

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MARK 3-4

I've always enjoyed the circus. And *my favorite act is the lion tamer*. He struts in among hungry lions, flicks his whip and holds his stool. I'd like to be a lion tamer!

It's obvious why a lion tamer uses a whip. Its crack and sting let the lion know he means business. Yet until recently I never knew why a lion tamer holds a stool. *Why stick a stool in the face of a man-eating lion?*

Here's why... The stool's legs confuse and disorient. The lion tries to focus on all four legs at once, and gets overwhelmed. A mental paralysis sets in and fragments his attention. The lion is disabled. The lion acts tame.

And psychologists say the same phenomenon occurs with humans. When too many tasks jockey for our attention a paralysis takes over. We can freeze-up.

The relentless demands of modern life fragment our attention. They sap us of our strength and resolve. We succumb to someone's whip. We act weak and tame.

Rather than roar into life - our roar becomes a meow.

Yet this is NOT what happened to Jesus. He felt the crack of the whip. He was confronted by numerous voices, yet He always stayed on task. Jesus handled the pressure. We see this firsthand in Mark 3-4...

Verse 1, “And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.”

Implied, is the crippled man was planted by the Jews who opposed Jesus. Jesus loved people. His enemies knew it was His habit to heal. But if He did so on the Sabbath they could accuse Him of breaking the Law.

Remember, when God gave the 4th commandment He blessed mankind with a day of *rest, and worship, and play* - to balance out the week of work. God never intended for it to be treated as a legalistic straightjacket that would make life unnecessarily hard and difficult.

But that's what happened...

The Pharisees went as far as to say that healing on the Sabbath constituted work, and was thus a sin. On the Sabbath you could prevent death... *You could apply a tourniquet to stop someone's bleeding - or draw a cold bath to control a fever.* You could keep a person from worsening, but pro-active care had to wait.

The Pharisees hoped Jesus violated their Sabbath rules so they could have an accusation against Him.

“And (Jesus) said to the man who had the withered hand, **“Step forward.”** Jesus knew this was a trap, but He refuses to back down. He calls the man out. One paraphrase reads, **“stand here where we can see you.”**

The Jews put Jesus on the spot - now He's putting them on the spot. He calls the man front-and-center!

Verse 4, "Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent." There're the ones now trapped...

Jesus is asking, "*What's more important, keeping rules that make you feel self-righteous - or doing good, and helping people?*" The answer was obvious, "*Evil never takes a day off, why should doing good!*"

"And when He had looked around at them..." The Phillips translation reads, "He looked round, meeting all their eyes." Jesus made it personal with each man...

"(He) looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts..." I don't know where we get the idea of an always gentle, laid back Jesus. Here, Jesus gets *hopping mad!* The blood He shed to save us also boiled in anger at the legalists...

Realize, Jesus got angry, but not at what we would. It wasn't lost sinners that riled Him. He had compassion on the folks we'd call, "*bad boys and girls.*"

Rather, Jesus got angry at the religious crowd - the people who put *rules and traditions* ahead of *people*.

Here's what's happening in this story... Puny little men are telling God what He can and can't do. They're hemming Him in - putting God in a box. They're saying to the Lord Jesus, "*You can heal six days a week... but knock it off on Saturday.*" Jesus

is about to let the Pharisees know He can do whatever He pleases! He's **Lord of the Sabbath**. He came into the world to save.

Even today, Jesus wants to restore what sin has withered away. And He still gets angry when legalistic people try to limit what He can do to help and heal.

Verse 5, **"(Jesus) said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." This was an impossible command...** If the man could've stretched out his hand he would've done so a long time ago... Jesus is asking him to do what he can't do on his own. But we're told, **"And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other."**

In your body, electrical signals travel along nerve fibers at speeds of 300 mph. In a nanosecond a message can travel from your brain to your hand.

When Jesus issued His command, this man made a choice to obey - to stretch out his balled up, crippled hand. Rather than focus on his atrophied muscles - He believed in the Word of Jesus, and acted on his faith.

In the millisecond it took for the message to travel from brain to fingers his withered hand was whole.

And this is how God works in our lives... All God's miracles begin as impossible commands. We all have withered areas of our life that are limp, and paralyzed, and wasting away... withered hopes, or joys, or relationships, or ministries. Dried up regions of our life.

But in the moment we choose to believe, Jesus can restore us. When we act on what He tells us to do a miracle occurs. God makes the impossible possible.

Do you feel like obeying? Of course not! A withered hand is impotent. The healing doesn't happen on its own. It's when you choose to obey Jesus that the miracle occurs. You have to take the first step.

Tonight, stretch out your withered part to Jesus!

“Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.” Rather than back down, Jesus backed the Pharisees into a corner. Now they plot to kill Him.

But here's how you stay true to your mission, even in the face of intimidation. *You get angry! Take a stand.*

Rather than be pushed into a corner - and boxed in by prejudice - you remember what God has called you to do. Jesus was sent by God into this world to do good and help people... *and He kept it just that simple.*

Verse 7, **“But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him.”** The cities mentioned in these verses covered a 100 mile radius. *Recall verse 7 when you complain about a 30 minute drive to church.*

The point is that thousands of people - Mark calls them **“a great multitude”**... were flocking to see Jesus.

“So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.” Crowd control was a real problem.

“For (Jesus) healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.” Literally it reads, “*lest they fall upon Him.*” Jesus was physically threatened by the crowds. Picture, frenzied fans storming the field after a controversial call ends a football game - swarming players - tearing down goal posts. Jesus’ congregation was acting more like a mob.

And if the scene wasn’t crazy enough, verse 11 puts it over the top, “And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, “You are the Son of God.” But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.” This would be like a Playboy magazine running a favorable article on Calvary Chapel. We’d try to stop the publication.

We wouldn’t want to be identified with the source. It’s bad public relations for demons to advertise for Jesus.

There was quite a crowd of sketchy people following Jesus. Imagine, dangerous, bizarre, wild-eyed, ill-behaved, out-of-control folks surrounding Jesus. Some of them were foaming at the mouth - convulsing in the dirt. Demon-dominated people were swarming Jesus.

If the US secret service had been assigned to protect Jesus they would’ve called this a security nightmare.

Jesus had been sent to help people, but the people He came to help might easily end up trampling Him.

Which brings up another truth, **hurting people often hurt other people**. I was always taught never swim to a drowning man. In his desperation he could pull you under. Stay at a distance and throw him a lifeline. You don't want to drown with the guy you're trying to save.

And the same is true in ministry. We're called to love and help hurting people, but to do so we can get trampled by their neediness. A desperate person has a way of pulling you under. If you let them, some folks will take all your time, your money, and your energy.

If you're going to stay healthy, and serve the Lord effectively, you have to create space between yourself and the hurting people you're trying to reach. I have to live my life, and love my family - as I try to help yours.

This is why Jesus wisely ordered His men to keep a small boat near the shore. This was His buffer between Himself and the crowds. In the boat he could row out a few yards and keep the desperate people at bay.

And though Jesus kept a healthy buffer He never grew aloof and distant. He became more accessible to people by recruiting twelve men to help Him minister.

“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send

them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:”

This was a stroke of genius. The answer to the growing demands of His ministry wasn't isolation, but delegation. Jesus recruited the help of twelve men.

DL Moody once said, “I would rather put ten men to work than do the work of ten men.” This is the way to manage any ministry - delegate as much you can.

In verses 16-19 Mark lists the men Jesus recruited, “Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder"; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into the house.” What a cast of characters to put under one roof. Talk about diversity. These men were all over the social spectrum.

Take Matthew and Simon... Matthew a tax-collector, was a Roman collaborator. Simon was a Jewish patriot. “Cananite” isn't a reference to his nationality. It means “zealous.” He was a zealot - a political radical who hated Romans and Jews who helped them.

The zealots were known as “daggersmen” - which referred to the knife Simon carried under his cloak and used on Roman sympathizers - *men like Matthew*.

Matthew and Simon were as compatible as a Black Panther and a Ku Klux Klansman. Yet amazingly, Jesus reconciled

them, and made them brothers. And if He could do that with these guys, He can do it with us.

Verse 20, “Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind.”

Note Jesus’ “own people” - family and friends - called Him “crazy.” They thought the pressures had gotten to Him. He was no longer eating. Jesus had gone nuts!

And if you follow Jesus don’t be surprised when they say of you, “*He is out of His mind.*” *You follow a man they can’t see - obey orders they don’t hear - sense love they haven’t received - treat people with kindness they don’t deserved.* Our lives don’t make sense to unbelievers. Yet don’t get discouraged, what the world today needs most is a few more *Christian crazies!*

Jesus’ own people thought He was deranged. But worse, the Jews accuse Him of being possessed by a demon. Verse 22, “And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebub,” and, “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.” The name “*Beelzebub*” means “*lord of the flies,*” and was a Jewish name for Satan - the chief of all the demons.

Obviously, the exorcisms Jesus performed were legit. The Jews made no effort to deny they’d occurred. Rather, they try to discredit the source of Jesus’ power.

They say Jesus casts out demons by a demon.

Jesus replies, “So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.” *Why would Satan cast out Satan, and undermine his own cause. It was illogical.*

Understand, I believe demon-possession wasn't just a first-century phenomena. It still occurs today, but in our so-called “enlightened” age it goes by other names.

Today, it's referred to as “*dysfunctional behavior*” or a “*pathological personality.*” I believe the serial killer - or serial rapist - is often demon-possessed. At times demon-possession is misdiagnosed as mental illness.

Sadly, Satan continues to steal, kill, and destroy.

In verse 27 Jesus answers His critics, and explains His exorcisms. And as He does He shares the key to spiritual warfare. “No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.”

When Jesus faced a demon-controlled person, rather than deal with the symptoms, He cut right to the chase. He exercised spiritual authority over the forces controlling the person. Satan is “the strong man” - but Jesus is stronger by far... And once the strong man is restrained - then you're able to free up the person.

Here's what we need to remember when we witness to our friends. *Before we open our mouth, we should get on our knees,* and battle spiritually. Through prayer we limit Satan's influence, and break His hold - then free up our friend long enough for him to seek Jesus.

But without first binding the enemy we're spinning our wheels. It's true, "There's a lot we can do after we've prayed, but we can do nothing until we've pray."

Jesus says to His accusers in verse 28, "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" - because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

No passage in the Bible is as misinterpreted as this idea of **the unpardonable sin**. *First, let me tell you what it's not?* It's not cursing God - or succumbing to a particularly vile sin - or thinking horrid evil thoughts.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is resisting the Spirit's purpose and mission... In John 15:26 Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

The Holy Spirit's job is to testify of Jesus. Thus, blasphemy against the Spirit is to reject His witness of Jesus. It's to turn a deaf ear to the Spirit's call and conviction. Die having never heeded what God's Spirit says about Jesus, and it's a sin that's never forgiven.

Here's what's going on in our text... The Jews heard God the Father speak from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Father spoke audibly. Yet they deny His voice. **Strike one!**

Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, forgave people's sins, fulfilling His Messianic claims. Again the Jews heard those claims, yet they denied Jesus. **Strike two!**

Now Jesus heals the sick and casts out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit, and these same Jewish leaders are witnessing these miracles. Yet here they're denying the work of the Spirit. They're ascribing to *evil spirits* the work of the *Holy Spirit*. **Strike three!**

Jesus is saying deny the witness of all three persons of the Godhead - and it's **three strikes, you're out.**

A person can reject the Father's testimony of Jesus, and Jesus' personal claims, and there still be hope.

But when you turn a deaf ear to the personal witness of God's Spirit there's no one left to speak. God said in Genesis 6:3, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." That's why if you feel His tug, please respond!

Verse 31, "Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him." Remember His own people thought He'd gone crazy...

"And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at

those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." First, if you are of a Roman Catholic persuasion, and you pray to Mary expecting her to have some clout with Jesus - and intercede for you - then you're going to be terribly disappointed!

Folks sitting next to Jesus tell Him His mom wants to see Him, and Jesus doesn't even give her the time of day. I'm just saying, **hailing Mary is a waste of time.** Sorry, but you'll get further along *hailing a taxi driver.*

The Bible is clear. 1 Timothy 2:5 tells us there is only one mediator between God and man, and that's Jesus. Acts 2 is the last time we see Mary in the Scriptures - and other believers are praying *with* her - not *to* her.

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Blood is thicker than water." Here Jesus is saying, "Spirit is thicker than blood." Family is a powerful bond, but Jesus formed spiritual ties to His followers that eclipsed even family.

I know Christians who've made the nuclear family everything. They're worshipping their family, not Jesus.

It's good to focus on the family, but if Jesus is your Lord He's your top priority - *not your fam!* Jesus refused to let family pressures distract Him from what God had called Him to do. We need the same attitude.

In Mark 4 Jesus tells a series of stories. Jesus was a great story-teller. He called His stories "**parables.**" They were stories from daily life, with a spiritual punchline.

And in Chapter 4 we have some of His most famous parables, **“the Kingdom parables.”** They describe the nature and growth of God’s kingdom on the earth.

In these verses Jesus reveals the reason over a third of His teaching was done with stories or parables.

Verse 1, **“And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables...”** The Greek word **“para”** means **“alongside”** - **“ballo”** means **“to cast.”** **“Paraballo”** or **“parable”** is **“to cast alongside.”**

A parable is **“a picture placed beside a principle.”**

A good teacher looks for windows into a truth. He finds pictures and stories that illustrate his lessons.

Jesus didn’t invent the use of parables - but He perfected their use. No one was better at it than Jesus.

He used the birds to illustrate *God’s providence*, and the lilies to teach *God’s provision*. Jesus spoke of a wayward son and his return home to convey *God’s pardon*. Jesus painted masterpieces of God’s truth with *common colors* and on *everyday canvases*.

Jesus’ stories drew people in. Folks came to Him skeptical, defensive, even hostile - but He’d tell a story.

And like a big-mouth bass spotting a plump juicy-worm, they’d bite and get hooked. As Jesus spun His story it was like spinning a reel... Jesus was an angler of souls who could tug the line in such a way that you took the bait - hook, line, and

sinker. His stories let the truth to sneak up on you before you could push it away. In parables the truth could slip past your defenses.

And this was true of the parable Jesus begins in verse 2, “**And (Jesus) said to them in His teaching: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow..."** Verses 14-20 interpret the parable, for now let's just read it...

“**And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred. And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"**”

Verse 10, “**But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.**”

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, 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.'**” This is a strange idea, but *Jesus used parables to conceal as well as*

to reveal. For some folks the parable helped them see truth, but for others it blinded them from the truth.

Realize, Jesus was such a persuasive presenter of truth if He'd laid it all out in a straight-forward manner His listeners would've had no other choice. He was compelling. He could've talked people into decisions.

But Jesus doesn't just want to convince your mind, without your heart. He wants you to follow Him not just because it makes sense. *He wants you to want to...*

And that's the purpose of a parable. It's truth on a covert operation. It's undercover truth. A parable slips past the mind, and strikes the heart. *In His teachings Jesus taught to curious minds, but in His parables He captured eager hearts.* His parables were powerful.

“And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” Here Jesus provides a explanation for the revolutionary nature of the *mysteries* of His kingdom.

Understand, a biblical *“mystery”* is not a who-done-it, or a search for the smoking gun. The word *“mystery”* can be defined as *a sacred secret*. A mystery is a truth you would never know, unless it was revealed by God.

The reality of God's coming Kingdom was certainly no secret. The OT talks much about God's kingdom... but the way it would enter the world was a *mystery*.

The OT vision of God's coming Kingdom depicted it as occurring in a single day. Messiah would return to earth, route His armies, dispose of its evil leadership, and establish a new world order on planet Earth. At last, God's will would be done on earth as in heaven.

This idea of the kingdom was well known in Jewish circles. Far from a secret, it was the passion and prayer of every Jew. They were waiting on the future.

But the Jews were focused on the climax of God's kingdom - not its beginnings. Jesus teaches that before the kingdom of God *smashes* the enemy - it first *sneak* across enemy lines, and frees the POWs of sin. God's Kingdom comes to the throne of the human heart - long before it comes to sit on the throne of Israel.

In Luke 17, the Jews asked Jesus, "*Where is this Kingdom you talk about?*" Jesus answered, "*The kingdom of God does not come with observation... the kingdom of God is within you.*" In other words, before God's reign comes to Earth politically, and militarily, and visibly - it arrives spiritually in human hearts.

This one statement shattered all previous Jewish notions about God's kingdom. This was a new insight.

If you were a Jew steeped in OT theology you'd consider Mark 4 the most revolutionary chapter in the Bible. The Jews had a correct view of the Kingdom's role at the end of the age, but what they lacked was insight into its initial phases in the affairs of mankind...

Jesus interprets His parable in verse 14, “**The sower sows the word.**” Notice, the seed is God’s Word. The Kingdom of God doesn’t begin with *a war*, but *a Word*.

This was so foreign to the Jews. They believed the Kingdom of God would come forcibly. God will impose His will... But Jesus says the Kingdom can be resisted. It comes as a word that can be accepted or rejected.

It’s like a seed sown. Which means, if we want to build God’s kingdom, don’t build walls, sow seeds!

People think the kingdom consists of human and political structures - and the key to spreading God’s Kingdom is to gain power, raise money, takeover institutions. *But where does a seed do its work?*

Underground. It works below the surface of what’s seen. It spreads as it’s planted in the soil of our hearts.

As a matter of fact, the success of the seed depends on the condition of the soil... I use to think that dirt was dirt - but not any more! When we built our parking lot we had to remove topsoil, and import some fill dirt.

There’s *good dirt* and there’s *bad dirt*.

And this is what Jesus tells us in the next few verses. He refers to four types of soil where the seed of God’s Word might land: *hard ground*, *shallow ground*, *thorny ground*, and *fertile ground*. *What type of soil are you?*

Verse 15, “**And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and**

takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.” The wayside was the trampled path.

Stomping of feet, and hooves, and wagon wheels make for hard, impenetrable soil. Seed can't grow.

And there are people like the wayside. They've got a concrete heart. Their hopes and dreams have been so trampled - and as soon as seed hits the ground birds of skepticism eat it up. The wayside is *the faithless heart*.

Verse 16, “These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time.

Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.” Here's a case where the seed of truth never develops roots.

The Christian life is not always smooth sailing. We can get bounced around. This is why faith has to be rooted. If your faith is dependent on circumstances, or a circle of Christian friends, or a friendly environment - it's doomed. Eventually, trouble will stumble your faith.

For faith to survive it has to grow deep, and tap into an internal reservoir of spiritual strength. You need to be able to draw from the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Years ago, Eternity magazine tracked the people who came forward at a large evangelistic crusade.

In the week of meetings 4,106 decisions were made.

But within 3 months only 3% were still attending church. That means 3,981 people came forward, had an emotional moment, but failed to follow through.

We need to tell people that following Jesus is always worth it - but it's not always easy. Responding to the Gospel is a commitment. Shallow faith doesn't survive.

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”
Materialism chokes out the Word.

Notice the phrase, “**the deceitfulness of riches**”... that's the new car, the house, the boat, the cottage at the lake - they all come with the promise to make us happy. But that promise is a lie. Always remember, *you will never satisfy a spiritual need with a material thing.*

I'm sure you've heard of a “**white elephant gift.**” It's a gag gift with no useful purpose. It's usually given for a laugh. But the real white elephant was no joke...

In the country of Siam a rare white elephant was a revered and sacred animal. Only the king could own them, unless he presented you with one as a gift.

If you were honored by the king with a white elephant, you had to feed and water the animal. To kill it, or sale it, or release it would be an insult to the king.

Over time the king of Siam learned to punish his enemies by giving them white elephants - sometimes several. At first the

recipient felt honored. He thought the king was bestowing a blessing. But over time the blessing became a curse. The elephants ate the recipient out of house and home. He went bankrupt.

Jesus is telling us that material things are like white elephants. At first, you think they're a blessing, but then you watch them suck up the time and effort you could be giving to God. You become a slave to your stuff.

God's Word can be choked out by earthly things.

Verse 20, "But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

There's **hard ground**, **shallow ground**, **thorny ground**... but also **fertile ground**. Receive God's Word with the willingness to be changed by it - and dynamic transformations take place. Power gets unleashed.

The average yield for a farmer is 8 to 1, *eightfold*.

To bear 30-fold is excellent, 60-fold is incredible, but 100-fold is miraculous. This means God promises us a fruitful life beyond our wildest dreams, as long as we supply Him with fertile soul. Be receptive to His Word.

Verse 21, "And He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." The

mysteries of the kingdom were never intended to remain mysteries. God reveals His truth. The only question becomes, *are we receptive?*

Verse 24, "And (Jesus) said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." Here's the truth about spiritual growth, "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer".

If you're receptive to God's Word you'll bear fruit in increasing proportions - 30, 60, 100-fold. Receive one blessing and another follows. But resist the truth, and God shuts off His blessings. It's **the snowball effect**. Get the ball rolling spiritually, and it picks up steam. Resist God's truth, and you'll be your own bottleneck.

Verse 26, "And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how."

The power and life of God's kingdom is encased in the seed. The farmer adds nothing to the seed. He just plants it. Even God brings the rain. The seed grows why the farmer sleeps. The growth comes from God.

The power that one day will crush the wicked kingdoms of this world is today packed in a seed that gets planted in our hearts. The fruit of love, joy, peace, and righteousness is a

supernatural work of the Spirit that depends on our heart's interaction with His Word.

And this should speak to those of us who want to see God's kingdom spread in today's world. Churches employ all kind of gimmicks and strategies, as if the key to growth is *how we toss the seed*. Yet Jesus says in verse 28, "For the earth yields crops by itself..."

A skilled farmer can employ the latest methods in agriculture, but the miracle of life is in the seed and its reception - not the farmer. *This is true of Christianity...*

Spiritual growth is a supernatural phenomenon. It requires a spiritual germination we can't manufacture.

Jesus says, "For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." A farmer doesn't make anything grow. The change agent is the seed. Just sow the seed, and wait on the harvest.

Verse 30, "Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade." Notice, the mustard seed is "*smaller than all the seeds on earth.*"

In Jewish literature, nothing was as tiny as a mustard seed. It was so minuscule it was barely visible..

Jesus is saying God's kingdom starts out small and insignificant. It's barely seen. It flies below the world's radar. Historians and sociologists can miss its impact, or chalk it up to more tangible influences. Christianity is literally, *an underground movement*, in people's hearts.

God's kingdom effects human institutions only as it effects humans in those institutions. When He returns Jesus will build His own institutions. For now, He saves *souls*, rather than *play politics*. We should do likewise.

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

Jesus will further explain the nature of His kingdom, but first He puts on display the power of the King...

Verse 35, “On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Here's the key, Jesus promises, they'll “cross over to the other side” - not *go under*, but *cross over*.

“Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.”

Realize, *the Sea of Galilee* is more a *lake*. Only 14 miles long by 8 miles wide - and it's notorious for its sudden storms. Cold

air from the Lebanese mountains pours in and hits warm air on top of the lake, and presto... *storms*. Waves have been measured 25 feet.

Notice, Jesus and His men are in one boat. Other people are in *little boats*. A whole fleet feels the effects of this windstorm... Realize, just being with Jesus doesn't shelter us from the storms of life. Our Lord Jesus has ridden out many a storm with His disciples.

And what is Jesus doing in the storm? Verse 38, **"But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow."** He's not just asleep. It's a sound sleep. He's snuggling with a pillow.

Realize, just because the storm in your life caught you by surprise, doesn't mean that's how Jesus reacts.

It's not a shock to Him. He doesn't panicked. Jesus isn't pacing, and plotting, and fretting. Jesus is at rest! Recall what He told them near the shore, while the sea was calm - **"Let us cross over to the other side."** **Base your reaction on His promise, not circumstances.**

"And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" How many times have we cried out... ***"Lord, don't you care about me?"***

Just because Jesus refuses to panic doesn't mean He's abandoned us. Our outcome is in the palm of His hand. Jesus is our peace. **The calm is in His palm.**

Then (Jesus) arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm." Jesus "*rebuked*" the wind.

That's what you do to a demon. It could be this storm was a Satanic attack. Spiritual forces wanted to sink Jesus and His men. Who knew that little boat was the only ship in history that was truly unsinkable. *It was the real Titanic!* For God promised, it would "**cross over.**"

Sadly, the only thing sinkable on the water that day was the faith of Jesus' disciples. That's why He scolds them, verse 40, "**Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?**" *Could Jesus say the same to us?*

Why are we so fearful and faithless, when we have Jesus in our boat, and the promise we'll "**cross over?**"

Verse 41, "**And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"**" Is your heart fertile soil for God's Word and promises? Let's cultivate an unsinkable faith.