

Mark 4:1-20
Real Faith Purifies Us
2/20/22

ILL: Once upon a time, a **Crane** waded in a stream looking for snails when a queenly **Swan** majestically landed nearby. The Crane had never seen a Swan before, so he asked, **"What are you?"** And, she answered, **"I'm a swan."** Then, he asked, **"Where did you come from?"** And, she said, **"Heaven."** Then, the Crane asked, **"What's Heaven?"** And, the Swan eagerly began to explain its glory. She described the **New Jerusalem**, the **City** of pure gold w/ walls of jasper and gates of pearl. She described its pure **River of Life**, clear as crystal. But then, the Crane barged in and asked, **"Tell me are there any snails in Heaven?"** And, she said, **"No, I'm afraid not."** And, he sniffed and said, **"Then I don't want to go there. I like snails!"**

RN: Can everyone conceive of Heaven, or does it take a **special revelation** to do so? Can everyone long for Heaven, or does it take a **special aspiration** to do so? Can everyone thank God for Heaven, or does it take a **special forgiveness** to do so?

BI: Jesus says that real Faith in Him unveils the mysteries of God's Kingdom for us, so real Faith **purifies** our spiritual sensitivity. **Please turn in your Bibles to Mark 4:1-20.**

- I. Today, we'll see why Jesus teaches in **Parables**.
- II. And, see how God gives **Insiders** a **Gift**.
- III. Finally, we'll see what makes Parables **understandable**.

Real Faith purifies us. **[PRAY]**

This group of Parables (4:1-34) makes up the 1st of 2 sections that Mark devotes to Jesus' teaching. The other long section is (13:3-37). Mark uses these Parables to illustrate what the KOG is all about. So, what's a Parable?

*A Parable is a little story that compares one thing to another in some striking way to teach a spiritual Truth. Usually, the storyteller compares something from nature or real-life w/ some Truth to make his point. The audience is supposed to **relate** to the Parable, **think** about the Parable, and **apply** the Parable's Truth to their own lives.*

*Now, as Jesus teaches His Parables, His popularity shoots off the charts w/ the Crowds who tag along after Him. So, He stirs up a lot of trouble for Himself, b/c His enemies grow more jealous. But, the jealousy and esteem that His enemies and the Crowd have for Him show that neither group has any idea Who Jesus really is. So, Mark uses today's Parable about farming to teach this **key** Truth—We can only understand Jesus' Parables **if** we have a Faith-filled **relationship** w/ Him.*

(TRN) In (1-9), Jesus teaches in **Parables**.

Mark 4:1–9 (NASB95) ¹ [Jesus] began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. ² And He was teaching them many things in Parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, ³ "Listen [to this!] Behold, the Sower went out to sow; ⁴ as he was sowing, some [Seed] fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ "Other [Seed] fell on the rocky [ground] where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. ⁶ "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ "Other [Seed] fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. ⁸ "Other [Seeds] fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." ⁹ And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

(1-2) Again, Jesus teaches a large crowd by the **Sea of Galilee**. And, He must teach from a boat offshore, b/c there are so many people standing on the beach.

A. But, this may also be Mark's way of pointing to Jesus' deity: **Psalm 29:10 (NASB95)** ¹⁰ **The LORD sat as [King] at the flood; Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.** IOW, Jesus, the God of Creation is enthroned on the sea, teaching His people.

B. Now, it's crucial to see that although Jesus teaches many Truths using Parables, in these verses Mark zeros in on **1** Parable dealing w/ a Farmer, Seed, and soils.

1. And, as such, Jesus will use this farming Parable to teach us—**among other vital Truths**—how His **real** Followers respond to His message.

(3-9) Jesus warns the **Crowd** to pay very close attention. And, He does so at the start and the end of this Parable. IOW, Jesus stresses that everybody had better listen up.

A. Now, Jesus says that a Farmer goes out into a field that hasn't been plowed yet, and he starts throwing Seed all over it.

1. But, this isn't **ordinary** farming, b/c the Farmer throws good Seed into a **wild** field. So, this must be a **different kind** of farming for a **different kind** of purpose.

2. Specifically, the purpose is to show us that despite wild opposition, God will prove Jesus **right** w/ crops of **100s, 1000s, millions, and billions** of those who Trust Him.

B. Now, some Seed falls on a path that gets a lot of foot traffic. It's hardpacked dirt, so the Seed stays on the surface. And, the Seed is easy pickings for the hungry birds.

C. Other Seed falls on to a thin layer of soil that covers a limestone shelf close to the surface. Now, this Seed finds its way into the soil and shoots up.

1. But, there's no place for the roots to take hold and drink moisture. So, when the sun swelters, it burns up the dehydrated little plants. And, *pffft!* they're gone.

D. Other Seed falls into the weeds. And, these wild plants grow up w/ the shoots from the Seeds. But, the weeds overpower the shoots, so they never produce a crop.

E. But, other Seed falls into open, fertile, moist soil, and take root. And, they produce huge crops **30** times, **60** times, even up to **100** times the amount of the sown Seed.

1. And, Jesus says to His Followers, the **12**, and the Crowd, **"I'm warning you. You better pay attention!"** And, everybody goes, **"Huh? What does He mean?"**

2. But, since this is a story about an unusual Farmer and his unusual farm, Jesus is trying to get at an **unusual** Truth about real Faith across to His listeners and to us. So, it's small wonder that the **faithless** Crowd and His **immature** Followers don't get it.

F. QTT: *CONTEXT: Jesus has just condemned Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, cities who should have trusted in Him. And, now He thanks God for those who have trusted in Him. Matthew 11:25-27 (NASB95) ²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from [the] wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶ "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. ²⁷ "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal [Him].*

G. APPL: The fallen mind cannot grasp God or the Truths of His Kingdom. But, God **begins to reveal** the mysterious Truths of His Kingdom to us when we express humble Faith in Jesus.

We can **begin to grasp** God's mysteries, as Real Faith purifies us.

(TRN) In (10-12), Jesus says that God gives **Insiders** a **Gift**.

Mark 4:10-12 (NASB95) ¹⁰ As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, [began] asking Him [about] the parables. ¹¹ And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, ¹² so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

(10) Later, when they're by themselves, Jesus' **Followers** and the **12 Apostles** start asking a ton of questions about the meaning of His Parables, especially the **1** about the Farmer, the Seed, and the soils.

A. Now to really get Jesus' answer, we must see what's going on around Him: When He teaches the Crowd—**for the most part**—they're hate-filled and doubting.

1. IOW, Jesus is teaching a lot of **Outsiders**, and He knows it. But, there's also a little band of **Insiders** in the Crowd, and He knows this, too.

B. And, they're starting to **Trust** Him and get what God is doing through Him. And, He knows that, too. So, their Faith is opening up their hearts to God's Truth.

1. IOW, Jesus uses this Parable to spotlight this **key** Truth—we can only understand Jesus' Parables **if** we have a Faith-filled relationship w/ Him. Then, God's Grace begins to **purify** our hearts and make Jesus' Parables clearer to us.

(11-12) So, Jesus says to His little band of Insiders, **"God has given you a Gift. He's explained His Kingdom to you and only you! Outsiders only get this from Him—Mysterious stories that they can't understand. And, unless they Trust in Me, God will abandon them deaf, blind, and damned."**

A. IOW, as Jesus gives His message to the believing Insiders and the doubting Outsiders, each group characteristically **accepts or rejects** the Grace of God.

1. As such, Insiders are **hearing** that Jesus is sowing God's Gospel Seeds into the hearts of men, women, and children. But, Outsiders are as deaf as bricks to all this.

2. Plus, Insiders are **seeing** that Jesus is sowing God's Gospel Seeds, using God's Kingdom authority. But, Outsiders are as blind as a Dead Sea bats to all this, too.

B. In fact, since Outsiders have rejected God's Grace, the Gospel, and Jesus, all they want to do is either **hate** Jesus or **take advantage** of Him.

1. As such, they're just like their ancestors, whom God cursed through **Isaiah** the prophet: **Isaiah 6:9–10 (NASB95)** ⁹ **[God] said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'** ¹⁰ **"Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."**

2. IOW, **if** a person chooses to reject the Light of God's Truth over and over again, there comes a point when God will **condemn** him to that state of spiritual death.

C. God is ready, willing, and able to give anyone the Grace to Trust in His Son, but if anyone chooses to reject that Grace once-for-all, God will damn him forever.

1. So, God gives the Outsiders Parables to spotlight their lack of **spiritual sensitivity**, and, maybe, get them to start questioning their disconnect w/ Him.

D. ILL: As **2** famous men faced death, they left **key** thoughts. The famous **Indian** leader, **Gandhi**, said, **"My days are numbered. For the 1st time in 50 years, I find myself in the mire of despair. All about me is darkness."** But, **Ira Sankey**, beloved blind hymn writer of the late **1800s** said, **"I have only a little longer of earthly darkness, and then the sunshine of the Father's throne. God is love. Good night, good night!"**

E. APPL: Gandhi led a **nation** while Sankey led **hymns**. But Sankey's **blind** eyes could **see** God when it mattered the mostⁱⁱ. So, we will begin to understand God's eternal plan when we Trust in Jesus, His Divine Son."

We can **begin to understand** God's eternal plan, as Real Faith purifies us.

(TRN) In (13-20), Jesus reveals that what makes Parables **understandable**.

Mark 4:13–20 (NASB95) ¹³ ***And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the Parables?"*** ¹⁴ ***"The Sower sows the word."*** ¹⁵ ***"These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them."*** ¹⁶ ***"In a similar way these are the ones on whom Seed was sown on the rocky [places], who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy;"*** ¹⁷ ***and they have no [firm] root in themselves, but are [only] temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away."*** ¹⁸ ***"And others are the ones on whom Seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,"*** ¹⁹ ***but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."*** ²⁰ ***"And those are the ones on whom Seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."***

(13) Jesus says to His **Followers** and the **12**, **"If getting My Parables isn't 2nd nature to you, you won't get the Truth in them, even if it's staring you in the face."**

A. IOW, when we Trust in Jesus, God puts His **moral** nature inside of us, so we should be able to see and hear what He's doing around us, b/c He's purifying our hearts.

B. **If** God's life is the source of our thinking feeling and acting, **then** we're going to understand how **He's** thinking, feeling, and acting. IOW, **if** Grace and Faith are purifying us, **then** we'll grow in spiritual **empathy** w/ God.

(14-20) Jesus begins to explain His Parable: The **Farmer** scatters the Seed on all kinds of ground. IOW, Jesus is teaching Gospel Truths to all kinds of **Listeners**.

A. Now to some, the Farmer's scattering Seed on wild ground may seem like a stupid thing to do. But, the point is—**Jesus is giving everyone the Gospel**.

1. IOW, to some **self-righteous** people, **Evangelism** is a waste of time, b/c really bad people don't deserve a shot at God's Grace and Mercy.

B. But, to Jesus, Evangelism puts flesh and blood on God's Grace and Mercy, b/c God is going after the Sinner; the Sinner isn't going after God.

1. IOW, Jesus knows the wild, rowdy, fierce, outrageous, stormy opposition that He's up against. But, He trusts in God and what God sent Him to do will **override** it.

C. So, He says that some hear the Gospel and respond w/ world-weary indifference. IOW, teaching them is like trying to plant Seeds in granite.

1. Every Seed lies on top—**lifeless**. So, Satan comes in, like a flock of crows and uses doubts and arrogance to eat up what little response to the Gospel they might've had.

D. Others hear these Gospel Truths, and they jump in w/ both feet, just like the Seed growing in a shallow layer of dirt.

1. But, they fizzle out real fast, b/c they've only made an **emotional** commitment to Jesus Christ.

2. And, just like plants w/ immature root systems that can't keep plugged into life-giving water, there's nothing vital to keep these people plugged into life-giving Jesus.

3. They feel that Jesus is going to be their Heavenly vending machine and holy rabbit's foot, all rolled into one, so there's only going to be smooth sailing from now on.

4. So, when tough times and tougher people challenge their Faith like the searing sun, they get angry w/ God, and they bail out on Him and crash-land into their resentment.

E. Others, hear the Gospel, but the thorny issues of life deflate God's message for them. They get caught up in the rat race and start fighting for survival and stuff!

1. IOW, they start looking at jobs and mutual funds as their security blankets. **READ THAT** they start making little gods for themselves to suit their grasping lifestyles.

2. So, their little gods start replacing the real God and His Gospel. And, they snuff out the light of Jesus' character w/ darkness of their own greedy, insecure, coveting characters, just like weeds snuff out a budding harvest of wheat.

F. But then, others hear the Gospel, and they welcome Jesus into their lives—**all their lives**. They want Jesus to be the **LORD** over their doubts and over their pride, s/t they can live lives of humble Faith.

1. They want Jesus to help them stare down tough times and tougher people who challenge their Faith, b/c they want to worship God in the **confidence** of Grace.

2. They want Jesus to be their only source of security, b/c **He is**. And, they want the only real God to **replace** all the little gods that they've made for themselves.

3. And, they want Jesus' character to choke out their own greedy, insecure characters, s/t they can live out fresh, lush, fertile spiritual lives before God now and forever.

G. And, as a result, these purified Followers of Jesus Christ bear a spiritual crop of Christ's character **30, 60, 100** times what we'd expect. And then, Christ, Himself, uses **them** to scatter the Seed of Gospel Truth over other wild fields.

H. ILL: A man was so **sick** for most of his life that he hardly ever left his home. When he was fully grown, he was **5'** tall and most people thought that he was **ugly**. In fact, the only chance he ever had to get married **fell apart** when the woman he had fallen in love w/ through correspondence finally met him face to face. Few of us could possibly imagine the **loneliness** that swept over this man when he thought about his life. But, in his **misery**, he wrote almost **700** hymns to the glory and faithfulness of God, including these encouraging words to lonely people: "**O God, our help in ages past/ Our hope for years to come/ Be Thou our Guide while life shall last/ And our eternal home.**" This man was **Isaac Watts**, the father of **English** hymn tradition ⁱⁱⁱ."

I. APPL: As Faith in Christ purifies us, we bear a crop of His virtues far beyond any measure we can imagine. And, Jesus uses us to scatter His Truth over other wild fields.

We can bear Christ's virtues **abundantly, as Real Faith purifies us.**

i "Snails," INFOsearch Pro ver 4.3P.

ii Pulpit Helps, May 1992, 21.

iii People of Destiny Magazine, Jul/Aug 1995, 12-13.

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