

Mark 4

1. Icebreaker

Have you ever been in a natural disaster or a terrible storm? What happened?

2. Opening Prayer

Ask if someone wants to volunteer before leading the prayer

3. Tell the Story

4. Read the Story (Mark 4)

Read out loud as a group, 4-5 verses per person, let everyone know they can opt out if they want to

5. Breaking it Down

Questions to be used (as appropriate based upon meeting dynamics) to facilitate discussion and understanding

5.1 What four places did the seed fall? (1---8)

1. The path. The soil of the pathways was so packed down that the seed could not penetrate the soil and so germinate.

2. Rocky places. Some soil covered a limestone base a few inches beneath the surface. Seed that fell here would germinate but it would not last, since a proper root system could not develop.

3. Thorns. When the seed grew up, so did the weeds, which invariably stunted the growth of the good seed. Although it lived, such seed would not bear fruit.

4. Good soil. Some of the seed fell where it could germinate, grow and produce a crop.

How well did the crop grow on the good soil?

It multiplied thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times. The normal yield for a Palestinian field is even and a half times what is sown, while 10 times is an especially good harvest. This is where the emphasis of the parable lies: not with the unproductive soil, but with the miracle crop.

5.2 What did the disciples ask him about? (9---12)

The point of Jesus' parable about the soils is not clear even to the disciples. Nor will Jesus' teaching become fully clear to the disciples right up to his death.

What is Jesus' point in quoting Isaiah 6:9-10?

God called Isaiah to speak his word even though Israel would not listen. Although they saw God's messenger and heard his word, they refused to heed his message. In order to be forgiven, people must turn/repent. In order to repent, they must understand their true situation.

5.3 How did Jesus explain the parable? (13---20)

This is the only parable that Jesus explains in Mark. This fact, coupled with its length, indicates how important this parable is for Mark. The reader understands the four types of responses to Jesus seen thus far in the Gospel.

1. The path. Some, like the teachers of the law are so hardened that the seed of the word never penetrates. The teachers of the Law have charged Jesus with being dominated by Satan when, in fact, it turns out that they are the ones under his influence.
2. Rocky places. Others, like the crowds, are superficially attracted to Jesus. They like what he can give them, but their commitment is not deep. They will fall away as soon as there is any hint of persecution.
3. Thorns. There are people who allow the wrong concerns to squeeze out the newly growing plant.
4. Good soil. Another way of looking at this parable is saying there are two kinds of soil. One that is unproductive and the good soil that is the only one that is productive.

5.4 What is Jesus' point in the Parable of the Lamp on a Stand? (21---25)

In verse 24, the hearers are warned to listen carefully. Then they are told a riddle that emphasizes that there are consequences to how they hear Jesus. Those who do not hear nor heed his words will miss out on God's kingdom, while those who grasp what is happening will grow in their understanding of the emerging kingdom.

5.5 What's the kingdom of God like in verses 26 thru 29? (26---29)

This is the only parable unique to Mark. It shows how the seed falling into the good soil (the fourth kind – 4:8,20) will grow into abundant fruit. Such an insignificant act as sowing seed yields, in the fullness of time, an incredible harvest.

5.6 What does the Parable of the Mustard Seed teach about God's Kingdom? (30---34)

To the Jew, the mustard tree was known for having the smallest seed. Along the Lake of Galilee, mustard shrubs grew to eight or ten feet. The shade they provided, along with the tasty black seeds, attracted flocks of birds.

5.7 What kind of storm came up on the disciples with Jesus in the boat? (35---41)

A furious squall. The Sea of Galilee was a deep, freshwater lake, 13 miles long and eight miles wide at its widest point. It was pear-shaped and ringed by mountains, though open at its north and south ends. Fierce winds blew into this bowl-shaped sea, creating savage and unpredictable storms.

After Jesus subdues the storm how do the disciples respond to Jesus?

Their fear of the storm is now replaced with terror. They then ask, "Who is this?" This is the key question in Mark's Gospel. The congregation in the synagogue wondered about this (1:27). The religious leaders asked this question (2:7; 3:22). Now his disciples discover that they do not understand who he is. The rest of Mark describes how the disciples discover his true nature.

6. Application

Sample questions (as appropriate) to tie to life application

- 1) What does this passage teach us about God?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- 3) What is a command to obey in this passage? What has God revealed in your life that needs changing? What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

Personal Reflection/Application:

1. Which of the four kinds of soil would best describe your response to the Gospel when you first heard it? Which best describes the condition of your heart right now?
2. What "worries of life, deceitfulness of wealth and desires for other things" might hinder your ability to produce a bountiful crop?
3. How would you live your life differently if you wanted to live it without worrying what was disclosed (vs 22)?
4. How do you react to Jesus when he seems to be asleep in your life?
5. What was the worst personal "storm" you have faced? How did Jesus help?

7. Prayer Requests

Have a designated person to capture and share (as appropriate) within the Life Group. What happens in Life Group, Stays in Life Group

8. Closing & Prayer

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