CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Mark Chapter 4 — Parables of the Kingdom and the Power of Faith

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Mark Chapter 4 is a chapter of parables and power.

In Chapter 3, opposition to Jesus grew.

Some rejected Him.

Others followed Him.

Now Jesus explains why people respond so differently to God's word.

He tells the Parable of the Sower.

The same seed falls on four kinds of soil.

The difference is not the seed.

The difference is the soil.

Jesus then teaches about a lamp that must shine.

He teaches about a measure that comes back to us.

He teaches about a seed that grows while the farmer sleeps.

He teaches about a tiny mustard seed that becomes a large plant.

Each parable shows something about how God's kingdom works.

Then the scene changes.

That evening, Jesus and His disciples cross the lake.

A furious storm comes up.

Jesus is asleep.

The disciples are terrified.

Jesus speaks to the wind and the waves, and they obey.

"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!"

The chapter moves through seven movements:

- The Parable of the Sower (verses 1–9).
- The Purpose of Parables (verses 10–12).
- The Meaning of the Sower (verses 13–20).
- The Lamp and the Measure (verses 21–25).

- The Growing Seed (verses 26–29).
- The Mustard Seed (verses 30–32).
- Jesus Calms the Storm (verses 33–41).

The central truth of Mark 4 is:

God's word bears fruit in hearts that truly receive it, His kingdom grows by His power from small beginnings to a great harvest, and Jesus is Lord even over the storms of nature and of life.

I. TEACHING FROM A BOAT

Mark 4:1 — A Huge Crowd by the Lake

"Jesus began to teach again by the lakeshore. A huge crowd gathered, so He got into a boat and sat in it on the water, while the people stood along the shore."

"Jesus began to teach again by the lakeshore."

Jesus returned to His favorite teaching place.

"A huge crowd gathered."

The crowds were larger than ever.

"So He got into a boat and sat in it on the water."

Teachers in those days usually sat while teaching.

The boat gave Jesus a little space from the crowd.

The water may also have helped carry His voice to the people on the shore.

Cross References

Matthew 13:1

> That same day Jesus left the house and sat down beside the lake.

Matthew 13:2

> So many people gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat down, while the crowd stood on the shore.

Luke 8:4

> A large crowd was gathering as people came to Jesus from town after town, and He told them a story.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus uses whatever means are needed to bring God's word to people.

Key Truth

Jesus was always looking for ways to help people hear.

II. MANY THINGS IN PARABLES

Mark 4:2 — Teaching with Stories

“He taught them many things using parables. He said:”

A **parable** is a story from everyday life that teaches a spiritual truth.

Jesus used farming, fishing, lamps, seeds, and other familiar things.

Parables make truth memorable.

They invite listeners to think.

They also reveal truth to open hearts and hide it from those who refuse to listen.

Cross References

Matthew 13:3

> Then Jesus used stories to teach them many things.

Luke 8:4

> When a large crowd gathered, Jesus told them this story.

Psalm 78:2

> I will open my mouth and speak in stories. I will tell things that have been hidden since long ago.

Spiritual Principle

God's truth can be found in the ordinary things of life.

Key Truth

Jesus made deep truths simple enough for anyone to remember.

III. LISTEN!

Mark 4:3 — A Farmer Went Out

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant seed.”

“Listen!”

Jesus begins by calling for attention.

The whole chapter is about how we listen.

“A farmer went out to plant seed.”

Everyone knew this scene.

A farmer walked through his field throwing seed by hand.

Seed landed everywhere.

The farmer did not choose where each seed fell.

He scattered it widely.

Cross References

Matthew 13:3

> He said, “A farmer went out to plant his seed.”

Luke 8:5

> A farmer went out to scatter his seed.

Isaiah 55:10

> Rain and snow come down from the sky and water the ground. They make plants grow and give seed to the farmer and bread to eat.

Spiritual Principle

How we listen to God's word matters.

Application

Are you really listening when God's word is taught?

IV. SEED ON THE PATH

Mark 4:4 — The Birds Ate It

“As he scattered it, some fell along the path, and birds came and ate it.”

“Some fell along the path.”

Paths ran through the fields.

People walked on them until the ground was packed hard.

“And birds came and ate it.”

The seed could not sink in.

It just lay on the surface.

Birds swooped down and took it away.

Cross References

Matthew 13:4

> As he scattered the seed, some fell beside the road, and birds came and ate it up.

Luke 8:5

> Some seed fell along the path. People stepped on it, and the birds ate it.

Matthew 13:19

> When someone hears the message about the kingdom but does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was planted in his heart.

Spiritual Principle

A hard heart keeps God's word from sinking in.

Key Truth

The word cannot grow where it cannot get in.

V. SEED ON ROCKY GROUND

Mark 4:5 — Shallow Soil

“Some fell on rocky ground where there wasn't much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow,”

“Some fell on rocky ground.”

In Galilee, much of the land had a layer of rock just under the surface.

“Where there wasn't much soil.”

There was only a thin layer of dirt.

“It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.”

The seed sprouted fast.

It looked promising.

But the roots had nowhere to go.

Cross References

Matthew 13:5

> Some seed fell on rocky places without much dirt. It grew fast because the soil was not deep.

Luke 8:6

> Other seed fell on rock.

Matthew 13:20

> The seed on rocky ground is the person who hears the message and gladly accepts it right away.

Spiritual Principle

A quick start does not guarantee lasting growth.

Key Truth

Fast is not the same as deep.

VI. SCORCHED BY THE SUN

Mark 4:6 — No Root

“but when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away.”

“When the sun came up, the plants were scorched.”

The heat came.

“Since they had no root, they withered away.”

Without deep roots, the plants could not reach water.

They dried up and died.

The sun did not cause the problem.

It only revealed the problem.

The real problem was no roots.

Cross References

Matthew 13:6

> But when the sun came up, the plants were burned, and because they did not have deep roots, they dried up.

Luke 8:6

> When it came up, the plants dried up because they had no moisture.

James 1:11

> The sun rises with burning heat and dries up the plant. Its flower falls off, and its beauty is gone.

Spiritual Principle

Trials reveal whether our faith has deep roots.

Application

Are your roots in Christ deep enough to survive the heat?

VII. SEED AMONG THORNS

Mark 4:7 — Choked

“Some fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so they produced no grain.”

“Some fell among thorns.”

The soil here was good.

But thorns and weeds were already growing.

“Which grew up and choked the plants.”

The thorns grew faster.

They crowded out the good plants.

They took the sunlight, water, and space.

“So they produced no grain.”

The plants survived, but they produced nothing.

This is perhaps the most dangerous soil.

It looks alive, but it is fruitless.

Cross References

Matthew 13:7

> Other seed fell among thorny weeds, which grew up and choked the plants.

Luke 8:7

> Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.

Jeremiah 4:3

> The Lord says, “Break up your hard ground, and do not plant your seed among thorns.”

Spiritual Principle

Competing loves can choke out the fruit of God's word.

Spiritual Warning

A life can look healthy and still bear no fruit.

VIII. SEED ON GOOD SOIL

Mark 4:8 — A Great Harvest

“But some fell on good soil. It grew, increased, and produced a harvest—some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred times what was planted.”

“But some fell on good soil.”

Finally, the seed found soft, deep, clean ground.

“It grew, increased, and produced a harvest.”

The seed did what it was meant to do.

“Some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred times.”

An ordinary harvest might be seven or ten times what was planted.

Thirty, sixty, or a hundred times was amazing.

This is the power of God's word in a receptive heart.

Notice also that not everyone produces the same amount.

But all good soil bears fruit.

Cross References

Matthew 13:8

> But some seed fell on good ground and produced a crop, some a hundred times more, some sixty, and some thirty.

Luke 8:8

> Other seed fell on good soil. It grew and produced a hundred times more.

Genesis 26:12

> Isaac planted crops in that land, and that year he harvested a hundred times what he planted, because the Lord blessed him.

Spiritual Principle

God's word produces an abundant harvest in a receptive heart.

Key Truth

All good soil bears fruit, though not all bears the same amount.

IX. EARS TO HEAR

Mark 4:9 — Let Them Hear

“Then Jesus said, “Anyone who has ears to hear, let them hear!””

Everyone has ears.

But not everyone truly hears.

Jesus is calling people to listen with their hearts.

To think about what He said.

To respond.

This saying appears again and again in Jesus' teaching.

Cross References

Matthew 13:9

> Whoever has ears should listen.

Luke 8:8

> As He said this, He called out, “If you have ears, then listen!”

Revelation 2:7

> Anyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Spiritual Principle

God calls us not only to hear His word but to truly listen.

Application

Are you listening with your heart, not just your ears?

X. ALONE WITH JESUS

Mark 4:10 — They Asked About the Parables

“When Jesus was alone, the twelve disciples and others around Him asked about the parables.”

“When Jesus was alone.”

The crowd went home.

But some stayed.

“The twelve disciples and others around Him.”

Not only the Twelve, but other followers as well.

“Asked about the parables.”

They wanted to understand.

This is the mark of a true disciple.

They came to Jesus with their questions.

Cross References

Matthew 13:10

> The followers came to Jesus and asked, “Why do You speak to the people in stories?”

Luke 8:9

> His followers asked Him what this story meant.

Matthew 13:36

> Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. His followers came to Him and said, “Explain to us the story about the weeds in the field.”

Spiritual Principle

Those who want to understand God's word must come to Jesus.

Application

Do you bring your questions about God's word to Jesus in prayer?

XI. THE SECRET OF THE KINGDOM

Mark 4:11 — Given to You

“He said, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but to those on the outside, everything is spoken in parables,”

“To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God.”

A **secret** in the Bible often means something once hidden but now revealed by God.

The secret was that the kingdom of God had come in Jesus.

This truth was given to the disciples as a gift.

“But to those on the outside.”

Those who did not follow Jesus.

“Everything is spoken in parables.”

For them, the parables remained puzzles.

They heard the stories but missed the meaning.

Cross References

Matthew 13:11

> Jesus answered, “You have been given the ability to understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but they have not.”

Luke 8:10

> He said, “God has let you know the secrets of His kingdom. But to others I speak in stories.”

1 Corinthians 2:7

> We speak of God's wisdom, which was hidden in the past. God planned this wisdom for our glory before the world began.

Spiritual Principle

Understanding God's kingdom is a gift given to those who follow Jesus.

Key Truth

The deepest truths are revealed to those who come close to Jesus.

XII. SEEING BUT NOT PERCEIVING

Mark 4:12 — The Words of Isaiah

“so that, ‘they may see but not perceive, and hear but not understand; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.’””

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6.

God sent Isaiah to preach to people who would not listen.

Their hearts were hardened by their own refusal.

This is a hard verse.

Bible students understand it in this way:

Jesus' parables were a form of judgment on hearts that had already rejected Him.

Those who refused to listen would find the truth hidden.

But those who came to Jesus with open hearts would understand.

The door was never closed to anyone willing to come.

Cross References

Isaiah 6:9

> God said, “Go and tell these people: ‘Keep listening, but you will not understand. Keep looking, but you will not really see.’”

Matthew 13:14

> What Isaiah said is coming true in them: “You will hear and hear but never understand. You will look and look but never see.”

John 12:40

> God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they cannot see with their eyes, understand with their hearts, and turn to Me for healing.

Spiritual Principle

Those who refuse to listen will find the truth hidden, but open hearts will find it revealed.

Spiritual Warning

Continually rejecting God's word can leave a heart unable to understand it.

XIII. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?

Mark 4:13 — The Key Parable

“Jesus said to them, “Don't you understand this parable? Then how will you understand any parable?”

Jesus gently corrects His disciples.

They were slow to understand.

“Then how will you understand any parable?”

The Parable of the Sower is the key to all the parables.

It explains how people respond to God's word.

If they understood this, they could understand the rest.

Cross References

Matthew 13:18

> Now listen to what the story about the farmer means.

Luke 8:11

> This is what the story means: the seed is God's word.

Mark 7:18

> Jesus asked them, “Are you also still unable to understand?”

Spiritual Principle

Understanding how we receive God's word is the key to understanding the kingdom.

Key Truth

Jesus is patient with slow learners.

XIV. THE FARMER SOWS THE WORD

Mark 4:14 — The Seed Is God's Word

“The farmer sows the word.”

This is simple and clear.

The seed is God's word.

The farmer is anyone who shares it.

Jesus Himself.

The apostles.

And every believer who tells others about God.

The seed is always good.

The difference is in the soil.

Cross References

Matthew 13:19

> The seed is the message about the kingdom.

Luke 8:11

> The seed is God's message.

1 Peter 1:23

> You have been born again, not from a seed that dies, but from one that lasts forever, through God's living word that never ends.

Spiritual Principle

God's word is the living seed that brings new life.

Key Truth

The seed is good; the question is the soil.

XV. THE PATH: TAKEN AWAY

Mark 4:15 — Satan Takes the Word

“Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was planted in them.”

“Some people are like seed along the path.”

These are hard-hearted listeners.

The word never sinks in.

“As soon as they hear it, Satan comes.”

Satan is like the birds.

He moves quickly.

“And takes away the word that was planted in them.”

He distracts.

He causes doubt.

He makes people forget.

The word never gets a chance to grow.

Cross References

Matthew 13:19

> When people hear the message about the kingdom and do not understand it, the evil one comes and takes away what was planted in their hearts.

Luke 8:12

> The seed along the path stands for those who hear, but the devil comes and takes the message from their hearts so they cannot believe and be saved.

2 Corinthians 4:4

> The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, so they cannot see the light of the good news about Christ's glory.

Spiritual Principle

Satan works to snatch God's word away before it can take root.

Application

What helps you hold on to God's word after you hear it?

XVI. THE ROCKY GROUND: QUICK JOY

Mark 4:16 — Receiving It with Joy

“Others are like seed sown on rocky ground. They hear the word and immediately receive it with joy.”

“They hear the word and immediately receive it with joy.”

These people respond with excitement.

They seem to be the best listeners.

They are happy.

They are eager.

But their response is emotional and shallow.

Cross References

Matthew 13:20

> The seed on rocky ground stands for those who hear the message and right away receive it gladly.

Luke 8:13

> The seed on rock stands for those who hear the message and receive it with joy.

John 5:35

> John was like a burning, shining lamp, and you were happy for a while to enjoy his light.

Spiritual Principle

Joy in hearing God's word is good, but it must lead to deep roots.

Key Truth

Excitement is not the same as commitment.

XVII. NO ROOT

Mark 4:17 — Falling Away in Trouble

“But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”

“Since they have no root.”

Their faith never went deep.

“They last only a short time.”

Their joy faded.

“When trouble or persecution comes because of the word.”

Following Jesus brings opposition.

“They quickly fall away.”

When faith costs something, they quit.

Their faith was real enough to start, but not deep enough to last.

Cross References

Matthew 13:21

> But they do not let it grow deep roots, so they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they quickly give up.

Luke 8:13

> They believe for a while, but when testing comes, they fall away.

Matthew 24:10

> At that time many will turn away from their faith, betray one another, and hate one another.

Spiritual Principle

Faith without deep roots cannot survive hardship.

Application

What are you doing to grow deep roots in Christ?

XVIII. AMONG THORNS

Mark 4:18 — They Hear the Word

“Still others are like seed among thorns. They hear the word,”

“They hear the word.”

These people really do hear.

The word gets in.

It even begins to grow.

But something else is growing too.

Cross References

Matthew 13:22

> The seed among the thorns stands for those who hear the message.

Luke 8:14

> The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked.

1 Timothy 6:9

> Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap. They are caught by many foolish and harmful desires that pull people down into ruin.

Spiritual Principle

Hearing God's word is not enough if other things are allowed to grow alongside it.

Key Truth

The word can be heard and still be crowded out.

XIX. THREE KINDS OF THORNS

Mark 4:19 — Choking the Word

“but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and desires for other things choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

Jesus names three thorns.

“The worries of this life.”

Anxiety about everyday things.

Bills, health, family, the future.

“The deceitfulness of riches.”

Money promises security and happiness.

But it lies.

It never satisfies.

“And desires for other things.”

Wanting more and more.

Pleasure, success, possessions.

“Choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

None of these is necessarily evil.

But when they take first place, they choke out God's word.

Cross References

Matthew 13:22

> The worries of this life and the lie that money brings happiness choke the message, so it produces nothing.

Luke 8:14

> They are choked by worries, riches, and the pleasures of life, and their fruit never matures.

1 Timothy 6:10

> Loving money leads to every kind of evil. Some people have wandered away from the faith because they wanted money, and they have caused themselves much pain.

Spiritual Principle

Worries, riches, and desires can choke the fruit of God's word.

Spiritual Warning

The thorns grow slowly and quietly, until the fruit is gone.

XX. GOOD SOIL

Mark 4:20 — Hear, Accept, Produce

“But those who are like seed sown on good soil hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.”

Good soil does three things.

“Hear the word.”

They listen.

“Accept it.”

They welcome it.

They believe it.

They let it shape their lives.

“And produce a crop.”

The word bears fruit.

Changed character.

Good works.

Others brought to Christ.

“Thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.”

Fruit is the mark of a true believer.

Cross References

Matthew 13:23

> The seed on good ground stands for those who hear the message and understand it. They produce a crop of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times more.

Luke 8:15

> The seed on good soil stands for those with a good and honest heart, who hear the message, hold on to it, and patiently produce a crop.

James 1:22

> Do not only listen to God's word and fool yourselves. Put it into practice.

Spiritual Principle

Hearts that hear, accept, and obey God's word bear lasting fruit.

Application

What kind of soil is your heart right now?

XXI. A LAMP ON A STAND

Mark 4:21 — Not Under a Basket

“Jesus continued, “Do you bring a lamp to put it under a basket or under a bed? No! You put it on a stand.”

Jesus gives another picture.

A small clay oil lamp lit a home.

“Do you bring a lamp to put it under a basket or under a bed?”

That would be foolish.

It would hide the light.

“No! You put it on a stand.”

A lamp is meant to shine.

The truth Jesus brings is not meant to stay hidden.

His followers who receive the light must let it shine.

Cross References

Matthew 5:15

> Nobody lights a lamp just to cover it up. They set it up high, where it can light up the whole house.

Luke 8:16

> No one lights a lamp and covers it with a bowl or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand so those who come in can see.

Luke 11:33

> No one lights a lamp and hides it. Instead, it is put on a stand so people can see when they come in.

Spiritual Principle

The light of God's truth is meant to shine, not to be hidden.

Application

Are you letting the light of Christ shine through your life?

XXII. NOTHING HIDDEN

Mark 4:22 — Brought into the Open

“For nothing is hidden except to be revealed, and nothing concealed except to be brought into the open.”

For now, the truth about Jesus was partly hidden in parables.

But it would not stay hidden.

One day it would be fully revealed.

Through the cross, the resurrection, and the preaching of the gospel.

Also, everything hidden in people's hearts will one day be brought to light.

Cross References

Matthew 10:26

> Do not be afraid of them. Everything that is covered up will be shown, and every secret will be made known.

Luke 8:17

> Whatever is hidden will be made plain, and every secret will come out into the light.

Luke 12:2

> Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing is hidden that will not be made known.

Spiritual Principle

God's truth will be fully revealed in His time.

Key Truth

What is hidden now will one day be seen by all.

XXIII. EARS TO HEAR

Mark 4:23 — Listen Again

“If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.””

Jesus repeats His call.

This is important.

Listen carefully.

Do not let these truths pass by.

Cross References

Matthew 11:15

> Whoever has ears should listen.

Luke 8:8

> If you have ears, listen!

Revelation 3:22

> If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus calls us again and again to listen with our hearts.

Key Truth

When Jesus repeats something, it is because it matters.

XXIV. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU HEAR

Mark 4:24 — The Measure You Use

“He also said, “Pay attention to what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.”

“Pay attention to what you hear.”

Listen carefully.

Think about what you are taking in.

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

The more attention you give God's word, the more understanding you will receive.

“And even more.”

God is generous.

He gives back more than we give.

Those who listen eagerly receive abundantly.

Cross References

Matthew 7:2

> You will be judged in the same way you judge others, and the amount you give to others is the amount you will receive.

Luke 6:38

> When you give to others, gifts will come back to you, packed down, shaken to fit more, and spilling over the top. The size of the scoop you use for others is the size God will use for you.

2 Corinthians 9:6

> Whoever plants a little will harvest a little, and whoever plants a lot will harvest a lot.

Spiritual Principle

The attention we give God's word determines how much we receive from it.

Application

How much attention are you giving to God's word?

XXV. WHOEVER HAS WILL BE GIVEN MORE

Mark 4:25 — Growing or Losing

“Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken away.””

“Whoever has will be given more.”

Those who receive God's word and act on it will understand more and more.

“Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken away.”

Those who ignore God's word will lose even the little understanding they had.

Spiritual truth is like a muscle.

Use it, and it grows.

Ignore it, and it weakens.

Cross References

Matthew 13:12

> Those who have understanding will be given more, and they will have plenty. But those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

Matthew 25:29

> Everyone who has will be given more, and they will have more than enough. But whoever has nothing will lose even what little they have.

Luke 8:18

> So be careful how you listen. Whoever has will get more, but whoever does not have will lose even what they think they have.

Spiritual Principle

Those who respond to God's word grow; those who ignore it lose ground.

Key Truth

In the spiritual life, we never stand still.

XXVI. SCATTERING SEED

Mark 4:26 — The Kingdom Is Like This

“Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the ground.”

Only Mark records this parable.

It is a simple picture.

A man plants seed in his field.

He does his part.

Then God does His part.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 3:6

> My work was to plant, and Apollos poured on the water. But it was God who caused the growth.

1 Corinthians 3:7

> So the one who plants and the one who waters are not important. Only God, who makes things grow, is important.

Isaiah 55:10

> Just as rain and snow water the earth and make plants grow, giving seed for planting and bread for eating.

Spiritual Principle

Our part is to sow; God's part is to make it grow.

Application

Are you faithfully sowing the seed of God's word?

XXVII. HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW

Mark 4:27 — Night and Day

“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he doesn't know how.”

“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up.”

The farmer goes about his life.

He sleeps.

He wakes.

“The seed sprouts and grows.”

The growth continues even when he is not watching.

“Though he doesn't know how.”

He cannot explain it.

He cannot control it.

God's kingdom grows in a mysterious way.

We cannot force spiritual growth.

We cannot fully explain how a heart changes.

But God is at work.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 11:5

> You do not know how the wind blows or how a baby grows inside its mother. In the same way, you cannot understand the work of God, who makes everything.

John 3:8

> You can hear the wind, but you cannot tell where it started or where it is headed. That is how it is when the Spirit gives someone new life.

1 Corinthians 3:7

> Neither the planter nor the waterer is anything; only God, who makes it grow.

Spiritual Principle

God's kingdom grows in ways we cannot see or explain.

Key Truth

You can rest at night, because God is still working.

XXVIII. FIRST THE STALK

Mark 4:28 — By Itself

“The soil produces grain by itself—first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.”

“The soil produces grain by itself.”

The Greek word here is the source of our word **“automatic.”**

The growth happens without human effort.

It is God's power at work.

“First the stalk, then the head, then the full grain.”

Growth happens in stages.

It takes time.

Spiritual growth is the same.

We should be patient with ourselves and with others.

Cross References

Genesis 1:12

> The land produced plants. Plants grew seeds, and trees grew fruit with seeds inside, each after its own kind. And God saw that it was good.

James 5:7

> Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes. See how the farmer waits patiently for the valuable crop to grow, waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

Isaiah 55:10

> The rain and snow fall and water the earth so that it grows plants and gives seed and bread.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual growth happens in stages, and it takes time.

Application

Are you patient with growth in yourself and others?

XXIX. THE HARVEST HAS COME

Mark 4:29 — Putting in the Sickle

“As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.””

“As soon as the grain is ripe.”

When the time is right.

“He puts in the sickle.”

The farmer harvests.

“Because the harvest has come.”

The harvest is a picture of the end of the age.

God's kingdom will reach its full harvest.

God's work, though slow and hidden now, will be completed.

Cross References

Joel 3:13

> Swing the sickle, because the harvest is ready.

Revelation 14:15

> Another angel came out of the temple and called loudly to the One sitting on the cloud, "Swing Your sickle and gather the harvest, because the time has come and the earth's harvest is ripe."

Matthew 13:39

> The harvest is the end of the age, and the workers who gather it are angels.

Spiritual Principle

God's kingdom will reach its full harvest at the right time.

Key Truth

What God begins, He will finish.

XXX. WHAT IS THE KINGDOM LIKE?

Mark 4:30 — Another Parable

"Again He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? What parable shall we use to describe it?"

Jesus invites His listeners to think with Him.

The kingdom of God is so great that no single picture can describe it.

So He gives another parable.

Cross References

Matthew 13:31

> Jesus told them another story: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed."

Luke 13:18

> Then Jesus said, "What is God's kingdom like? What can I compare it to?"

Matthew 13:24

> Jesus told them another story: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who planted good seed in his field.”

Spiritual Principle

God's kingdom is so great that it takes many pictures to describe it.

Key Truth

The kingdom of God is bigger than any one story can tell.

XXXI. A MUSTARD SEED

Mark 4:31 — The Smallest Seed

“It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds when planted in the ground.”

“It is like a mustard seed.”

A mustard seed is tiny, about the size of a pinhead.

“The smallest of all seeds when planted in the ground.”

Among the seeds farmers commonly planted in that land, it was known as the smallest.

It was a common way of describing something very small.

The kingdom of God began small.

A carpenter from Nazareth.

Twelve ordinary men.

It did not look impressive.

Cross References

Matthew 13:31

> The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone planted in a field.

Luke 13:19

> It is like a mustard seed that a man planted in his garden.

Matthew 17:20

> Even if your faith is no bigger than a tiny mustard seed, you can tell this mountain to go somewhere else, and it will go.

Spiritual Principle

God's kingdom often begins in small and unimpressive ways.

Key Truth

Never despise small beginnings.

XXXII. THE LARGEST OF GARDEN PLANTS

Mark 4:32 — Birds Nest in Its Shade

“Yet when it grows, it becomes the largest of garden plants, with such large branches that the birds of the air can nest in its shade.””

“Yet when it grows, it becomes the largest of garden plants.”

A mustard plant could grow eight to twelve feet tall.

“With such large branches.”

From a tiny seed, a large plant grew.

“That the birds of the air can nest in its shade.”

In the Old Testament, a tree with birds in its branches pictured a great kingdom that sheltered many nations.

God's kingdom would grow to welcome people from every nation.

From twelve disciples, the church has spread around the world.

Cross References

Matthew 13:32

> It is the smallest of seeds, but when it grows, it becomes larger than the other garden plants and turns into a tree, so that birds come and rest in its branches.

Ezekiel 17:23

> I will plant it on Israel's high mountain. It will grow branches and bear fruit and become a great cedar. Every kind of bird will nest under it.

Daniel 4:12

> Its leaves were beautiful, and it had plenty of fruit. Wild animals rested in its shade, and birds lived in its branches.

Spiritual Principle

God's kingdom grows from small beginnings to bless all nations.

Key Truth

What begins small in God's hands can grow beyond anything we imagine.

XXXIII. AS MUCH AS THEY COULD UNDERSTAND

Mark 4:33 — Many Parables

“Jesus taught the word with many parables like these, as much as the people could understand.”

“Jesus taught the word with many parables like these.”

Mark gave only a few examples.

Jesus told many more.

“As much as the people could understand.”

Jesus was a wise teacher.

He taught people at their level.

He gave them what they could handle.

Cross References

Matthew 13:34

> Jesus used stories to tell all these things to the people.

John 16:12

I have much more to tell you, but it is too much for you to take in right now.

Psalm 78:2

I will teach you with stories. I will talk about mysteries from the past.

Spiritual Principle

God teaches us patiently, as much as we are able to receive.

Key Truth

Jesus meets people where they are.

XXXIV. HE EXPLAINED EVERYTHING

Mark 4:34 — Alone with His Disciples

“He did not speak to them without using a parable, but when alone with His disciples, He explained everything.”

“He did not speak to them without using a parable.”

In public, Jesus taught mainly in parables.

“But when alone with His disciples, He explained everything.”

Those who stayed close received the full explanation.

There is a blessing in spending time alone with Jesus.

Cross References

Matthew 13:34

He always used stories to teach the crowds.

Matthew 13:35

This happened to fulfill what the prophet said: “I will speak in stories. I will tell things that have been secret since the world was made.”

John 16:25

> I have told you these things using word pictures. But a time is coming when I will speak to you plainly about the Father.

Spiritual Principle

Those who draw close to Jesus receive deeper understanding.

Application

Are you spending time alone with Jesus to learn from Him?

XXXV. LET'S GO TO THE OTHER SIDE

Mark 4:35 — That Evening

“That evening He said to His disciples, “Let's go over to the other side of the lake.””

“That evening.”

After a long day of teaching.

“Let's go over to the other side of the lake.”

Jesus gave a clear plan.

They were going to the other side.

Remember these words.

Jesus did not say, “Let's go to the middle of the lake and sink.”

He said they were going across.

Cross References

Matthew 8:18

> When Jesus saw the crowd around Him, He told His followers to go to the other side of the lake.

Matthew 8:23

> Jesus got into a boat, and His followers went with Him.

Luke 8:22

> One day Jesus and His followers got into a boat. He said, “Let's cross the lake.” So they started across.

Spiritual Principle

When Jesus gives a promise, He will see it through.

Key Truth

If Jesus says you are going to the other side, you will get there.

XXXVI. JUST AS HE WAS

Mark 4:36 — Leaving the Crowd

“Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along in the boat, just as He was. Other boats were with Him too.”

“Leaving the crowd behind.”

They left the crowd at the shore.

“They took Him along in the boat, just as He was.”

Jesus was probably exhausted after teaching all day.

They left without preparing.

“Other boats were with Him too.”

Other people were also on the water.

The storm would affect them all.

Cross References

Matthew 8:23

> When Jesus got into the boat, His followers went with Him.

Luke 8:22

> They got into a boat and set out across the lake.

John 6:22

The next day, the crowd on the other side of the lake saw that only one boat had been there.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus shares in the journeys of His followers.

Key Truth

When Jesus is in your boat, you are never alone.

XXXVII. A FURIOUS STORM

Mark 4:37 — Nearly Swamped

“A furious storm came up, and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped.”

“A furious storm came up.”

The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills.

Cool winds can rush down suddenly and stir up violent storms.

“The waves broke over the boat.”

Water poured in.

“So that it was nearly swamped.”

The boat was filling up.

Several of these men were experienced fishermen.

If they were afraid, this was a serious storm.

Being with Jesus does not mean we will never face storms.

Cross References

Matthew 8:24

Suddenly a terrible storm came up on the lake, so that waves covered the boat.

Luke 8:23

> A strong wind blew down on the lake, and the boat began to fill with water. They were in danger.

Jonah 1:4

> But the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and there was such a violent storm that the ship was about to break apart.

Spiritual Principle

Following Jesus does not keep us from storms, but it keeps us with Him in them.

Key Truth

The disciples were in the storm because they obeyed Jesus.

XXXVIII. SLEEPING ON A CUSHION

Mark 4:38 — Don't You Care?

“Jesus was in the back, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said, “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?””

“Jesus was in the back, sleeping on a cushion.”

What a picture.

Jesus was truly human.

He was tired.

He slept.

And He was at peace in the storm.

“The disciples woke Him.”

They were desperate.

“Teacher, don't you care if we drown?”

This is the cry of fear.

They thought His sleep meant He did not care.

But Jesus' peace was not a lack of care.

It was perfect trust in the Father.

Cross References

Matthew 8:24

> But Jesus was sleeping.

Luke 8:23

> As they sailed, Jesus fell asleep.

Jonah 1:5

> Jonah had gone down into the bottom of the ship, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

Spiritual Principle

God's silence in our storms is not a sign that He does not care.

Application

Have you ever wondered if God cares about your storm?

XXXIX. PEACE! BE STILL!

Mark 4:39 — Completely Calm

“He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, “Peace! Be still!” The wind died down, and it was completely calm.”

“He got up.”

Jesus rose.

“Rebuked the wind.”

He spoke to the wind the way He spoke to demons.

“And said to the waves, ‘Peace! Be still!’”

Three simple words in Mark's language.

The literal sense is “Be silent! Be muzzled!”

“The wind died down, and it was completely calm.”

Normally, even after the wind stops, the waves keep rolling for a while.

But this calm was immediate and complete.

Only the Creator has this kind of power.

Cross References

Matthew 8:26

> Then He got up and gave orders to the winds and the waves, and everything became completely calm.

Luke 8:24

> He got up and commanded the wind and the rough water. They stopped, and everything was calm.

Psalm 107:29

> He made the storm be still and calmed the waves.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus has authority over the forces of nature.

Key Truth

The storm that terrified the disciples obeyed Jesus with one word.

XL. WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID?

Mark 4:40 — Still No Faith?

“He said to His disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?””

“Why are you so afraid?”

Jesus asked a searching question.

They had reason to be afraid of the storm.

But they had Jesus in the boat.

“Do you still have no faith?”

They had seen Him heal the sick and drive out demons.

Yet they still did not trust Him in the storm.

Fear and faith struggle against each other.

Faith remembers who is in the boat.

Cross References

Matthew 8:26

> Jesus asked them, “Why are you afraid? Your faith is so small!”

Luke 8:25

> He asked them, “Where is your faith?”

Matthew 14:31

> Right away Jesus reached out His hand and caught Peter. He said, “Your faith is so small. Why did you doubt?”

Spiritual Principle

Faith trusts Jesus even when the storm is raging.

Application

What storm in your life is Jesus asking you to trust Him with?

XLI. WHO IS THIS?

Mark 4:41 — Even the Wind and Waves Obey

“They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!””

“They were terrified.”

Before, they were afraid of the storm.

Now they were in awe of Jesus.

This was a holy fear.

“Who is this?”

This is the great question of the Gospel of Mark.

Who is Jesus?

“Even the wind and the waves obey Him!”

In the Old Testament, only God controls the sea.

The answer to their question is clear.

Jesus is God.

Cross References

Matthew 8:27

> The men were amazed and said, “What kind of man is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!”

Luke 8:25

> They were afraid and amazed. They said to each other, “Who is this? He gives orders to the wind and the water, and they obey Him!”

Psalm 89:9

> You rule over the raging sea. When its waves rise up, You calm them.

Spiritual Principle

The One who calms the storm is the Lord of all creation.

Key Truth

The question “Who is this?” has only one answer: Jesus is Lord.

XLII. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM MARK 4

1. The Word of God Must Be Received Deeply

“Those who are like seed sown on good soil hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop.”

Principle:

Fruit comes when the heart is soft and ready.

2. Faithfulness Brings More

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.”

Principle:

The attention you give God's word will determine what you receive.

3. God's Kingdom Grows Mysteriously

“The seed sprouts and grows, though he doesn't know how.”

Principle:

Like a seed, the kingdom grows beyond human control or understanding.

4. Small Beginnings Can Yield Great Results

“It is like a mustard seed.”

Principle:

God's work can grow far beyond what anyone expects.

5. Jesus Has Authority Over Nature

“Even the wind and the waves obey Him!”

Principle:

Even storms obey Him, reminding us to trust His power over our fears.

XLIII. THE FOUR SOILS

The Parable of the Sower describes four kinds of hearts.

1. The Hard Path

- The word does not sink in.
- Satan snatches it away.
- Result: no growth.

2. The Rocky Ground

- The word is received with joy.
- But it has no root.
- Result: quick growth, quick falling away.

3. The Thorny Ground

- The word grows.
- But worries, riches, and desires choke it.
- Result: life, but no fruit.

4. The Good Soil

- The word is heard and accepted.
- It takes deep root.
- Result: an abundant harvest.

How to Become Good Soil

- Soften your heart through humility and prayer.
- Grow deep roots through daily time in God's word.
- Pull out the thorns of worry and greed.
- Obey what you hear.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The seed is always good; the question is always the soil.

XLIV. THREE PARABLES OF GROWTH

Mark 4 gives three pictures of how God's kingdom grows.

The Sower

The kingdom grows where God's word is received.

The Growing Seed

The kingdom grows by God's power, even when we cannot see it.

The Mustard Seed

The kingdom grows from small beginnings to great size.

Key Truth

God's kingdom grows through His word, by His power, beyond our expectations.

XLV. JESUS IN THE STORM

Verses 35–41 teach important lessons about storms in life.

Storms Come Even When We Obey

The disciples were in the storm because they followed Jesus' command.

Jesus Is in the Boat

He did not send them alone.

Jesus Is at Peace

His rest showed perfect trust in the Father.

Jesus Cares

His sleep did not mean He did not care.

Jesus Has Authority

One word from Him calmed the storm.

Jesus Calls Us to Faith

“Why are you so afraid?”

Jesus Is Lord

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The storm is never stronger than the One who is in the boat with you.

XLVI. WHAT MARK 4 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is the Great Teacher

“He taught them many things using parables.”

He Is the Sower of the Word

“The farmer sows the word.”

He Reveals the Secret of the Kingdom

“To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God.”

He Explains His Word to His Followers

“When alone with His disciples, He explained everything.”

He Was Truly Human

“Sleeping on a cushion.”

He Is Lord Over Creation

“Peace! Be still!”

He Is God

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus is fully human, tired enough to sleep in a storm, and fully God, powerful enough to stop it.

XLVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What is a parable?

A story from everyday life that teaches a spiritual truth.

Question 2

What does the seed represent in the Parable of the Sower?

God's word.

Question 3

What do the four soils represent?

Four different kinds of hearts that hear God's word.

Question 4

What happens to seed on the path?

Satan takes it away before it can grow.

Question 5

Why did the seed on rocky ground wither?

It had no root, so it could not survive trouble and persecution.

Question 6

What three thorns choke the word?

The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and desires for other things.

Question 7

What marks the good soil?

It hears the word, accepts it, and produces fruit.

Question 8

What does the lamp on the stand teach?

The truth of God is meant to shine, not to be hidden.

Question 9

What does the Parable of the Growing Seed teach?

God's kingdom grows by His power in ways we cannot see or explain.

Question 10

What does the mustard seed teach?

God's kingdom begins small but grows into something great that shelters many.

Question 11

Why did the disciples think Jesus did not care?

Because He was asleep while the storm raged.

Question 12

What should Mark 4 change about the way Christians live today?

Mark 4 should cause believers to live:

- Listening carefully to God's word.
- Growing deep roots in Christ.
- Pulling out the thorns of worry and greed.
- Bearing fruit for God.
- Letting their light shine.
- Sowing the word and trusting God for the growth.

- Not despising small beginnings.
- Trusting Jesus in every storm.

XLVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Mark 4 asks several important questions.

What Kind of Soil Am I?

Hard, rocky, thorny, or good?

Do I Truly Listen?

Or does God's word go in one ear and out the other?

How Deep Are My Roots?

Would my faith survive a hard trial?

What Thorns Are Growing in My Heart?

Worry? Money? Other desires?

Is My Light Shining?

Or am I hiding it?

Am I Sowing the Seed?

Am I sharing God's word with others?

Am I Patient with Growth?

In myself and others?

Do I Trust Jesus in My Storms?

Or do I wonder if He cares?

XLIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Same Seed, Different Soil”

The farmer in Jesus' parable did not use different seed.

He used the same seed in every part of the field.

The path got the same seed as the good soil.

The rocky ground got the same seed as the good soil.

The thorny ground got the same seed as the good soil.

But the results were completely different.

Why?

Because of the soil.

Many people hear the same sermon.

Read the same Bible.

Sit in the same church.

But some grow and bear fruit, and others do not.

The difference is not the seed.

The difference is the heart.

This creates a powerful principle.

We cannot change the seed.

But by God's grace, we can prepare the soil.

We can ask God to soften our hearts, deepen our roots, and remove the thorns.

Principle:

The power is in the seed, but the harvest depends on the heart.

L. FINAL APPLICATION

Mark Chapter 4 teaches us how to receive God's word and how to trust God's Son.

It shows four kinds of hearts.

It calls us to let our light shine.

It reminds us to listen carefully.

It shows that God's kingdom grows by His power.

It shows that small beginnings can become something great.

And it shows that Jesus is Lord even over the storm.

Mark 4 therefore reminds us:

Never let your heart grow hard.

Never be content with shallow faith.

Never let the thorns choke the word.

Never hide your light.

Never despise small beginnings.

Never forget who is in your boat.

The church does not need people who only hear the word.

It needs:

Hearts that are good soil.

Lights that shine.

Sowers who scatter the seed.

And disciples who trust Jesus in the storm.

The same Jesus still calls:

Tell people that God's word can change their lives.

Tell people that God's kingdom is growing.

Tell people that no beginning is too small for God.

Tell people that Jesus can calm any storm.

And as you live:

Listen carefully.

Grow deep roots.

Let your light shine.

Trust Jesus in the storm.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the good seed of Your word.

Thank You that Your word has the power to bring new life and great fruit.

Thank You that You reveal the secret of Your kingdom to those who follow Jesus.

Thank You that Your kingdom grows by Your power, even when we cannot see it.

Thank You that You can take small beginnings and make them great.

Thank You that Jesus is in the boat with us in every storm.

Thank You that even the wind and the waves obey Him.

Forgive us when our hearts have been hard.

Forgive us when our faith has been shallow.

Forgive us when we have let worries, riches, and desires choke Your word.

Forgive us when we have hidden our light.

Forgive us when we have been afraid instead of trusting You.

Make our hearts good soil.

Help our roots grow deep in Christ.

Pull out every thorn that chokes Your word.

Let our lives produce a harvest for Your glory.

And in every storm, help us remember who is in our boat.

“Peace! Be still!”

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But those who are like seed sown on good soil hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.” — Mark 4:20

Central Truth

God's word bears fruit in hearts that truly receive it, His kingdom grows by His power from small beginnings to a great harvest, and Jesus is Lord even over the storms of nature and of life.

Mark 4 in One Sentence

Jesus teaches in parables that God's word bears fruit only in hearts that truly receive it, that His light must shine, that His kingdom grows by God's power from tiny beginnings into something great, and then calms a furious storm with a word, leaving His disciples asking, “Who is this?”