



# **JESUS: The Servant of God**

A verse-by-verse study of the Gospel of Mark

## **The Gospel and the Word**

**Mark 4:1-20**

**Message #10**

**Sermon given on December 28, 2025**



**Sunday Morning Service**

**Pastor Rick Lancaster**

# The Gospel and the Word

*Mark 4:1-20*

## Opening Comments

- Open your Bibles to **Mark 4**
- Today, we continue a series through the gospel of Mark – **JESUS: The Servant of God**
- Let's open this time in our service with a word of prayer. - **Pray**

## Teaching

- **The Gospel and the Word**
- The account we are going to look at this morning is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels.
- It answers a question many believers ask, 'Why is it that some people hear the gospel and are saved and others hear the same gospel and are not saved?'
- The gospel message is simple – mankind has a problem with sin and there is nothing they can do about it.
- Because of sin, they cannot go to heaven and are destined to eternity separated from God in hell.
- God doesn't want that for us, so He sent His Son Jesus to save us.
- He saved us by dying on the cross in our place.
- If we repent of the sins Jesus died for, and believe in Him, we are saved.
- The gospel is so simple that even a child can understand it and be saved.
- Jesus is going to try to help us understand why many are not saved.
- **Mark 4:1-2**
- **Albert Barnes** defines a parable as:  
“...a similitude taken from a natural object to illustrate a spiritual or moral subject.”
- Parables are tools for illustrating a point or subject.
- It is the message of the parable that matters.
- A parable is designed to make a single point.
- We must be careful not to look for anything but that one point.
- **Mark 4:3-8**

- Everyone around Jesus was familiar with the process of planting seeds.
- Man with a bag of seeds walking casting them by hand.
- Every plot of land the farmer cultivated would have these four areas.
- The wayside is the pathway around the field where people travelled and made the ground very hard.
- The ground was too hard for seeds to take root.
- Instead, the birds would come and eat them.
- The stony ground is where all the stones in the field have been cast to get them out of the main field.
- Seeds that land there may take root, but the stones prevent them from flourishing.
- The thorns are weeds – they will grow anywhere they are not rooted out.
- They seem to thrive better than what the farmer wants to grow.
- They will choke out the good seeds.
- The good ground is where the hard ground has been plowed and broken up, the stones have been removed, and the weeds have been pulled up.
- Everyone could understand the illustration, but what was the spiritual truth the illustration pointed to.
- Before He explains it, He tells us who the parable is meant for.
- **Mark 4:9**
- Jesus is communicating a spiritual truth that cannot be heard with natural ears. **1 Corinthians 2:14**
- <sup>14</sup> **But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.**
- Spiritual ears to hear the spiritual things of God are a manifestation of the grace of God through the Holy Spirit.
- To understand the spiritual things of God, the Spirit of God must give you spiritual ears to hear.
- We'll talk more about that later.
- Jesus is asked about why He teaches in parables.
- **Mark 4:10-12**
- Turn to **John 3**.

- God will not force His will upon us.
  - He created us in His image including with the ability to choose to love Him or not.
  - God will honor our choices.
  - **John 3:16-19**
  - God wants everyone to be saved, but they must choose to believe to be saved. **2 Peter 3:9**
- <sup>9</sup> **The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**
- The key to understanding spiritual things is believing.
  - Believing must precede understanding.
  - Turn back to **Mark 4.**
  - When Jesus says, ‘to you it has been given’, He is referring to those who responded to the Holy Spirit and have chosen to believe.
  - The truths of the kingdom of God are revealed to those who believe and are hidden from those who refuse to believe.
  - That is an expression of God’s mercy upon unbelievers.
  - Believers are forgiven for all their sins.
  - Unbelievers will pay a terrible price for each and every sin they have committed in this life.
  - The greatest sin of all is not believing in God’s Son, Christ Jesus.
  - Every time truth is revealed to an unbeliever, they are given a choice of believing or not believing.
  - If they reject that truth, they have committed another sin God needs to punish them for.
  - If they were to understand that truth and reject it, that punishment would be more severe.
  - In His mercy, God keeps them from understanding, so that He can limit their punishment.
  - Believing must come before understanding.
  - The Holy Spirit will make them able to believe, but they must choose to believe.
  - Even those who believe may struggle with understanding the spiritual things of God.
  - **Mark 4:13-14**

- Seeds are remarkable things.
- Each seed has abundant life contained within it.
- A single acorn can grow into a massive oak tree that can live up to three hundred, some even one thousand years.
- Each oak tree that started as an acorn can produce ten million acorns in the lifetime of the tree.
- It is an ideal illustration of the power of the gospel.
- The seed the sower sows is the Word of God.
- In Matthew 13:37 Jesus identifies Himself as the sower.
- Just like a plant seed, the Word of God is alive, it has everything in it to bring life – eternal life, and to reproduce life in those who take it in.

### **Hebrews 4:12**

<sup>12</sup>**For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

- The sower in this account is Jesus – though it also includes anyone who shares God’s Word with anyone else.
- In all four places the seed lands we must keep in mind it was all the same seed – the problem is not with the seed or with the sower – the problem is the condition of the soil the seed lands in.
- Jesus begins to explain what each part of the parable means.
- In so doing, He is describing four types of hearts and how they respond to the gospel.
- **Mark 4:15**
- This is the **Hard Heart**.
- This person hears the good news, the gospel, the Word of God, but their heart is so hard that there is no chance for it to take root.
- Someone who believes there is no such thing as absolute truth, God doesn’t exist, man wrote the Bible, or evil proves God doesn’t exist.
- Or someone who hears the gospel and thinks it is too simple – believe and be saved.
- The Devil comes and takes that truth out of their minds so that it doesn’t have an opportunity to break through their hard heart.
- The next one is the **Shallow Heart**.
- **Mark 4:16-17**
- This person responds to the gospel message emotionally.

- These ones are often the ones who accept the message of hope, peace, joy, and blessings, but without true repentance.
- Notice what is the first word of Jesus' first sermon. **Matthew 4:17**  
<sup>17</sup>**From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**
- First word = repent.
- Without repentance, there is no forgiveness – without forgiveness, there is no salvation.
- As soon as there is trouble 'for the word's sake', those with the shallow heart will wilt.
- You will hear these ones say something like, I tried being a Christian, but it didn't work.
- Problem is – they never were Christian.
- Most anti-Christians come from this group.
- Next, we have the **Crowded Heart**.
- **Mark 4:18-19**
- This is someone who has made a confession of faith, but maintains a firm grasp on the things of their life.
- In fact, the things of this world have a higher place in their life than does God. **Matthew 6:24**  
<sup>24</sup>**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.**
- This person finds it hard to make time for the things of God.
- The early church referred to Sunday as the Lord's Day.
- It was the day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead.
- And they chose to set it aside to gather to worship Him.
- The crowded heart is so busy with the things of the world that they do not have time to gather with God's people to worship Him who gave them their things. **Matthew 6:33**  
<sup>33</sup>**Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**
- Because they are focused on the things of this world, they produce no spiritual fruit.
- The fourth type of heart – **Fruitful Heart**.
- **Mark 4:20**

- When the Word of God lands in a heart prepared for and by the Word of God, life is produced – spiritual fruit comes forth in great abundance. **Galatians 5:22-23**

**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**

- Only this last heart is able to produce spiritual fruit – the other three did not – even though the same seed landed in all four.
- The hard heart is obviously not saved – the shallow heart and the crowded heart give the impression of salvation, but it is not real.
- When the gospel is preached or the Word of God is taught, the same words are heard by everyone, but it is the heart that determines how they will respond to it.
- If someone does not respond to the gospel, it is because their heart is in one of these three states: hard, shallow, or crowded.
- You don't have to figure out which one it is, just ask God to change their heart.
- For us, we need to examine the state of our own hearts regularly.
- You might be saved, but your heart is not perfect – no one's is.
- There may be areas of hardness, where you are unwilling to hear what God has to say on a topic.
- There may be areas of shallowness because you are allowing some sin to exist in your life.
- Or, there might be places in your heart that are crowded with the cares of this life.
- Pray, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal those things.
- And when He reveals them to you repent and ask Him to help you change.
- Verse 20 says the heart that is good ground for bearing spiritual fruit 'hears the word, accepts it, and bears fruit.'
- The Word of God is life to a Christ-follower.
- As we move into 2026, let's recommit ourselves to the Word of God.
- Let God's Word empowered by God's Spirit help us to bear much fruit in the name of God's Son Christ Jesus.
- **Pray – Last Song**