

And He Spoke the Word to Them

Mark 4:33-34

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Introduction

For the past few weeks, we have been looking at the parables Jesus told about the kingdom of God that are recorded in Mark 4.

- We have seen Jesus' explanation of His use of parables.
- We have seen the Parable of the Sower with its explanation.
- We have seen the parable of the lamp, of the growing seed, and of the mustard seed.

Today we come to the conclusion of this section of parables in Mark.

- It is only a brief conclusion, but there are some very precious truths here that we would do well to take to heart.
- The passage is found in Mark 4:33-34.
 - Please give careful attention as I read these two verses to you now, for this is the very word of God.

Mark 4:33-34: And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy and infallible Word.

This little text answers a question that people often ask:

- *If God were to come into the world, what would He say to us?*
- And the answer is that He *has* come and that He spoke parables, telling us the good news about the kingdom of righteousness that He was establishing for sinners so that we could be restored to God and bear fruit that pleases Him.

We will consider three things about what Jesus said to us, according to Mark 4:33-34.

- Let me give you an overview of these three things so you will know where we are going.

First, that

I. Jesus speaks the word to all.

- Those referred to in verse 33 to whom He spoke many such parables were the multitudes at large that came to Him.
- What He spoke by His many parables was the word of the gospel—
 - It was a very excellent word... the good news of salvation that He came to accomplish which is freely offered to all.

II. Second, Jesus speaks as they are able to hear.

- There is much that made them unable to hear all that He wanted them to hear...
 - We will consider those things.
- But knowing of their inability to hear, He is gentle and compassionate.
 - He does not overwhelm us with what we are not ready to hear...
 - He speaks so as to be rightly understood. That is His way.

III. Third, Jesus speaks freely to His disciples in private.

- Here is the intimacy He has with believers.
- What excellent things He reveals to us from His heart! We shall look at them.
- We shall consider how good it is for us to keep up this intimate communion with Him.

Now let us consider each of these three points in detail.

I. First, that Jesus speaks the word to all.

- After recording four of Jesus' parables, Mark here reveals to us in verse 33 that: **with many such parables He spoke the word to them.**
- A. This conveys to us that it was the gospel that Jesus was making known.
1. Mark tells us that it was *the word* that He spoke by these parables.
 - It was not merely words, but *the word*—God's message to us—*the word* of grace.
 - Mark has been telling us from the very start of his book that Jesus made it His purpose to preach the word of the gospel in all of Galilee.
 - As the one who had come to bring salvation to His people, He was eager to make this good news known to the multitudes that came to Him.
 - This was His gracious way as the Mediator, telling us that God's promised salvation was at hand.
 - That was the word He preached.
 2. Mark has given us four parables as a sample of what His many parables were like, and we can see that they are all about the good news of the kingdom...
 - They were of two sorts.
 - a. There were the ones about His kingdom itself.
 - 1) In the parable of the sower, He tells us how that in His kingdom, seed which is the word of God is sown, and He tells us how different ones respond when the seed comes to them.
 - But the good news is that those who receive the word with true faith bring forth fruit.
 - It is a gospel that enables we who are barren and dead in sin to be made alive by Christ and to bear fruit for God.
 - The astounding thing is that a barren desert like mankind becomes fruitful.
 - 2) And there is the parable that tells us how those who are in His kingdom will grow.
 - That the word sown germinates and brings forth life through the powerful working of God so that first the blade, then the head, and then the full grain in the head.
 - The gospel gives us life as soon as we believe, but we are not yet all that we shall be—we grow over time after we come to Him.
 - We must not be discouraged when we see that we are not yet perfect... if we are joined to Christ in faith, we will grow.

- b. There were also the parables about Jesus, the king Himself.
- 1) The parable of the lamp seems to be such.
 - Jesus was not sent into the world to be hidden, but as a lamp to be seen—a lamp is placed on a stand so all can see.
 - Therefore, if we seek Him, we will find Him—things that are not yet clear will become clear.
 - The measure we use in seeking the light will always be rewarded—
 - Our seeking will *never* outstrip His revealing.
 - 2) The parable of the mustard seed also seems to be about Jesus.
 - Though when He came, He was small and insignificant as one who was not acknowledged by those in power and who only had a few lowly disciples,
 - yet, after He was planted, by the crucifixion, He grew into a great tree that is filling the whole earth.
3. We might say that the parables show us, in their own way (by stories), that through Jesus, there will arise in the earth a mighty kingdom for God.
- This is a tremendous truth for a world filled of only sinners.
 - Jesus is the redeemer who gives life to all who come to Him, to all who believe the word of the gospel.
 - He takes those who are cut off from God and restores them to His favour.
 - That is the gracious message He came into the world speaking to us.
 - It is the beautiful word of the gospel.
- B. Consider that this word of the gospel by parables was declared to the multitude.
1. The gospel is freely offered to all who hear it.
 - Anyone who heard these parables could respond to what Jesus was saying.
 - Anyone who was mindful of their need—of the need of Israel and of the whole world to be saved from our sins and from the wrath of God,
 - would find these parables to be of great encouragement... telling us as they do, that a people will be brought forth who are God's own people.
 - That there will be a people out of this world—a great many people—that will be given life in this kingdom so that they bear fruit for God.
 - They would be like the prophetess Anna and her friends who are described as those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
 - How she rejoiced as soon as she learned that Jesus had come into the world, and spoke to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
 2. By these parables, those who heard with understanding would be encouraged to seek the kingdom and life in the kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming.
 - They would be encouraged to come to Jesus with the promise that those who seek will find.
 - This broad proclamation of the gospel by parables was not withheld from anyone, but was openly conveyed to all.
 - But there were very few who received the gracious words of the gospel.

C. How the word of Christ ought to be cherished by all who hear it!

1. What an excellent thing it is to have God come and speak words of grace to us.
 - That in His mercy, He should declare to us that there is reconciliation with God!
 - That we who are barred from paradise with the flaming sword of the law are now able to come back to God and be His own.
 - Such revelation ought to delight everyone who hears it.
2. Mark says that this is the word—that is, the word of God.
 - It comes to us with all authority from heaven.
 - It is not something doubtful or unsure.
 - There really is a righteous kingdom where sinners can be gathered for life.
 - It is an expression of the gracious love of God.
 - That for those lost and ruined by sin, He has made provision and has not left us all to perish in our sin.
 - Until we see Him as a gracious God, we will never come to Him. We will be afraid to come to Him as He is and we will make idols.
 - That is what our society is doing—they are making substitute gods and substitute philosophies of life because they do not know the gospel.
3. It is Jesus' delight to make the gospel known to us.
 - He spoke many parables to tell us of this kingdom of life.
 - By these He told us that what God had promised of old was now at hand—now that He had come.
 - It is a sure word of grace to be believed and sought after.
 - Do you cherish this word as you ought? Do you pray to understand? Do you listen attentively?
 - See that you do.

TRANS> And now let's move along to the second thing where we see how graciously He speaks to us in our weakness and our blindness.

II. Second, Mark tells us that Jesus spoke this word as they were able to hear.

- A. These words imply that Jesus had much more that He wanted to say to the people, but was limited by what they were able to hear.
1. We know from what is said elsewhere that this was so.
 - According to John 16:12, Jesus said, even to His disciples, **“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”**
 - Even they were not in a state of readiness to take in all that He had to say to them... even they did not understand their need for a crucified Saviour.
 2. If Jesus was not able to speak fully even to His own disciples, how much more was this the case with the multitudes that came around Him.
 - Our gracious Saviour had so much more to say to them, but they were not ready for it.
 - He has much more for us too, even if we are His disciples.
 - Until we grow in grace, we will not be able to receive all that He has for us.

- B. There is much that makes us unable to hear all the gracious things He has to say to us.
1. We are filled with thoughts of other things so that we never pay attention to the word.
 - We may be caught up with our own fears or worries so that in our prayers we only seek relief, instead of growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - Perhaps we are bitter because of how things have gone for us.
 - There are many reasons that we are unable to hear as we ought...
 2. But the greatest problem of all is that we do not have a sense of our true need.
 - a. If someone is in a burning building, but they have no sense of the peril they are in, they will not pay attention to the call to get out of the building...
 - They are busy watching television or shopping online for a new shirt.
 - b. We can see our temporal needs, but we cannot see our need of spiritual life.
 - We can see poverty when we suffer from it so that as soon as someone tells us of food and provision, we will gladly receive the good news.
 - We can see sickness and injury, so that if someone tells us of a cure, we will gladly hear them.
 - c. But when God Himself comes to tell us the good news that there is a kingdom of righteousness that He is preparing for sinners where they can be pardoned and reconciled to Him, we yawn.
 - We have no interest in that—
 - We have no interest because we are not cognizant of our estrangement from God and our need for mercy and forgiveness.
 - Nor do we know the joys of communion with God through Christ and life in the Holy Spirit through faith.
 - We are more interested in a ball game or in shopping for a new shirt.
 3. The great problem when Jesus came into the world was that no one was looking for the kind of good news He brought.
 - a. The Lord had promised a kingdom of righteousness that He would establish, but many of His people had latched on to idea that the kingdom meant that they would rule over their enemies in the world...
 - They did not grasp that their greater need was for an atonement for sin that would reconcile them to God.
 - Even though God had given them a tabernacle with priests and lots of sacrifices for sin to testify of this need...
 - And even though He had promised the suffering servant who would come and die in their place, bearing all their sins,
 - Their concern was not for that, but for ruling over their enemies and having the wealth of the world as it had been in Solomon's day.
 - b. As a result, Jesus' call to repent and believe the gospel did not really get through to them.
 - Instead, they were waiting for Jesus to raise up an army to subdue the Romans, and then to establish a lavish kingdom.
 - While they were excited about the potential He had as one who healed the sick and cast out demons, they wondered why He didn't get on with His work and set up His kingdom as they envisioned it.

4. If they had been aware of their desperate need things would have been quite different.
 - If they had been hungry for reconciliation with God... He could have told them many marvellous things from the start.
 - a. He could have told them how He was the Son of God who came from heaven to give His life for their sins...
 - And they would have understood that He was actually going to bear the curse for them.
 - It would have brought them great joy to see such love.
 - b. When He told them the parable of the sower, they would have understood it without it even having it explained.
 - The parable the sower didn't make sense for the kind of kingdom they were looking for—
 - Who would not want a kingdom of prosperity and dominion?
 - What did He mean that there would be three kinds of soil that would not survive in the kingdom?
 - What did He mean in suggesting that not everyone would be interested in the kingdom?
 - How could there be people that did not notice the kingdom?
 - How could there be those who suffered because of the kingdom?
 - How could there be things in the world that would draw them away from a kingdom such as the kingdom that they had in mind?
 - c. As those who were not aware that their relationship with God was the thing that needed to be restored first and foremost,
 - were unable to connect with the parables.
 - Only in those in whom the Holy Spirit was beginning to stir up a yearning to know God and to be reconciled to Him did these parables shed light.
- C. Nevertheless, though they were hardened and unable to understand, Jesus graciously spoke to them as they were able to hear.
1. He did not come right out and tell them that He was the Messiah who had come to die for their sins.
 - They would have all been offended with Him before they had chance to believe, because He did not do what they thought the Messiah was supposed to do.
 - By waiting until He had actually done His work on the cross; by waiting until there was actual forgiveness to be proclaimed through His suffering and death, He left the way open for those who would believe.
 - There were the three thousand at Pentecost who believed—and then the five thousand, and not too long after, there were the myriads—tens of thousands that believed—which we read about in Acts 21.
 2. He spoke in parables as they were able to hear so as not to alienate them. His goal was for them to understand.
 - Yes, the parables were a judgment of sorts as we saw from Jesus' words to His disciples in private in Mark 4:11-12 where it says: **And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to**

those who are outside, all things come in parables, ¹² so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and *their* sins be forgiven them.’ ”

- As I told you, there are many to whom even the cross itself is a curious story that they do not understand the meaning of—they do not see saving power.
- But there were also many elect persons in the multitude who were not yet ready to hear the mission that Jesus had come to fulfill...
 - And Jesus did not wish to overwhelm them with truth that they could not yet understand...
 - So He graciously told them through parables that there was a kingdom that God was establishing and that it was a kingdom from which many would be excluded...
 - that it was a kingdom that they needed to seek with all their heart,
 - and that they needed to receive the word of promise about that kingdom that they might enter it.
 - He set this forth to them in parables so that those in whom His Spirit was beginning to work would be prepared...
 - That they would see that this was a kingdom that was of much greater importance than the kind of kingdom they were seeking.
 - He presented these parables in a way that would make them ponder and wonder until the time was right.
- It was a gracious thing on His part that He did not speak to them without a parable at this time.
 - It does not mean that He just strung one parable after another together, but that He did not speak plainly until they were able to hear and understand.
- 3. Learn from this that His gracious goal is for understanding.
 - He even made the promise through His parables that those who sought to understand would understand and be blessed in the kingdom.
 - Sometimes we may feel like His word is not as clear as we would like it to be, but we need to understand that it is just what we need.
 - The word is written in such a way that we come to understand in the way that we ought to.
 - It gives us the kind of understanding in which we sense our need of salvation so that we cry out to Him for mercy,
 - And the kind of understanding in which we come to more and more rejoice in His mercy, justice, and love as we continue in His word.
 - The word of God is exactly what we need to bring about the understanding He wants us to have.
 - And it is effective in all those who by the grace of the Holy Spirit come to know Him as the Saviour they need.
- 4. Take heart... He wants us to understand.
 - a. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you... your seeking of Him will never outstrip His revealing of His truth to you.

- b. And knowing that He has revealed His truth with a desire that it be understood should also encourage us to share His word with others.
 - His word is understandable.
 - It is just what people need if they are going to enter His kingdom and be reconciled to Him, bringing forth the fruit of eternal life.
 - It is designed to lead them to Christ our Saviour who died on the cross that He might bring us to God.

TRANS> And know that when we have once come to be His disciples, the third thing we see from our text is what Jesus does with those who have come to Him for salvation.

III. Jesus speaks freely to His disciples.

- Verse 34 says: **And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.**

A. What does it mean that He “explained all things” to them?

1. The word *explained* is literally *to let loose* or *to unpack*.
 - As it says in verse 11, it has been given to you, His disciples, to know the mystery of the kingdom.
 - Anyone who comes seeking to be reconciled to God, seeking to be saved from his sins, will come to know the mystery that God is revealing...
 - that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
 - that He came to bear the sins of many by becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
2. He reveals this to His disciples—He lets all of this loose for them—so that the glorious truth floods their souls.
 - They see that Jesus is their all in all—that He is the way, the truth, and the life... that no one comes to the Father but through Him.
 - For them, there is no longer any notion of their own merit—it is Christ who died and who is risen again in whom they find their hope.
 - For them, there is no thought of people of other religions being saved by some other way—they have come to trust in the crucified one.

B. There are so many things that Christ has to reveal to them over time.

1. There is an intimacy with Him that His disciples experience...that you experience if you are His disciple.
 - He speaks of this in John 15:13-15 when He says:
 - John 15:13-15: **“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”**
 - What a grand thing to have the love of the Son of God made known to our souls in the gospel of peace.
 - He tells us that He has laid down His life for us.
 - He tells us what He is doing...what His aspirations are...His sorrows, His joys.
 - He tells us of His great love for us and for His people for whom He is establishing His kingdom.

2. He brings these truths home to us as we walk in communion with Him through the word and prayer.
 - As we walk with Him, we come to understand more and more the height and breadth and depth and length of His love who gave Himself for us.
 - John 14:21 says: **“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”**
 - Knowing Him and the Father is the essence of eternal life.
 - In intimacy with Him, we learn the reality of Zephaniah 3:17: **The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.**
 - He assures us that He has a glorious future for us with Him in His house, that He will indeed come to take us to be with Him in His Father’s house forever, and that when we see Him we shall be like Him.
- What gracious words He speaks to us!
3. See that you keep up communion with Him as His disciple!
 - Continue in His word, in prayer, and in the means of grace, meditating on Him.
 - If your business is to know Him, to serve Him, to live for Him, to find your all in Him,
 - He will make it His business to make known to you all of His secrets.
 - You will enjoy a face-to-face intimacy with Him.
 - It is His delight to show you His glory.
 - All who come to Him will see it.
 - It is His delight to reveal His glory to you so that you will understand it.

Conclusion:

- Proverbs 4:18 sums it up quite nicely: **“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.”**