satan takes away the seed before it has a chance to germinate because the heart is hard and impenetrable. The Lord has much to say about hard-heartedness – just a couple of verses:
Mark 3:5 – *read it*. A hard heart is grievous to Jesus.
Heb. 3:13 – *“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”* – a hard heart is usually caused by sin.
2. A Shallow Heart – vv. 5-6,16-17. These are what I would call emotional hearers. They respond enthusiastically, but that is the way they respond to everything. Every fad or idea that comes along – they are all gung-ho, but it soon fizzles out and dies. Nothing comes of it. They are like the man who came to Jesus in Matt. 8:19 and said to him, *“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”* (Mention Jesus’ response...) There’s no depth of root, no foundation. They are like the man who builds his house on the sand - Luke 6:49. As soon as there is any trouble or persecution, any kind of opposition, they fall away and there is no lasting result.
3. A Distracted Heart – vv. 7,18-19. These are worldly hearers. They hear the Word, seem inclined to follow and obey, but other things get in the way and take them away from the truth. The cares of the world, the concerns of this life choke out any true response to the

truth. Jesus reminded us in Matt. 6 not to get burdened down worrying about the things of this life and this world:

Matt. 6:31-32 – “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”

God does not want the concerns of this life to keep the Word from taking root in our heart and producing fruit.

Now, before we go on to the fourth soil in this parable, I want to address a question that may come to your mind about these hearts. Are the people Jesus talks about Christians? Do they lose their salvation? What exactly is happening according to this parable?

First, I would say that if we are talking about the Word coming to a non-Christian and his response to it, the results here would indicate that whatever faith sprouts from hearing the Word is choked out without ever really becoming saving faith that changes the heart – *explain*.

But there is something else. Whenever the Word of God comes to us, whenever the seed of the Word is sown, our heart is going to be in one of these conditions. The real issue in this parable is not salvation, it is fruitfulness. Does the Word produce fruit in us? How often are we under the sowing of the Word and the cares of this world, or the distractions of life keep it from ever taking root in our hearts? Or our hearts are hard at that moment and we just ignore the truth of the Word? Well, let’s look at the fourth result...

4. A Prepared Heart – vv. 8,20. These are the receptive hearers who are ready to hear and respond to the Word as it is given. They are like the Thessalonian believers to whom Paul wrote:
1 Thess. 2:13 – *“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”*
The result is a fruitful life – fruit which brings glory to God – thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold.

The real question we must answer is this: what is the condition of your heart when you hear the Word of God. It is not necessarily the same all the time. At any given moment, as we sit under the Word, we can be infertile, shallow, or distracted. Or we can be prepared to receive it, respond to it and act upon it.

Well, I want to quickly look at these other two parables:

The Seed Growing – Waiting for the Harvest

Read vv. 26-29 – this parable is unique to Mark. None of the other gospel writers record this particular illustration that Jesus gives. I would like to share some thoughts from Ray Stedman:

This is a secret of the kingdom of God. He is speaking of how this rule of God increases, how it grows in a life. He explains it as a coming to harvest by a patient expectation that God will work. The key of this whole passage is, "... the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, ..." That is, there are forces at work which will be faithful to perform their work -- whether a man stews and frets about it or not. He does what he can do, what is expected of him. But then God must work. And God will work. And in the confidence of that, this man rests secure.

Jesus draws the picture this way. This farmer goes out to sow. It is hard work as he sows the field, but this is what he can do. But then he goes home and goes to bed. He does not sit up all night biting his fingernails, wondering if the seed fell in the right places, or whether it will take root. Nor does he rise the next morning and go out and dig it up to see whether or not it has sprouted yet. He rests secure in the fact that God is at work, that he has a part in this process, and he must do it; no one can do it for him. But he will faithfully perform it. So, the farmer rests secure, knowing that as the seed grows there are stages which are observable: "... first the blade, then the ear then the full grain in the ear." It is only as the grain is ripe that he is called into action again. When the harvest is ready, then he is to act once more.

This is exactly what Paul describes for us in that passage in 1 Corinthians 3:6 – “For we are laborers together with God:” This is the way we ought to expect him to work. It involves a witness first, perhaps a word

of teaching or exhortation to someone—or to ourselves. And then an inevitable process begins, one which takes time and patience, and allows God to work.

One of the most destructive forces at work in the church today is our insistent demand for instant results. We want to have immediate conversions, immediate responses, immediate dedications every time we speak. We tend not to allow time for the Word to take root and grow and come to harvest. But that is what our Lord is teaching us in this parable.

The Mustard Seed – Seeing the Result

The mustard seed is the third in this trio of parables about the seed. I confess that this parable has long been a mystery, and in many ways its meaning is still hidden to me. There are several different views regarding the meaning of this little parable. We are not going to spend long on it this morning.

Whatever main truth Jesus was seeking to point out, even he seems a bit puzzled as to how to make the point – v. 30. Then he gives this little nugget about the mustard seed.

There are a couple of things to point out here – the mustard seed is not actually the smallest of all seeds. But relatively speaking it is very tiny, especially compared to the plant that can grow from it. Then the description of the plant that grows from that seed seems like an exaggeration in v. 32. But I understand that there are varieties of mustard plants in the middle East that can grow up to 12-15 feet high.

The meaning – It seems that Jesus pictures the kingdom of God beginning with a small influence but growing to something large and life-changing. There is the element of the spread of the gospel in the world to become worldwide in its scope. But I would suggest that this image fits equally well to the way in which the Word of God takes root and grows in the life of the individual believer. It begins with that simple seed of faith—like a mustard seed. Yet it grows and matures until the impact reaches far beyond the individual. As your faith grows and increases, your very life becomes a source of shade, benefit, and blessing to others as well.

Conclusion

Well, there are the three secrets of the kingdom of God which Mark selects for us. What do they say to us? God is at work today just as he was then:

- He is sowing the Word, by various means, in our lives and hearts. We are to be careful that our heart is ready and responsive to receive that Word.
- Then we are to rest upon him. He is bearing the load of the battle. The battle is the Lord's, not ours. He is working out his purposes in our individual lives and in the life of the church as a whole. He will do it. We can rest on it till the harvest time comes; then he will call us to action again.
- Finally, we are to be growing, allowing the Word to grow in us, that we might become a source of blessing and grace to others. Faith, which begins small, as a grain of mustard, can become great and powerful as we mature in Christ.

Let us seek to allow the seed of the Word to produce a rich harvest in our lives.