

Jesus Wow! Series Part 16

Jesus Uses Parables

Mark 4:1-12

Pastor Andrew Neville 26/7/20

Sermon Summary

The first 9 verses of the 4th chapter of Mark can be entitled: **The Parable of the 4 Soils**. Jesus finishes the teaching with the remark, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” In other words, “think about it, figure it out, then adjust your life accordingly.”

The teaching next proceeds to a private meeting with the disciples recorded in Mark 4:10-12. The disciples did not understand the parable and asked Jesus for an explanation. Paraphrasing the words of these 3 verses: Jesus talks in parables to (a) bless insiders and (b) to block outsiders. It is only natural that we think Jesus is deliberately obscuring his message to block out others. Really?

This is one of the more difficult passages to understand, yet we must know the foundations of what Jesus is telling us, since it comes across as hugely controversial.

It is like a jigsaw (or Wasjig). In order to see the full picture, we require painstaking determination to piece every bit together. A few points about this passage:

1. Some outsiders do become insiders. With understanding, those outsiders will come to faith. Jesus is preaching **good news** – repent and believe (Mark 1:14-15). This is His mission. The disciples, after all, were once outsiders themselves.
2. Many outsiders heard other teachings by Jesus that were **not** expressed in parables. For example, the Sermon on the Mount was certainly preached in very plain language. While the use of parables was part of Jesus’ teaching technique, we must remember that He did many other things such as healings that made Him unique. They were a showcase of His divinity; His audience understood that.
3. Some outsiders certainly understood the parables. For example, the parable of the tenants (Mark 10: 1-12) was clearly understood by the Pharisees – since verse 12 “they were seeking to arrest Him” is not the sort of reaction of a crowd to a message they did not understand!
4. Some insiders also struggled to understand the parables – why? Matthew writes in greater detail than Mark on this issue. Matthew 13: 10-16 is the equivalent of Mark 4: 1-20. Matthew adds Isaiah’s prophecy found in Isaiah 6: 9-10 + [which will fall on Isaiah’s generation whose character was laid bare in the first 5 chapters of his book]. Just as the people of Isaiah’s day had calloused hearts, so do many of the people of Jesus’ day.

These are people who always seem to miss the point. They are uninterested. They have made up their minds; they have become willfully blind. They simply don’t **want to know**.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day didn't want a kingdom of peaceful forgiveness – they wanted a warrior king of unlimited power to crush their enemies. They wanted to be top-dogs of an empire. And Jesus answered his disciples explaining the reason for parables: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11).

If we harden our hearts, much will be taken from us. For those with hardened hearts, the message of Jesus has been **concealed** – it has **not been revealed**. Mentally, such people get it – the gist, but they do not believe it is true. The truth of the gospel is **not** about **cognition**; but rather **volition**.

The more the people hardened their hearts, the more Jesus spoke in parables. Even the disciples did not always understand the meaning within a parable, but one thing they did have was a passionate desire **to know everything that Jesus was on about**. And so, Jesus used parables to conceal things from some and to reveal things to others.

Today, we are privileged because we have Jesus' explanations of the parables in the New Testament and many expositors' work on them down the years. We are without excuse.

The sovereignty of God, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22:21 is perfectly obvious. Everything written there is for **His Glory**. Throughout the Bible we are given commands plus the ways to carry them out. God says to each of us, “You are held accountable; you are responsible for your actions and beliefs.”

Compatibilism is the belief that free will and determinism are mutually compatible and that it is possible to believe in both without being logically inconsistent. It means that **God is sovereign** – He chooses us: “No one can come to me unless the Father draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day,” said Jesus (John 6 :44). But that does not reduce our **human responsibility**. We have to respond to God.

“Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:35-37). God does not make bad choices; we do! But if we come to Jesus, He will never drive us away.

So, what do we do with this text? Right now, if you are not a Christian, become one! Don't wait lest you be too late. God has given all humans enough knowledge to make a decision for Him.

“I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”(2 Timothy 2: 10).

Why would you not want to have eternal life – to be chosen by God? The Bible says there are still people out in the world who will be saved. It is our job as Christians to witness to them.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a time in school or work or family life when someone spoke to you or a group in a parable or figure of speech to make a point? Did you get it? Did all of you get it? Describe the analogy and the response.
2. **Read Mark 4: 1-12. Compare Matthew 13: 1-17 and Luke 8: 4-10.** What differences do you see? What is the essence of the 3 accounts?
3. Were you ever an outsider to the Christian faith? What most blocked your eyes from seeing and your ears from hearing the truth of the gospel? What opened your eyes?
4. Why do many people **not** want to hear the gospel?
5. **Read 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16.** What is the role of the Holy Spirit in witnessing? Reread verse 14 – what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the response?
6. How long does one go on witnessing with the hard-hearted person? **Look at Matthew 7:6, and 10:14-15.** But then **read 2 Timothy 2:10.** How do you decide who is elect by the sovereignty of God?
7. **Read John 6:35-37 and 44.** In what way do these words of Jesus give you hope?

Prayer suggestions for Life Groups July 27th

Global: India

There are reports of increased suicides in India during lockdown. An exciting new pilot project using WhatsApp has been launched in India. Short encouraging Christian audio messages that address the Covid-19 situation in indigenous languages

National: Jobs

The number of job losses is escalating (eg The Warehouse Group – c. 950 jobs). About 3500 Southland jobs could be affected, directly and indirectly by the closing of the Tiwai Point aluminium smelter.

Local: Students

Pray for our University students as courses start again... and for all Christian campus outreaches