

The Gospel of Mark

Parables About the Kingdom: Lesson 9

- I. General Introduction
 - a. Parables and information in this section are scattered in Matthew and Luke
 - b. Mark gathers the information here from oral traditions
 - c. Mark uses this information to comment on the meaning of parables
 - d. Jesus is probably teaching in Galilee
- II. A Lamp on a Stand
 - a. Not exactly a parable but a statement about parables
 - b. Lamp has several meanings in the OT
 - i. God
 - ii. Davidic Messiah
 - iii. Torah
 - c. Another translation
 - i. "Does the lamp come in order that it might be placed under the bowl or under the bed?"
 1. The – not just any lamp, a special lamp
 2. Coming – refers more to a person
 3. This points to Jesus – the LAMP of God
 - d. Oil lamps gave optimum light when elevated
 - e. Lampstand was placed in the tabernacle so all could see
 - i. Jesus and His light cannot be hidden
 - ii. Jesus is not subordinated to anything
 - iii. Jesus is elevated and supreme
 - f. Jesus is the light that allows people to see
 - g. Lamp + disclosure = God's purpose in Jesus is to enLIGHTen and reveal
 - h. Verse 22 is not a warning about future judgment
 - i. Jesus makes the simple statement that what is secret always becomes known
 - ii. God's kingdom has been a mystery which Jesus is now revealing
 - iii. Concealment has the seeds of what will be revealed
 - iv. Jesus' humanity prevents God's glory from overwhelming and blinding the world
 - i. Jesus is graciously revealing the very secrets of the kingdom of God through parables
 - i. This is good news!
 - ii. The secrets of the kingdom are made available to humanity
 - j. The promise (v. 22) is followed by an encouraging exhortation (v. 23)
 - i. 'Listen carefully and really hear what I am saying'
 - ii. Hearing is not only with the ears but with the heart
 - k. Embroidery has two sides
 - i. One side is a mess of tangles, knots and loose threads
 - ii. Other side is a beautiful pattern
 - iii. To see the pattern, you must turn the fabric over to reveal it
 - l. Parable has two sides
 - i. One side is the story told
 - ii. Other side is the deeper meaning of the story
 - iii. To understand the parable, you must listen and hear

- iv. Hearing is the entryway to the kingdom
- m. The effort you use to really hear the Word will determine how well you understand it (v. 24)
 - i. Those that open their ears and open their hearts will understand
 - ii. Those who just listen will fail to understand the secrets and mysteries
- n. God wants to give us understanding
- o. 'In the pot in which you cook others, you will be cooked.'
- p. Verse 25 IS a warning
 - i. Those who make the effort to hear
 - 1. Rewarded with more and more understanding
 - ii. Those who listen but make little effort to hear
 - 1. Their understanding will slowly diminish
 - 2. They will lose interest as the parables are just stories to them
 - 3. Eventually they will reject the Word and reject God
 - iii. Those to whom the mystery of the kingdom is given through Jesus
 - 1. Get a greater capacity to enter it
 - iv. Those who fail to receive the mystery in Jesus
 - 1. Have the understanding they already have removed
 - v. Understanding the kingdom is NOT a human ability
 - 1. It is a capacity created by Jesus Christ in the heart

III. The Parable of the Growing Seed

- a. Reminders
 - i. Parable about the kingdom of God
 - ii. The Gospel of Mark is an identity mystery
 - 1. Who is this man Jesus?
 - 2. He is the "Son of God"!
 - 3. Supernatural world knows His true identity
 - 4. Natural world is ignorant until ...
 - iii. "Son of God" language comes from 2 Samuel 7:14
 - 1. Refers to David's royal lineage
 - 2. David's sons will enjoy a father-son relationship with God
 - iv. King in the Ancient Near East was to mediate god's blessing to the people. (Psalm 72)
 - v. Above the earthly kings is god
 - 1. King of all creation
 - 2. King of all kings
 - vi. Jesus is the Son of God who brings life to humanity
 - vii. Most people were not able to see that Jesus would be the very source of life
 - 1. As the Son of God and as the royal Son of David
 - viii. How could He best explain and reveal how God's kingdom works?
- b. Another agricultural parable
- c. Paradox of the Gospel
 - i. God's Kingdom is grand and glorious
 - 1. High mountains, sunsets, wide oceans
 - ii. Jesus represents the Kingdom with seeds
 - 1. Something inauspicious and commonplace

- iii. God is high and holy but also near and present
 - 1. Planting and harvesting are mundane clues to the nature of the kingdom and God's plan
- d. The subject is just a man (not a farmer)
- e. He casts seed on the ground (active)
 - i. Seed is not spectacular in any way
- f. No matter what he does the seed grows (passive)
- g. He does not understand the mystery of the growth
 - i. Some other force is responsible
 - ii. He believes the harvest will come
- h. He harvests the crops when it is time (active)
- i. Seed contains in itself the power of generation
- j. Gospel also prospers of itself
 - i. Once sown it sets in motion a process leading to harvest
- k. Sickle represents the arrival of God's kingdom
- l. Kingdom grows alongside business as usual
 - i. Growth is not obvious
- m. God does not hurl the kingdom as lightning bolt but plants it as a seed – presently hidden, portends a harvest
- n. Zealots tried to force the kingdom by revolution
- o. Apocalypticism looked to careful observations to predict the future
- p. Pharisees believed obeying the law would bring about the kingdom
- q. Jesus is confident in the coming kingdom despite opposition and misunderstanding
- r. We must sleep and rise confident that God has invaded the world not with an army but with a seed
- s. We often think:
 - i. We can have spiritual effects
 - ii. We can design and guarantee outcomes
 - iii. We can create a technology to solve spiritual problems
- t. We are tempted:
 - i. To investigate and then eliminate the mystery of faith
 - ii. To take control of spirituality
- u. We can choose wise ways to sow and reap
 - i. We cannot actually create life
 - ii. We cannot control outcomes
 - iii. We cannot even be faithful by ourselves
- v. It is not our job to understand the mystery of faith
- w. To embrace these truths is to have real freedom

IV. The Parable of the Mustard Seed

- a. The movement from small to large and the contrast shows how God works!
 - i. The vision of a population for Israel as numerous as the stars in the sky
 - ii. From begins with an old man and a barren woman. (Gen.15:1-6; Rom. 4:16-25)
- b. Israel's royal lineage began with David
 - i. The youngest of Jesse's sons (see 1 Samuel 16:1-13)

- c. God often uses the weak, sick, inferior, young, and poor to do his great work. (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)
- d. Mustard
 - i. Annual plant
 - ii. Microscopic seed produces a bush where birds can roost
- e. Kingdom
 - i. Something God gives, not something we bring about
 - ii. What we cannot imagine will loom before us
 - iii. God's will be more real, larger and more encompassing than we can imagine
 - 1. It all starts with simple, small, and obscure beginnings which are hidden and overlooked
- f. The Birds of the Air
 - i. Jesus is likely drawing on imagery from Daniel (4:9-12, 20-21) and Ezekiel (17:22-24; 31:1-9)
 - ii. The "birds of the air" seem to represent all the nations, people of the world
 - iii. God's grace is available to ALL
 - iv. Appealing to Mark's Gentile Roman readers

V. Conclusion

- a. There are many other similar stories
- b. "as much as they could understand"
 - i. To those that hear receive a revelation which grows and multiplies
 - 1. The first step to fellowship with Jesus
 - a. When they were alone Jesus explained the parables
 - ii. To those that cannot hear the parables are opaque
- c. Parables were Jesus' public persona
- d. Jesus used graphic images from everyday life
- e. Jesus invited audiences to and insider experience and fellowship