

Week 7: Teaching: The Kingdom of God

Hook



Main Point: Jesus taught in parables to reveal the truth of the kingdom of God.

Q: Have you ever discovered something valuable?

In 2009, a man named Terry Herbert was looking through a field in England with his metal detector – something he often did as a hobby. It probably seemed like any other day to him, and the field was just like the many he had searched before. But that day, he stumbled upon the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold and silver ever discovered: over 4,000 items, buried just beneath the surface. The treasure was eventually valued at over \$4 million.¹

Q: What would you do if you found buried treasure worth millions of dollars?

Transition: As crazy as it would be to find real treasure buried in a field, Jesus said that God's kingdom is just like that. Jesus frequently used parables to teach about the kingdom of God, and this is just one of many examples. Today, we'll explore how and why He often employed this teaching method.

RECAP: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books; they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark's focus on Jesus' action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw how every part of Jesus' ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world. We saw Jesus' power not only to heal, cast out demons, and perform miracles but even to forgive sin, demonstrating that He is God.

In the last two lessons, we saw Jesus behave differently from the typical religious leaders of His day and flip their social systems upside down. And we saw that some people reacted positively to Jesus, and some people reacted negatively, especially those who didn't want their world turned upside down, because the status quo was working in their favor.

In this lesson, Mark turns to Jesus' teachings on the kingdom of God. Mark doesn't contain as much teaching as the other Gospels, but He doesn't leave it out completely. Though Jesus came to offer Himself as a sacrifice, He also came to teach the people what the kingdom of God is like and what it looks like to live as kingdom people in this fallen world.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus taught in parables to reveal the truth of the kingdom of God.

Mark 4:1–20 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus' ministry revealed whether people's hearts were receptive or stubborn.

Q: Why did Jesus say He spoke to the people in parables?

Q: What do the different types of soil in this parable represent?

We've seen Jesus teach, and we've heard Him say a few things in response to people's questions and actions, but this is the first real block of teaching in Mark. It starts with a parable that tells us exactly what we saw in the last lesson – that people will respond differently to Jesus and the Gospel. Most Bibles title this the parable of the sower, but it's more about the different kinds of soils than the sower himself. The sower scatters His seed the same way each time. It's the kind of soil that determines whether it grows.

This shows us that Jesus offers the Gospel to every person equally, regardless of background, social status, ethnicity or religious fervor. The invitation to repent, believe in the Gospel, and follow Him to find rest for our souls is open to everyone equally. Jesus made the same offer to the Pharisees, the Samaritan woman at the well, the Roman centurions, the Jewish fishermen by the sea, and even His own mother and brothers. He didn't show any favoritism of any kind; all are welcome to come to Him (Acts 10:34).

The seed is also the same every time. The message of the Gospel is the same for every single person – repent, believe the Gospel, and follow Jesus. This message was the same for the Pharisees, who thought they were righteous already and didn't need repentance, as it was for the sinners, who knew they weren't living righteously. All human beings are sinners in need of salvation. There is not one who is righteous, not even one (Psalm 14:1–3).

But not everyone receives His offer. Though Gospel means "good news," not everyone hears it as good news because of the condition of their hearts when they hear it. Jesus explained the parable to the disciples. The "good soil" refers to those whose hearts are fertile to receive the Gospel. When they hear it, they accept it with joy and it produces a good crop – the Fruit of the Spirit growing in them – which impacts the world in an exponential way.

But there are those with stubborn hearts, like the Pharisees Jesus had just encountered (3:5). When Jesus offered them the Gospel, it was like scattering seed on a path. It never gets planted at all; Satan takes it away as soon as it is heard. Satan is the liar; he tells them God's Word is not true, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden. Those with stubborn hearts hear the Gospel and immediately reject it as untrue or foolish.

Then there are those whose hearts are rocky soil. They receive the Gospel with joy at first but don't grow any roots. These are the kinds of people who might pray the prayer of salvation to get their "ticket into heaven" but never really follow Jesus. They never repent but continue living the way they did before, so the Fruit of the Spirit doesn't grow in their lives. It's not about their actions. It's not about "not doing enough"; it's about the condition of their heart. They haven't really accepted the Gospel because they haven't repented or changed. When trouble comes, they turn away from the faith, because their faith was never real in the first place.

There are others whose hearts are like soil that has thorns. They also hear the Word, but it doesn't take root. The worries of this life and the desire for other things, like wealth and power, choke the Word so it never bears fruit. These are people who would say they believe the Gospel, but their life shows that their true "gods" are the things of this world, not Jesus.

This is an explanation of why many of the people they had encountered thus far had rejected the Gospel or seemed to accept it but then fell away. It was also a word of warning to the disciples that the same thing would happen when they went out to spread the good news. They needed to be ready for people to react in different ways. As messengers, they were only responsible for sharing the message, not for how people reacted to it. As Paul said, we can plant seeds and water seeds, but it is only God who causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5–9).

Q: How have you seen some people respond to the Gospel with stubborn hearts? What can you do when they seem to be completely closed off to it?

Q: What can we do to cultivate "good soil" in our lives and in our relationships?

Mark 4:9–13 and 21–25 [Read]

Talking Point 2: God will grow His fruit in those who have open hearts.

Q: Why do you think Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear"? What kind of hearing is He talking about?

Q: What did Jesus mean by “more” when He said more will be given to those who have?

These two short parables refer to what Jesus said between His telling of the parable of the sower and His explanation of it. Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” implying there were some who didn’t have “ears to hear,” who wouldn’t listen to His message or understand it, those who were like the path, the rocky soil, or the thorns. The disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables rather than just telling them plainly. At first glance, Jesus’ answer may seem unfair. It sounds like He was intentionally making the truth of the kingdom hard for “those on the outside” to understand.

But Jesus was quoting Isaiah, when God called him to be a prophet. Reading it in that context, we see that God said Isaiah’s message would harden the people’s hearts, not bring them to repentance as God desired. Just like the law, Isaiah’s message was the message God wanted His people to hear, but sinful human hearts had a poor reaction to it. They had calloused hearts, dull ears, closed eyes. God told Isaiah they wouldn’t listen until their cities lay ruined, until Jerusalem was destroyed, and they were sent into Exile. Only then would they finally repent. And after the Exile, only a remnant of God’s people would remain (Isaiah 6:9–13).

Jesus was saying that the people of His day were just like the people of Israel in the time of Isaiah. They had stubborn hearts, dull ears and closed eyes. He taught in parables to reveal the hearts of the people. The “secret” of the kingdom of God was that it didn’t fit their expectations. They were expecting a military leader to conquer Rome and bring independence back to Israel. These parables taught exactly what the kingdom of God was really like, but if they didn’t have ears to hear, they wouldn’t get it. To those who have open hearts, the parables of Jesus illustrate the truth about the kingdom of God. But to the hard-hearted, His parables are like riddles they don’t understand. They are prophetic warnings of judgment for those who don’t follow Jesus, just like Isaiah’s day. But as in the Old Testament, every time God offers a prophetic warning, He offers an opportunity to repent.

This is why the next parable was about bringing the truth to light, and Jesus again said that only those who had “ears to hear” would hear it. Jesus’ ministry would expose the truth about people’s hearts. As Jesus continued to teach and minister to people, those with open hearts would understand more and more, and the Fruit of the Spirit would grow and multiply in their lives. But those with stubborn hearts, like the scribes and Pharisees, would grow angrier and eventually plot to kill Him. The “lamp” is God’s Word (Psalm 119:105), Jesus Himself, the Light of the World, and His teaching – both His

words and His actions. The light of Jesus would expose who was really part of God's kingdom and who wasn't.

This is what He meant by "more" in the next parable. More Fruit of the Spirit, more spiritual growth of the seed that was planted. It doesn't mean whoever has more money or power or status or any other worldly thing but whoever has the seed planted in the good soil – this will continue to grow. Whoever doesn't have that seed planted – the path, the rocky soil, the thorns – won't grow spiritually, and even that seed will be taken away. The "measure" is the attitude with which we receive the message of God's Word. If we welcome the Gospel's being planted in our hearts and grow deep roots, He will grow His fruit in us, even to a hundredfold, which, symbolically, means more than we could have imagined.

This is the "secret" of the kingdom. It was different than their expectations. It was not about Israel's gaining independence from Rome and establishing their own physical kingdom. It is about God's rule over the whole world, starting in our hearts. Jesus came to proclaim this kingdom, and His parables explain exactly what kind of a kingdom it is. His teaching and His ministry also reveal who is on board with this kingdom and who is against it.

Q: Jesus says, "Pay attention to what you hear." What does that look like practically in our daily walk with God?

Q: How can we cultivate a greater receptivity to God's Word in our lives?

Mark 4:26–34 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The kingdom will start small but grow to impact the whole world.

Q: Why do you think this parable says the seed grows no matter what the man does?

Q: What does the imagery of the mustard seed teach us about how God's kingdom grows?

These two short parables both illustrate how the kingdom of God will start small like a seed but grow into fullness over time. This is another way the kingdom of God was different from what the people expected. They thought the Messiah would come like a conquering hero on a war horse, defeat Rome in a decisive battle, and reestablish the throne of David. That God's kingdom would come suddenly, all at once. But Jesus said His kingdom would start small, like a seed planted in the soil. Over time it would grow until the grain became ripe, and then it would be time for the harvest.

In other parables, Jesus linked the “harvest” to the Day of Judgment, when the “grain” of the field would be cut down and the wheat would be separated from the tares (Matthew 13:24–30). Jesus’ describing His kingdom this way explains what scholars call “inaugurated eschatology,” or the “already/not yet” of the kingdom of God. Jesus will come one day as a conquering hero on a war horse to defeat Satan and establish His kingdom, but this won’t happen until much later (Revelation 19:11–16). When Jesus came the first time, in first-century Galilee, He only started (inaugurated) the kingdom as a small seed. This kingdom will continue to grow over time, through every generation of the Church, until He comes again.

In the first of these two parables, Jesus said the seed grows on its own, whether the man sleeps or gets up. This means no matter what we as humans do or don’t do, the kingdom of God will grow. In other places, Scripture talks about the kingdom’s being like a temple where each of us puts the “living stone” of our life’s ministry work on top of the foundation of the apostles to build the Church (Ephesians 2:20). Paul said we need to be careful how we build (1 Corinthians 3:10–17). This is true. We work with God to build His Church, and we should take care in how we build, but this parable lets us know that even if we mess up, God’s kingdom will grow. Sometimes God even uses our mistakes to grow His Church.

The second of the two parables tells us that the seed may start small, but it will grow into the largest of all the plants, with branches big enough to provide shade, representing God’s blessing to the world. What Jesus was doing at the time may have seemed small and insignificant, but it would grow to impact the entire world and bless every nation, just as God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3). In the book of Acts, the Church exploded in growth and spread across the known world at the time, just as this parable describes.

We are now 2,000-plus years past the early days of the Church’s starting as a seed and exploding into growth throughout the known world. But we don’t know when harvest time will come. We live in the “between” of the “already, not yet.” The kingdom has come in the hearts of believers but not yet in its fullness, when Jesus will physically reign on the throne over the whole world. We have individually been made new creations, but all creation has not yet been made new. Our job in the meantime is to be Christ’s ambassadors to the world, sharing His message with the broken world through our words and our actions (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). This is how we help build the Church until He returns.

Q: What are some “mustard seed” moments you have experienced with Christ—times when something small grew into something significant?

Q: How have you seen God use people's mistakes to grow His Church?

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Took

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Christians are called to go and be Jesus' hands and feet, to share His love and His light with the people around us. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

It can be easy to miss it, but God's kingdom is growing. From this summer's Prestonwood Students Beach Camp alone, 128 students were baptized. Consider all that God is doing around the world. Then think about what He's doing near you, whether in your church, your family, your workplace or elsewhere.

Q: How can you be a part of building His kingdom on a day-to-day basis?

Q: How can you spread the light of God's truth?

Would you like to be a part of a Jesus-ministry that serves God's people and is used to expand the kingdom? Consider volunteering in one of these amazing ministries:

Before You Say, "I Do" Coach Couples (Plano Campus Only): e-mail bysid@prestonwood.org

Mentor4Couples: e-mail m4c@prestonwood.org

In-Touch Ministry: e-mail intouch@prestonwood.org

Media Department: e-mail media@prestonwood.org

PowerPoint Ministries: e-mail email@powerpoint.org

KIDZ Ministry: e-mail dpendley@prestonwood.org

Guest Central: e-mail dblakes@prestonwood.org at the Plano Campus or cburt@prestonwood.org at the North Campus

Life Recovery: e-mail liferecovery@prestonwood.org

Kids' Worship: e-mail kidsmusic@prestonwood.org at the Plano Campus or northkidsmusic@prestonwood.org at the North Campus

Own Your Own Section: e-mail host@prestonwood.org

Prestonwood Pregnancy Center: e-mail prestonwoodpregnancy.org/volunteer

Prestonwood Sports Organization: e-mail gmixon@prestonwood.org

Prestonwood Students: e-mail planostudents@prestonwood.org at the Plano Campus or northstudents@prestonwood.org at the North Campus

Special Friends Ministry: email spickrell@prestonwood.org at the Plano Campus or wfink@prestonwood.org at the North Campus

Ushers, Parking Team, Greeters: e-mail hletcher@prestonwood.org

Women's Ministry: e-mail bchambless@prestonwood.org

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on people you know who are like the path – with stubborn hearts toward Jesus, thinking Christianity is untrue or even foolish. How can you reach out to them in a way that shows them something true about the Gospel? What else can you do to impact them? What about people who are like rocky soil, who have a shallow “faith” that isn’t real faith? How can you speak truth into their lives and show them genuine faith? How can you challenge those with nominal faith but not real faith in Jesus? How can you guide them when they’re choked by worries, desires, or riches? How can you show them Jesus’s worth over their desires? How can you pray for them?

PRAY for God’s kingdom to grow in this time between Jesus’ first coming and His final kingdom. Pray for the Church to be strengthened all over the world. Pray for the Church to grow both in numbers and in depth, passion and purpose. Pray specifically for the American Church, that we will be an accurate reflection of who Jesus is. Pray for every believer to have a true, living and active faith, not just a nominal faith – Christians in name only. Pray for yourself to have the strength and wisdom to speak truth in hard situations and bring the truth to light the darkness.

ACT: Speak truth – Reflect on the different types of people we’ve talked about in this lesson – people who don’t even want to hear the Gospel; people with a nominal faith, not a true faith; people who are choked by the worries and desires of the world; people who need to have truth revealed in their lives. Think about friends and family who may be in these categories and how God wants you to speak truth into their situations and bring the truth to light. Then do it in a challenging yet loving way.

¹ “Unearthed Treasure: The Astonishing Discovery of the Staffordshire Gold Hoard.” *Aurum*. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://aurum.co.uk/the-staffordshire-hoard/>.