



Mark - Lesson 4A

Chapter 4:1-12

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- Last week we explored Jesus' explanation of what it means to be His true family.
 - We witnessed that Jesus' true family was distinct from that of His earthly family in that He placed much emphasis on His spiritual family.
 - Jesus mentioned that His spiritual family (insiders) are those who both hear the word of God and do the word.
 - I believe the words "hear" and "do" will speak volumes into the greater understanding of this parable in which we will see tonight and in the next teaching.
 - Due to the depth of this parable and the length of verses we are going to break this up into two separate teachings (Part 1 and 2).
 - I believe that laying a foundation of the parable of the soils will give us greater understanding of Jesus' other parables regarding the Kingdom Program.
 - We will also see that this concept of insiders and outsiders will continue into tonight's teaching and provides us great context for tonight.
 - With that being said, pick me up at Mark 4:1-12 as we dive into the teaching of the Parable of the Soils: Part 1.

Mark 4:1 He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.

Mark 4:2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching,

Mark 4:3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow;

Mark 4:4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.

Mark 4:5 Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil.

Mark 4:6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

Mark 4:7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

Mark 4:8 Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Mark 4:9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Mark 4:10 As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables.

Mark 4:11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,

Mark 4:12 so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven."

- Let's Pray
- Whenever tax season comes along and our tax documents are being prepared, our tax

representatives request that we validate the information to confirm for final approval.

- In doing so these documents are done through a safe and encrypted portal which requires a password or access code of some sort.
 - This code provides an extra layer of security for our tax documentation in the event that if an email is sent out containing our info, that no one else can access it.
 - The only way that one can have access to the information is if the one with the access codes provides access.
- In other words, hidden information can only be revealed if access is given by full cooperation of the one who holds the code.
 - In a similar way, we will see tonight that as Jesus is teaching on the Kingdom of God, the secret of the Kingdom is hidden in the parable.
 - And the only way in which someone can know the mystery of the Kingdom is if God Himself provides this divine access.
- Tonight, we will see just how this hidden mystery of the Kingdom will be made known to men and women in the world.
 - With that being said, pick me up in verse one of Chapter 4.

Mark 4:1 He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.

- So we have, at this point in Mark's gospel, witnessed Israel (nationally) reject the offer of the Kingdom by rejecting their Messiah.
 - On top of that there has been some familial conflict regarding who Jesus' true family is.
 - He makes this designation in Mark 3:33 stating "Who are my mother and brothers?"
 - He then states in the next breath, those who do my Father's will are my mothers, sisters, and brothers.
 - Jesus makes it known in Luke's account that it is those who both hear and do the word of God who are considered His true family.
 - **In other words, what is rightly believed about Messiah and rightly lived out to the Glory of God are the marks of a true follower of Messiah.**
 - It is displayed in obedience to God and His word. Not merely in word only, but also in deed.
 - It is from this point that Mark's gospel moves to Jesus' teaching by the Sea of Galilee.
 - Notice that after much persecution and misinformation from both Jesus' family and the scribes that Jesus presses on in His earthly ministry and mission.
 - If I may interject for a moment and speak to Jesus' leadership, I believe it serves us well to see Him in action here.

- Jesus did not stop teaching the Gospel of God after having been rejected and defamed by His own.
- He remained faithful to doing the will of the Father and did not throw in the towel on His mission.
- **May this be every believer's disposition in the face of adversity and tribulation as well.**
- Keep persevering and enduring even when the going gets tough because that is the mark of true faith in Jesus. We will see this further explained in the teaching as well.
- So we see that Jesus' teaching ministry and following continues to grow despite the grumbling and persecution of the religious leaders.
 - Check out the description given regarding the size of the crowd:
 - "Very large"
 - The "whole" crowd
 - Mark makes it clear that His followers have increased in quantity.
- The increase is so much so that Jesus had to get into a boat in the sea to continue teaching the crowd.
 - If you remember in Mark 3:9, Jesus and His disciples have a boat ready for when crowds became too pressing.
 - The need for the boat here simply confirms for the reader then and now that there was immense growth in Jesus' following.
- It's important that as we see the crowd increase that we ask the question: "Who is included within this crowd of people?"
 - Are these all men and women who believe in Jesus' claims as Messiah or not?
- Remember that at this point in Jesus' ministry there are a smorgasbord of people following Him.
 - Recall for a moment the healing of the paralytic man at Peter's home. Within that crowd were the scribes and not just all "interested parties".
 - So we can assume that the crowd was comprised of a diverse group of people such as:
 - 1. Followers and those committed to Jesus as Messiah
 - 2. Traveling skeptics and critics (scribes and others)
 - 3. Individuals solely interested in their own particular interest (i.e. healing, miracles, and other miraculous signs and wonders)
- Whatever the heart intentions of these men and women may be, Jesus' teaching method will weed out the outsiders from the insiders.
 - Notice what Mark says in the very next two verses.

Mark 4:2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching,

Mark 4:3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow;

- So here we have Jesus, as promised, teaching this large crowd in parables.
 - Again, a parable is a figure of speech which uses something common and familiar in our lives and it correlates that with something moral, ethical, or provides spiritual truth.
 - In this case and context for Jesus' use of parables, it is in regards to the Kingdom Program.
 - And within proper context, Mark is moving the reader into Jesus answering this question regarding the Kingdom of God and how one enters.
 - Remember our last two teachings were hinged on the reality of Israel having had rejected their King.
 - And because of their refusal of the Kingdom right then and there the offer was rescinded, and their hearts were hardened.
 - The question becomes "How does the Kingdom program move forward and with whom will it be given to now?"
 - The only reasonable answer we come to is what Jesus says in Mark 4:9, that the Kingdom will be revealed to those in who "Have ears to hear and eyes to see"
 - We will see in greater detail tonight how Jesus' teaching in parables is simply a fulfillment of scripture.
 - With that being said let us turn to the parable that Jesus will share regarding how men and women will come to know the kingdom and who will be in the Kingdom.
 - The parable that we come across today is known as the Parable of the Soils.
 - As we read in our opening reading of the text together, there seems to be three things in this parable:
 - 1. Sower
 - 2. Seed
 - 3. Soils
 - We will take our time in part one of this teaching in understanding some background regarding this parable to have clear context.
 - Let's begin with verse 3, "Listen to this! Behold the sower went out to sow;"
 - Jesus begins this teaching with a declarative announcement. One could imagine with much emphasis Him saying "Listen to this!"
 - The word "listen" here in the Greek is *akouo*.
 - It is this idea of hearing with intention so that those who are able to receive understanding can truly perceive with true spiritual insight.
 - And after He grasps their attention, He says "there was a sower that went out to sow."
 - As we read from the top of the night, there are 4 soil conditions that the sower throws seed to.
 - Let's walk through the four conditions of the soils by reading those passages again.

Mark 4:4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came

and ate it up.

Mark 4:5 Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil.

Mark 4:6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

Mark 4:7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

Mark 4:8 Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

- So what we can gather from just a general read of the parable is that it is reflecting that of an agrarian life within the first century in Palestine.
 - Farming was a common thing during the first century and its methods to produce crops was not unfamiliar to the reader at that time.
 - As a matter of fact farming was essential and the means of food was dependent upon those with farmland.
 - The goal for the sower/farmer is that their seed would produce a harvest that yielded well.
 - According to this parable there is a sower who is indiscriminately throwing out seed among the field.
 - There seems to be a sense of random scattering without a care as to where the seed is landing.
 - This is key to note because this parable does not place much emphasis upon the sower. Simply what the sower does, and that is sow seed.
 - We will come back to this point in detail in our next teaching for part 2.
 - Let's now move on to the soils themselves.
 - The first soil that we see is in verse 4.

Mark 4:4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.

- The first soil is said to have landed “beside the road”. Apparently, the seed fell on what would have been considered a “hard-packed road” or trail.
 - If you could imagine these dirt paths were created in that day so that people would not walk through the grain fields causing destruction to the field.
 - So with this constant walking on the trail whether by bare feet or with sandals, the path would have become beaten over time.
 - So for seed to have the opportunity to penetrate the soil was impossible.
 - The seed would simply sit on top of the soil and as a result, would be devoured by birds.
 - So here is the summary for the 1st soil condition:
 - 1. Hard-compacted soil

- 2. Impenetrable
- 3. Seed can't be planted
- So because of these conditions, Jesus says the seed is stolen away by the birds and cannot produce more crop.
 - This is the first soil.
 - Let's look at soil #2.

Mark 4:5 Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil.

Mark 4:6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

- So with soil #2, Jesus says that the ground is “rocky ground” and this ground does not have much top soil.
 - He then mentions that in this soil condition there happens to be immediate growth but later, because of its shallow top soil, when the sun rises the plant withers and dies.
 - In order for us to better understand this soil condition, it requires some topographical understanding of the region of Palestine.
 - Rocky ground is a type of soil in the mountainous regions of Palestine.
 - For those native to South Texas, you are familiar with this type of soil.
 - This type of soil contains a thin topsoil and right underneath it is a layer of limestone rock.
 - With the topsoil, there is loose soil available which makes the sowing of the seed very easy.
 - This also allows for the water to penetrate the topsoil without hesitation, therefore the seed can quickly germinate overnight.
 - This is why verse 5 tells us “Immediately it sprang up”.
 - So with this immediate growth and this particular soil condition, the growth that occurs is only short lived. Notice verse 6.

Mark 4:6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

- Jesus states that once the sun rises, the plant becomes scorched, withers, and then dies.
 - And Jesus says that this happened because the plant had no roots to sustain the plant itself.
 - So to summarize soil #2, we see the following:
 - 1. Thin topsoil layer with no depth of roots.
 - 2. Immediate (enthusiastic) growth for a time.

- 3. Once the sun rises, the plant withers away.
- This is soil #2. Let's examine soil #3.

Mark 4:7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

- Jesus tells us here that soil #3 seems to have a decent amount of soil and enough depth of soil for plants to survive.
 - We come to this reality because presently there are thorns and weeds that are growing in this soil, therefore we can conclude there are some deep roots.
 - However, within this soil condition, Jesus says that as this seed is growing, the thorns are growing and choking the seed's growth.
 - Notice that the seed does not wither up nor does it die, it's simply being choked.
 - The word for "choked" in Greek here is *sympnigo* (*sym-pn-igo*).
 - It means to press up closely against, in the sense of constricting someone's throat to prevent them from breathing.
 - **In other words, although there is growth happening, the seed isn't able to produce more seed (fruit).**
 - So here is what we see in soil #3:
 - 1. The soil here is capable of supporting and sustaining life. (Growth is happening)
 - 2. The seed is able to grow itself and is alive internally (deep roots), however its focus is on trying to survive amidst the suffocating growth of things around it.
 - Lastly, we have soil #4.

Mark 4:8 Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

- Jesus tells us that soil #4 is the good soil.
 - This soil is so good that the seed is able to grow, increase, and yield fruit (more seed).
 - The growth is so evident that the crop that has been produced from the seed scattered in this soil produces crop of 30, 60, and 100-fold.
 - Clearly, this soil is deep, rich in nutrients, and ready for a good harvest.
 - From what we can tell this soil doesn't have any contaminants within its immediate vicinity.
 - **In other words, nothing is choking out its growth and it is able to withstand the scorching heat because its roots go deep.**
 - So these are the four soil conditions within Jesus' parable.

- **And right after sharing these conditions, Jesus tells the crowd in verse nine, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**
- It’s clear that the parable itself was straight forward descriptively, however Jesus’ statement gives way to suggest that there is something much deeper at play here.
 - Remember, Jesus is using parables moving forward as His teaching method which means there are some spiritual implications that are out of reach for those who He does not give the ability to understand.
 - We can tell the perplexity of this moment because immediately after, Mark tells us this regarding the scene. Check out verse 10:

Mark 4:10 As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables.

- Mark lets us know that the moment Jesus is alone, “His followers and the twelve” began inquiring about the parable.
 - Now, observing the first half of this verse, we can assume that the larger crowd or the “outsiders” themselves have left after the teaching.
 - Maybe Jesus has concluded His teaching for the day and has dismissed the crowd.
 - And maybe these individuals go back to their homes or places of work to continue their days as usual.
 - However, there is a smaller group that remain who inquire to know more about this parable.
 - This smaller group, according to Mark, is Jesus’ followers (disciples) and the selected “twelve”.
 - It’s important to note that the synoptic accounts document different groups of individuals present upon Jesus explaining this parable.
 - Luke states it’s just the twelve, and Mark and Matthew state the disciples and the twelve were a part of this group who had the parable explained.
 - I believe this difference in documentation is no reason to be up in arms about the accuracy of the text or even the canon for that matter.
 - I believe that the documenting of either the disciples and the twelve within this text speaks to our teaching from last week.
 - It reinforces the understanding of those who are outsiders versus insiders.
 - **In other words, Jesus is not going to explain to anyone outside of those who the Lord is drawing to the Son.**
 - It would defeat the purpose of using parables in the first place.
 - **So we can surmise that this group who will have the parable explained are those in whom are being drawn all the more to the Son.**
 - These will be the ones that have the ability to see and hear.
 - **Friends, this ultimately reveals that the illumination of truth within the heart of men and women is only accomplished by the Power of the Holy Spirit.**

- The Holy Spirit is the revealer of all truth from God.
- Check out what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:11-14

1 Corinthians 2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1 Corinthians 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

1 Corinthians 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- The Apostle Paul lets us know here that the way in which men and women come to faith in Christ is by their eyes being opened to the truth of the Gospel.
 - Non-believers cannot comprehend the spiritual realities of Gospel truth unless the Spirit of God who searches the deep things of God reveals it.
 - This knowledge cannot be mustered up by intellectualism.
 - The Kingdom truth is hidden from those who have not been given the ability to see it or to know it.
 - Let's keep moving. Check out verses 11-12 regarding this "mystery of the Kingdom".

Mark 4:11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, **Mark 4:12** so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven."

- Well if it was not clear then it is extremely clear now. Jesus lets the "inside" group know that this mystery of the Kingdom has been given to them.
 - Jesus then makes another distinctive statement which is: the insiders will see and understand things in which the outsiders, on their own, will not see or understand.
 - Jesus then follows up by quoting from a shorter citation of Isaiah 6:9-10.
 - To provide full context to the scripture Jesus is quoting, I want to read it in context.

Isaiah 6:9 He said, "Go, and tell this people:
'Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.'

Isaiah 6:10 “Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
 Their ears dull,
 And their eyes dim,
 Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
 Hear with their ears,
 Understand with their hearts,
 And return and be healed.”

- So Isaiah provides the reader with understanding 3 imperatives here regarding his commission to ministry.
 - And the three imperatives that Isaiah speaks to regarding what would seem to be an unsuccessful ministry for Isaiah are the following:
 - 1. Fatten the hearts of the people: And as a result they would lose all sense of working of divine grace.
 - 2. Their ears would be made heavy: resulting in them not being able to listen.
 - 3. Shutting of eyes: They would not be able to see properly.
 - If you notice in Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah, He leaves out a particular imperative.
 - He includes both the people’s failure to see and their inability to hear, however, **he doesn’t include the fattening of the heart.**
 - **Noting this difference plays to the significance of the parable itself.**
 - **The parable is speaking to the matters of the heart.**
 - This parable reveals how the mystery of the Kingdom of God unfolds upon the hearts of men and women.
 - That there will be some who will receive it and yield much fruit and there will be those who will hear and not respond.
 - Men and women who hear the very Gospel message cannot come to the full truth of the Gospel because of their hardened hearts.
 - Because of man’s inability to come to that truth on their own. It renders them spiritually dead.
 - And therefore, they cannot bear any fruit of the Kingdom nor possess its bountiful beauty and grace.
 - The kingdom of God is a mystery because it is God that moves its message from being hidden to revealed.
 - It is God that moves hardened hearts to soften and become receptive hearts.
 - Hardened soils to “good” soils.
 - What we can gather from tonight’s teaching on the parables of the soil is that, clearly, the soils represent the heart and how well it receives and responds to the seed.
 - Which begs the question: “What is the seed representing in this parable?”
 - As we prepare for next week, I will give you a sneak peak as to what the seed represents in Luke’s account: Luke 8:11.

Luke 8:11 “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.

- We are going to dive deep into Jesus’ explanation of the parable next time, and I encourage you all to read v.13-25 in preparation for the next teaching.
 - Let’s Pray.