



**UNIT 9 LESSON 3**  
**MARK Chapters 4 AND 5**

**WHAT ARE PARABLES?**

- a) In Mark 4:1-34 the writer has drawn together several parables and sayings of Jesus to make a unit which illustrates the way Jesus taught and to drive home the point that now after the clashes we studied in Lesson 2, Jesus turned towards a new phase in his ministry - a much more public one.

Jesus used parables of all kinds. In this chapter there is a series of parables which Jesus used to teach his listeners. The Jewish people of Jesus' day were accustomed to being taught in parables. Teachers and audiences both were familiar with this teaching method.

Some of Jesus' parables were stories of reasonable length and others were short pithy sayings. Some had the meaning spelled out to greater or lesser extent, while others were cryptic and challenging.

The parables reflect a great variety of facets of everyday life in Palestine - farmers, lamps, birds and bushes are mentioned in Chapter 4. Jesus used them to convey sublime truth. And that was their value - Jesus exploited the story form and the common events of life to reveal the Kingdom of God. One of the greatest values of the parable was that it made the listener get involved. As a teacher Jesus knew that it was no use just telling a story. The learner had to be actively involved.

Listening to the teachings of Jesus is not enough. Hearing must be followed by obedience. The word of God must be allowed to take root, grow and bear fruit in our lives.

- b) In Mark 4:3-20 we have the parable of the sower. The explanation of the parable, given by Jesus in verses 13-20 and the extra parables and sayings which follow it, all combine to show that God's operation of revelation is constant, but the extent of the final understanding and comprehension is dependent on the attitude of the hearers. The sower sowed the seed everywhere with the same care and liberality, but the good results only came in the good soil. The person who has much spiritual insight and uses it will gain more (v. 25).
- c) In Mark 4:21-25 we have four different sayings of Jesus which are put together whereas in Matthew's Gospel we find them scattered as follows: 5:15, 10:26, 7:2, 13:12, 25:29. Mark 4:22 stresses how the Gospel message may appear to be insignificant and hidden but will eventually come to light in God's way; it is a follow-up to emphasise the truth of the preceding parable of the Sower. But in Matthew 10:26 the same saying is explicitly referred to fear and persecution: "Do not be afraid of men then..."

We learn from this that each Gospel writer or compiler would use the sayings of Jesus in his own way, but always in harmony with the teaching of Jesus. It is obvious that



Jesus must have used his teaching over and over again as he moved from place to place and as he reiterated it to make sure his hearers remembered it.

## 2. IS JESUS REALLY MASTER OF ALL? (Mark 4:35 - 5:43).

- a) In Chapter 4 the disciples learned through parables. In this section they learn through actual experience in desperate situations. In the storm at sea they realize that the one whom they follow can control the forces of nature. Then they see his power to cast out evil spirits which were destroying a man's mind and personality. They see his power to heal a woman's chronic incurable disease, and to restore life to a dead child. They see that Jesus' power and concern affect every area of human need.

In all these incidents the people have reached desperation point. The message is - when men run out of resources, Jesus is still there with his power and authority.

- b) For your own interest look for the points of desperation in the stories. Make a list of these points and of how Jesus answers their needs. Then ask yourself, "what kind of situation in the early church would these stories fit?" A glance through the book of Acts gives a few ideas -persecution, trouble within the Church, weariness in missionary outreach, and growing understanding of doctrine are some of the points hinted at there. Now take the process further, and relate it to your own situation in the modern church. In other words, what situation today does this miracle or incident suit?

Read Mark 4:35-41. The sea of Galilee is known for its violent storms which arise with frightening swiftness

Read Mark 5:1-20. The fact that this incident takes place on the eastern shore of the sea of Galilee indicates it is Gentile territory, which probably accounts for some of the things Jesus does differently here. The "Ten Towns" (5:20) is a large area which was predominantly Greek and rather independent of the Roman rule. Perhaps Jesus insisted that the healed man remain in that district so he could be the first missionary to that cultural group.

Read Mark 5:25-34. Under the laws of Judaism this woman's condition made her ceremonially unclean, and everyone who touched her would be considered unclean (Leviticus 15:25-27). Her illness thus shut her off from worship in the temple and ordinary social life.

Read Mark 5:21-24 and 35-43. The contrast between Jesus' attitude to death and that of the local Jewish community (5:35,38) was striking (5:42) "Jewish mourning customs were very vivid and very detailed, and practically all of them were designed to stress the desolation and the final separation of death. The triumphant, victorious hope of the Christian faith was totally absent from them." Barclay, Daily Study Bible, *The Gospel of Mark*, p133.

**QUESTION 1:**

In the Parable of the Sower describe briefly the four kinds of soil which receive the seed. Describe in your own words the four kinds of people identified by Jesus. What experiences do they share? In what ways do they differ from one another?

**QUESTION 2:**

What understanding does Jesus seek to give us in the parable in 4:26-29? What does this parable teach about the growth of the kingdom of God?

**QUESTION 3:**

(Mark 4:35-41) Why is Jesus asleep? What has he been doing all day? Why do they wake Jesus and what does their question imply? Why do you think this incident makes a deeper impression on the disciples than anything they have thus far witnessed?

**QUESTION 4:**

(Mark 5:1-20) What three changes take place in the demoniac? How do the people react? Why? What is their reaction to Jesus when they realize his power? Contrast the demoniac's reaction.

**QUESTION 5:**

(Mark 5:25-34) What specific things do you know about this woman's condition? What did the woman know about Jesus and what does she believe? What happens? Why would she seek healing in this way rather than coming forward with her request as Jairus did?

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

In the parable of the sower what specific kind of pressure undermines the faith of the people described in verses 16,17? Relate your own experience of such pressure. What three types of things prevent the people in verses 18 and 19 from being fruitful? Give a present day example of each.