



Gospelimages

# THE BOOK OF MARK

*Lesson 5—Mark 4:1–24: The Sower, Parables*

# PARABLES

With the parable of the sower Christ began to make parables a major way to explain truth. The Sermon on the Mount had probably been given a few weeks earlier, and his listeners could see on the Plain of Gennesaret farmers sowing their winter grain. At least ten parables were given at this time—the eight of Matthew 13 and the two in Mark about the candle (4:21–23) and the ear of corn (vs. 26–29).

In Christ's parable teaching . . . Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly . . . **the unknown was illustrated by the known**; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.

*(COL 17.1)*

The Scripture says, “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; ... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 13:34, 35 [Psalm 78:1, 2]. Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of **nature** and the **life-experience** of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word. Leading thus from the natural to the spiritual kingdom, Christ’s parables are links in the chain of truth that unites man with God, and earth with heaven. (*COL* 17.2)

Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers. Their interest was aroused by figures drawn from the surroundings of their daily life. None who listened to the Saviour could feel that they were neglected or forgotten. The humblest, the most sinful, heard in His teaching a voice that spoke to them in sympathy and tenderness. (*COL 21.2*)

And He had **another reason** for teaching in parables. Among the multitudes that gathered about Him, there were priests and rabbis, scribes and elders, Herodians and rulers, world-loving, bigoted, ambitious men, who desired above all things to find some accusation against Him. Their spies followed His steps day after day, to catch from His lips something that would cause His condemnation, and forever silence the One who seemed to draw the world after Him. The Saviour understood the character of these men, and **He presented truth in such a way that they could find nothing by which to bring His case before the Sanhedrin.** (*COL 22.1*)

In parables He rebuked the hypocrisy and wicked works of those who occupied high positions, and in figurative language clothed truth of so cutting a character that had it been spoken in direct denunciation, they would not have listened to His words, and would speedily have put an end to His ministry. But while He evaded the spies, He made truth so clear that error was manifested, and the honest in heart were profited by His lessons. Divine wisdom, infinite grace, were made plain by the things of God's creation.

Through nature and the experiences of life, men were taught of God. "The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world," were "perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity."

Romans 1:20, R. V. (*COL* 22.1)

# MATTHEW 13

It had been an eventful day in the life of Jesus. Beside the Sea of Galilee He had **spoken His first parables**, by familiar illustrations again explaining to the people the nature of

His kingdom and the manner in which it was to be established. He had likened His own work to that of the **sower**; the development of His kingdom to the growth of the **mustard seed** and the effect of **leaven** in the measure of meal. The great final separation of the righteous and the wicked He had pictured in the parables of the **wheat and tares** and the **fishing net**. The exceeding preciousness of the truths He taught had been illustrated by the **hidden treasure** and the **pearl of great price**, while in the parable of the **householder** He taught His disciples how they were to labor as His representatives. (*DA 333.1*)

# THE SOWER

MATTHEW 13:1-9

MARK 4:1-9

LUKE 8:4-8



Beside the sea lay the beautiful plain of Gennesaret, beyond rose the hills, and upon hillside and plain both sowers and reapers were busy, the one casting seed and the other harvesting the early grain.

Looking upon the scene, Christ said—(COL

34.2)

By the parable of the sower, Christ illustrates the things of the kingdom of heaven, and the work of the great Husbandman for His people. Like a sower in the field, He came to scatter the heavenly grain of truth. And His **parable teaching itself was the seed** with which the most precious truths of His grace were sown. Because of its simplicity the parable of the sower has not been valued as it should be. From the natural seed cast into the soil, Christ desires to lead our minds to the **gospel seed**, the sowing of which results in bringing man back to his loyalty to God. He who gave the parable of the tiny seed is the Sovereign of heaven, and the same laws that govern earthly seed sowing govern the sowing of the seeds of truth. (*COL 33.1*)

Christ's mission was not understood by the people of His time. The manner of His coming was not in accordance with their expectations. The Lord Jesus was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. Its imposing services were of divine appointment. They were designed to teach the people that at the time appointed One would come to whom those ceremonies pointed. But the Jews had exalted the forms and ceremonies and had lost sight of their object. The traditions, maxims, and enactments of men hid from them the lessons which God intended to convey. . . . And when the Reality came, in the person of Christ, they did not recognize in Him the fulfillment of all their types, the substance of all their shadows. They rejected the antitype, and clung to their types and useless ceremonies. The Son of God had come, but they continued to ask for a sign. . . . (*COL* 34.4)

The gospel of Christ was a stumbling block to them because they demanded signs instead of a Saviour. They expected the Messiah to prove His claims by mighty deeds of conquest, to establish His empire on the ruins of earthly kingdoms. **This expectation Christ answered in the parable of the sower.** Not by force of arms, not by violent interpositions, was the kingdom of God to prevail, but by the implanting of a new principle in the hearts of men.

“He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.” Matthew 13:37. Christ had come, not as a king, but as a sower; not for the overthrow of kingdoms, but for the scattering of seed; not to point His followers to earthly triumphs and national greatness, but to a harvest to be gathered after patient toil and through losses and disappointments. (*COL* 34.4–35.1)

The Pharisees perceived the meaning of Christ's parable, but to them its lesson was unwelcome. They affected not to understand it. To the multitude it involved in still greater mystery the purpose of the new teacher, whose words had so strangely moved their hearts and so bitterly disappointed their ambitions. The disciples themselves had not understood the parable, but their interest was awakened. They came to Jesus privately and asked for an explanation. (*COL 35.2*)

This was the desire which Christ wished to arouse, that He might give them more definite instruction. He explained the parable to them, as He will make plain His word to all who seek Him in sincerity of heart. Those who study the word of God with hearts open to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, will not remain in darkness as to the meaning of the word. "If any man willeth to do His will," Christ said, "he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself." John 7:17, R.V. All who come to Christ for a clearer knowledge of the truth will receive it. **He will unfold to them the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and these mysteries will be understood by the heart that longs to know the truth.** A heavenly light will shine into the soul temple, and will be revealed to others as the bright shining of a lamp on a dark path. (*COL 35.3*)

- Nicodemus—John 3:4, 9
- William Miller, Hiram Edson
- Mysteries of the incarnation, justification, sanctification, nature of sin and perfection
- 2300 day prophecy

“The sower soweth the word.” Christ came to sow the world with truth. Ever since the fall of man, **Satan has been sowing** the seeds of error. It was by a lie that he first gained control over men, and thus he still works to overthrow God’s kingdom in the earth and to bring men under his power. A sower from a higher world, Christ came to sow the seeds of truth. He who had stood in the councils of God, who had dwelt in the innermost sanctuary of the Eternal, could bring to men the pure principles of truth. Ever since the fall of man, Christ had been the Revealer of truth to the world. . . . In that first promise spoken to our fallen race in Eden, Christ was sowing the gospel seed. (*COL 37.1*)

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel. (Genesis 3:15)

**The word of God is the seed.** Every seed has in itself a germinating principle. In it the life of the plant is enfolded. So there is life in God's word. Christ says, "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life." John 6:63. "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life." John 5:24. In every command and in every promise of the word of God is the power, the very life of God, by which the command may be fulfilled and the promise realized. He who by faith receives the word is receiving the very life and character of God. (*COL 38.1*)

- Wayside—fowls came and devoured it
- Stony ground—sun scorched it
- Thorns—choked it
- Good ground—sprang up and increased
- He that hath an ear, let him hear

The seed sown by the **wayside** represents the word of God as it falls upon the heart of an **inattentive hearer**. Like the hard-beaten path, trodden down by the feet of men and beasts, is the heart that becomes a highway for the world's traffic, its pleasures and sins. Absorbed in selfish aims and sinful indulgences, the soul is “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Hebrews 3:13. The spiritual faculties are paralyzed. Men hear the word, but **understand it not**. They do not discern that it applies to themselves. They do not realize their need or their danger. They do not perceive the love of Christ, and they pass by the message of His grace as something that does not concern them. (*COL* 44.2)

As the birds are ready to catch up the seed from the wayside, so Satan is ready to catch away the seeds of divine truth from the soul. He fears that the word of God may awaken the careless, and take effect upon the hardened heart. **Satan and his angels are in the assemblies where the gospel is preached.** While angels of heaven endeavor to impress hearts with the word of God, the enemy is on the alert to make the word of no effect. With an earnestness equaled only by his malice, he tries to thwart the work of the Spirit of God. While Christ is drawing the soul by His love, Satan tries to turn away the attention of the one who is moved to seek the Saviour. He engages the mind with worldly schemes. He excites criticism, or insinuates doubt and unbelief. The speaker's choice of language or his manner may not please the hearers, and they dwell upon these defects. Thus the truth they need, and which God has graciously sent them, makes no lasting impression. (*COL 44.3*)

The seed sown upon **stony ground** finds little depth of soil. The plant springs up quickly, but the root cannot penetrate the rock to find nutriment to sustain its growth, and it soon perishes. Many who make a profession of religion are stony-ground hearers. Like the rock underlying the layer of earth, the selfishness of the natural heart underlies the soil of their good desires and aspirations. The love of self is not subdued. They have not seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the heart has not been humbled under a sense of its guilt. This class may be easily convinced, and appear to be bright converts, but they have only a **superficial religion**. (*COL* 46.3)

. . . But those who in the parable are said to receive the word immediately, **do not count the cost**. They do not consider what the word of God requires of them. They do not bring it face to face with all their habits of life, and yield themselves fully to its control. (*COL* 46.4)

And they withered away. The only hope of stony-ground hearers is to be born again (*COL* 48).

The gospel seed often falls among **thorns and noxious weeds**; and if there is not a moral transformation in the human heart, if old habits and practices and the former life of sin are not left behind, if the attributes of Satan are not expelled from the soul, the wheat crop will be choked. The thorns will come to be the crop, and will kill out the wheat. (*COL 50.3*) . . .

Christ specified the things that are dangerous to the soul. As recorded by Mark He mentions the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things. Luke specifies the **cares, riches, and pleasures of this life**. These are what choke the word, the growing spiritual seed. The soul ceases to draw nourishment from Christ, and spirituality dies out of the heart. (*COL 51.1*)

“The cares of this world.” No class is free from the temptation to worldly care. To the poor, toil and deprivation and the fear of want bring perplexities and burdens. To the rich come fear of loss and a multitude of anxious cares. Many of Christ’s followers forget the lesson He has bidden us learn from the flowers of the field. They do not **trust to His constant care**. Christ cannot carry their burden, because they do not cast it upon Him. Therefore the cares of life, which should drive them to the Saviour for help and comfort, separate them from Him.

*(COL 51.2)*

Even the church, which should be the pillar and ground of the truth, is found encouraging the selfish love of pleasure. When money is to be raised for religious purposes, to what means do many churches resort? To bazaars, suppers, fancy fairs, even to lotteries, and like devices. Often the place set apart for God's worship is desecrated by feasting and drinking, buying, selling, and merrymaking. Respect for the house of God and reverence for His worship are lessened in the minds of the youth. The barriers of self-restraint are weakened. Selfishness, appetite, the love of display, are appealed to, and **they strengthen as they are indulged.** (*COL* 54.2)

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Way side

Stony ground

Thorns

Ephesus—left thy first love

Pergamos—doctrine of  
Balaam, of Nicolaitans

Thyatira—sufferest  
Jezebel

Sardis—hast a name but  
art dead

Laodiceans—lukewarm

# MARK 4:12; ISAIAH 6:9– 10; JOHN 12:40

- Harden Pharaoh's heart—Exodus 4:21
- “And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand; but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.” That is, the display of almighty power before Pharaoh, being rejected by him, would make him harder and more firm in his rebellion. His hardness of heart would increase by a continual resistance of the power of God. (3SG 194.2)

- Make heart fat—Isaiah 6:10—insensitive, unresponsive—[by] seeing but not perceiving and hearing but not understanding