

Mark 4:21-34
Parables of Fruitful
Hearers

1

Introduction

When one considers how the enemies of a Holy God can be forgiven, adopted as children of the King, and enter into the Kingdom of God, it seems too good to be true. What is truly crazy is that anyone would reject this offer. The parable of the soils helps us understand that it is the sinful nature of man's hearts that cause them to reject the Gospel.

We can find forgiveness of our sins, not through works, but only by
faith!

The big question is "What is Faith?" Though faith involved knowledge, it is more than just knowing and quoting doctrine. Though faith involves belief, it is more than just accepting something as true. James reminds us that even the Devil believes in God (James 2:19).

2

Introduction

Saving faith means to look at the truth of the Gospel (that it is our sin that separates us from God, who Jesus is, and how He paid our debt upon the cross). True belief means taking that knowledge of God and this reality and making it foundational in one's life. True saving faith will become evident in a person's life as they bear fruit (James chapter 2 defines this as works).

James isn't contradicting Paul. Paul teaches we're saved by faith alone; James teaches that true saving faith never stays alone — it bears fruit. In these parables, Jesus is teaching that those who "hear" the truths of the Kingdom and "believe", will bear fruit in keeping with what they hear.

3

Mark 4:21-34

Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? ²² For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

²⁴ Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. ²⁵ For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

²⁶ And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.

²⁸ For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.

²⁹ But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

³⁰ Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it?

³¹ *It is* like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth;

³² but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."

³³ And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. ³⁴ But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

4

Fruitful Hearers Witness

Mark 4:21-23

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The parable of the soils focused on the responses of those who heard the message of salvation. Good soil bears much fruit. In these parables the focus in on what that fruit looks like.

Those with true faith are to be faithful witnesses of Christ. Our faith must be evidenced by our actions and our faithful witness.

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Jesus used a simple analogy to make this point. He was saying to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?" Terracotta lamps were small oil pitchers with a wick and handle. To maximize their illumination, lamps were set on lampstands or on shelves where their glow could radiate throughout the room unobstructed. For obvious reasons, no one would place a lamp under a basket or under a bed, thereby negating its purpose.

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Verse 22 is more difficult. Some theologians believe that Jesus is answering the disciple's confusion over Him speaking in parables. Is the Gospel to be hidden? Though parables Jesus spoke in a way to hide truth from those who had rejected Him, yet nothing can remain hidden or secret. After His resurrection, the disciples will carry the light of the message of the Gospel to the world. We are to let our light shine! Others believe that Jesus is referring to our lives. There is nothing in our lives that is secret and hidden that will not be exposed. Just as a lamp give light to a house, so God's truth bring light into our lives and exposes the things in and around us. Better to deal with those things now then before the Judgment Seat of God.

In a sense, both of these ideas carry practical implications.

Jesus warns, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

7

Fruitful Hearers Work

Mark 4:24-25

Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. ²⁵ For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

In Jesus' next statement He warns the disciple to pay close attention to what He is telling them. Jesus is looking for faithful workers. Each believer has been given gifts and talents to be used to evangelize the world. Everybody is important and each spiritual gift is to be utilized. It is not about the "gift" but one's faithfulness to it. To those who "hear and do" and are faithful in what has been given, they prove themselves to be faithful stewards and more will be given to them. Jesus taught this same concept in the parable of the talents.

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There is a warning here also. To the one who does not hear and chose to walk in God's path and do the "good works" that God has prepared for them (Eph. 2:10), what little they have will be stripped away from them. This is the wicked servant in the parable of the talents.

We must adjust our thinking and understanding to recognize that all we have – body, wealth, intellect, freedom, knowledge, talents, and spiritual gifts are given by God to be used for His kingdom. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

9

Fruitful Hearers Wait Diligently

Mark 4:26-29

And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. ²⁸For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

This parable teaches that we must be dependent upon God for the results. Jesus returns to a sower scattering seed on the ground. The sower cannot cause the seed to sprout and grow and does not have true understanding of what is taking place. He simply sees the result of the seed sprouting, growing, and bearing fruit. At the appropriate time, He is able to bring in the harvest.

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Each of us are to use our gifts and abilities to further the Kingdom of God. We are all given the task of scattering seed. We witness by our words and our lives, yet we cannot force the seeds of the Gospel to sprout - that is not our job. We are not responsible for the results. Our job is to share the gospel, edify and build each other up, and train others to repeat the process. Sometimes we get to be present as one is born into the kingdom, but remember that the glory goes to God.

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We must never underestimate our role in serving God. Some have visible roles like pastors and teachers, while others have powerful roles of being prayer warriors. Still others work behind the scenes helping, encouraging, and showing hospitality. Yet when we get to eternity and see how God wove everything together, we will not be boasting of our accomplishments, but how He could orchestrate, good and bad, pain and suffering, loss and regret into something good and beautiful. That impact may not be visible from our perspective, but we trust God to accomplish His purposes.

12

Fruitful Hearers Walk Confidently

Mark 4:30-32

Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? ³¹ *It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; ³² but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.*"

We live our lives serving the King. We are not responsible for results but simply sharing the Gospel message. This passage speaks of the power of the Gospel. Whether we are speaking of an individual's faith or the growth of the entire Kingdom, it may start small – almost imperceivable. We must not get wrapped up looking for the big events. The Kingdom is built on the many small events – individual people coming to Christ – one life at a time.

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In the Old Testament, the image of a tree providing safe haven to the birds was used to illustrate kingdoms that were so mighty they brought stability and blessing to nations around them (cf. Dan. 4:10–12, 20–22; Ezek. 31:3–6). Despite its small beginnings, the kingdom of God would become a mighty tree providing security and blessing to the whole earth.

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In the church age, that blessing extends to the nations through the influence of Christians around the globe. When believers walk faithfully, they are a blessing to those around them. The corporate influence of the church has benefited the world in many ways: spiritually, economically, culturally, and morally. Yet, the implications of this parable go beyond the church age to Christ's future millennial kingdom (cf. Ezek. 17:23). During His glorious reign, the Lord Jesus will rule from Jerusalem over the whole world, extending unparalleled blessings to all the nations.

15

Conclusion

Mark 4:33-34

And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. ³⁴ But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

Because of the unbelief of the crowds, Jesus taught in parables. Like the earlier parable, much had already been taught and rejected. Jesus' teaching in parables with a judgment on their unbelieving hearts and closed minds.

Yet Jesus' teaching was not meant to be hidden from those who believed in Him. When the disciples were alone, Jesus explained all things to them. This is true for us today as believers have the Holy Spirit who guides them into truth.

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So What ...

I have met many Believers who sit on the sidelines in discouragement. They believe Satan's lies that their talents and abilities are too small to make a difference, so they do nothing. In these parables, Jesus taught that He was responsible for the advancement of the Kingdom. Our job is to scatter seeds and produce a loving environment where they can germinate and grow.

You need to let the light of God shine through you to others. Be bold, rely and trust in God in all things, and give Him the glory for what He will do.