

## Parables of Two Seeds

Parables are simple stories from everyday life that shed light on profound spiritual truths. Parables help make abstract teachings concrete and meaningful – moving from the known to the unknown. Parables left men and women wondering and thinking for themselves rather than dismissing and forgetting truths that were beyond their understanding.

The parable of the secretly growing seed is found only in the Gospel of Mark. Even though it shares the same theme with the parable of the sower, farming, its emphasis is difference. The emphasis in the parable of the sower was on preparation of the soil but the emphasis in this parable is the mysterious power of the seed itself to produce a crop.

The parable is about the Kingdom of God, and more particularly about how the Kingdom grows. All the farmer can do is plant the seed on suitable ground. He cannot make the seed grow. In fact, he is at a loss to even understand how it grows. But it does grow and “all by itself produces grain.” The point of the parable is as follows: As seedtime is followed in due time by the harvest, so will the present hiddenness of the Kingdom of God be replaced by its glorious revealing.

Joachim Jeremias in his book on the parables of Jesus suggests,

The fruit is the result of the seed; the end is implicit in the beginning. The infinitely great is already active in the infinitely small. In the present, and indeed in secret, the event is already in motion.

William Barclay writes that this short parable unique to Mark’s gospel is filled with unmistakable truths. These truths include:

1. The helplessness of man. Farmers do not and cannot make the seed grow they place in the ground. In the last analysis, he does not even understand its growth. In the same way, when it comes to God’s Kingdom, we are not in control, God is! We can for sure frustrate the growth or even hinder it, but we do not control it. The parable tells us about the nature of the Kingdom: it is imperceptible; and it is constant. Even when we cannot see the growth, God is always at work in believer’s lives. There is nothing spasmodic about his work. He goes on quietly and unceasingly unfolding his plan for our lives. And the growth is inevitable. In spite of man’s rebellion and disobedience, God’s work continues. In the end nothing can stop God’s purposes.
2. Finally the parable teaches us that there will ultimately be a consummation. There is a day when the harvest will come and when it does come two things will happen. The good fruit will be gathered in and the weeds and chaff will be burned. Harvest and judgment go hand in hand. Because the harvest will take place there are three things that we need to consider.
  - Patience. We are creatures of the moment and often give little thought to the future. But our lives quickly pass and we are moving inexorably toward the harvest. When that day comes what will we be found to be?
  - Hope. There is much despair in our world and some have given up on any progress being made against evil. But we forget, God has always been at

work and is still. We may at times feel remorse or regret because of missed opportunities in life or past failures, but God has not stopped his work in us and around us.

- Prepare. Since harvest is coming, those who are faithful will be prepared. It is too late to prepare when the harvest is here. We should literally prepare everyday to meet our God.

What a great parable and to think, it is one of the smallest of all!

Jesus continues the theme of seeds by reminding them of the incredible properties of the mustard seed. He loves to use mustard seeds as an object lesson because they are so tiny. He will, in another place describe the power of a tiny amount of faith by comparing it to a mustard seed. The mustard seed did in fact grow into something like a tree. It became a very large shrub. A traveler in Palestine wrote about seeing a mustard plant that was taller than a man on a horse. Birds were very fond of the little black seeds of the shrub and loved to sit on its branches. In fact, it was not uncommon to see a cloud of birds over a mustard plant.

The main point of the parable is that the Kingdom of God is like what happens to the mustard seed. It has insignificant and weak beginnings, but a day will come when it will be great and powerful. So, we should not be discouraged over small beginnings. It may seem that nothing great can come from our efforts, but over time incredible things happen. God is able to make from small beginnings glorious endings.

After recording the parable of the mustard seed, Mark mentions that Jesus used parables extensively to impart important spiritual messages to the people. In fact Mark says that Jesus did not say anything without using parables. There are probably many reasons why.

One very important reason was the effectiveness of parables in making people think and helping people remember what he said. It is much easier to remember a story than it is to remember dry theological jargon. One can only imagine the discussions that must have taken place in the marketplace between people who heard his stories and who were trying to understand the underlying meaning. That's what makes parables so effective. The people are left trying to understand the point!

Another reason for the use of parables was to hold off the process that would lead him to his death later on. In the early days of his ministry, Jesus' parables were not overtly confrontative. They were personally very challenging, but they would not be as confrontative as future parables would be when the meaning became perfectly clear to the hearers. By the time of this death he would have been able to do much more teaching by means of parables than he could have accomplished by other, more direct means.

Whatever the reasons, parables were effective and challenging for the hearer to understand. In fact, Jesus took his disciples aside after teaching in parables and spent time explaining the parables to them. They then would be able to later apply what Jesus had been teaching to the people around them. No wonder Jesus was called the Master Teacher.

## Peace, Be Still!

The Sea of Galilee was notorious for its storms. They came literally out of the blue with shattering and terrifying suddenness. A writer described them like this:

It is not unusual to see terrible squalls hurl themselves, even when the sky is perfectly clear, upon these waters which are ordinarily so calm. The numerous ravines which to the Northeast and East debauch upon the upper part of the lake operate as so many dangerous defiles in which the winds from the heights of Hauran, the plateaus of Trachonitis, and the summit of Mount Hermon are caught and compressed in such a way that, rushing with tremendous force through a narrow space and then being suddenly released, they agitate the little Lake of Galilee in the most frightful fashion.

The voyager on this Sea was always liable to encounter a storm like this. Jesus is placed in a position of honor in the boat, on a cushion, while the rest of the men guided the boat. While Jesus slept, a horrible storm suddenly came up and the waves were crashing over the decks. The boat was nearly swamped and the men were becoming frantic. Desperately they woke Jesus and asked him if he cared that they were about to drown. Jesus got up and rebuked the winds and the waves and incredible calm came over the sea. The disciples were astounded! And Jesus asked a very provocative question, "Why were you afraid?" The first response to a question like this might be that it would be normal to be afraid given the circumstances. How could any normal person sleep during such a terrible storm! Jesus followed with an equally provocative question; "Do you still have no faith?" What a question! It would seem that after all they had experienced with Christ, up to this point, that faith would be an easier matter, but when faced with incredible, undeniable challenges sometimes faith is set aside. They did not realize that Jesus was in the boat with them, just as we fail to sometimes realize the presence of Christ in the midst of our struggles.

## A Demon Possessed Man

Jesus had demonstrated his power over the forces of nature by stilling the winds and the waves. Now he demonstrates his power over the forces of evil by casting out demons from a possessed man. The two stories go together because they prove that Jesus is totally divine.

This is a vivid and somewhat eerie story. It seems that it happened the same day as Jesus calmed the Sea. The event happens on the other side of the Sea, which in this

case means the eastern side. This was a largely Gentile area that is called Decapolis or the region of the Geresenes, so the presence of a large herd of pigs would not have been abnormal.

As Jesus stepped from the boat, the demon-possessed man, who ran to him from a distance, immediately confronted him. It was probably very dark when they encountered this man since it was already evening when he left the other shore.

The possessed man lived in the tombs. Often in Palestine people were buried in natural caves or in tombs cut from limestone ledges. These would provide a good shelter for anyone who would want to live in them. It was a natural place for the demon-possessed man to live because it was a popular belief that tombs were the favorite haunts of demons. This wretched man had probably been driven from ordinary society to the graveyard. Efforts had been made to control him but to no avail. Although he had been bound hand and foot, he had broken the chains and no one to this point had been strong enough to subdue him. One prominent psychologist commented that verses 3-5 “give a vivid picture of the manic stage of a manic depressive psychosis.” He even practiced self-mutilation, cutting himself with sharp stones.

The demon-possessed man fell on his knees in front of Jesus. The demon recognized a force much more powerful than he. He fell in respect, not worship. The demon addressed Jesus with a loud voice. His cry, “What do you want with me?” was a way of saying, “What have we in common?” The demon recognized that he was in the presence of one who threatened his very existence. He used Jesus personal name in addressing him and begged him not to torture him. The demon uses the title, “Son of the Most High God” to describe Jesus. This shows that the demon recognized Jesus’ deity.

Jesus had ordered the demon to come out of the man, but when the demon begged Jesus not to torment him, Jesus asked his name. The demoniac replied, “Legion.” The significance of this name is not clear. Perhaps he had an unfortunate experience with a Roman legion and this had caused his madness. Or perhaps he felt that he was possessed by thousands of demons (a legion consisted of over 6000 men). Perhaps the demons combined to form one powerful aggregate force thus the name Legion. So fully was the man possessed that he was unable to act apart from the demons that possessed him.

The demon once again begged Jesus not to send him out of the area and noticing a large herd of pigs (remember this is gentile country), he asked Jesus if he could be sent among the pigs. Jesus gave his permission and the demons entered the pigs, causing a stampede down a steep bank and into the lake that caused the entire herd of pigs to drown.

People from all over came to see what had happened. When they arrived, not only did they see that the entire herd had drowned, they also noticed that the demoniac was sitting there, dressed and in his right mind. What an incredible miracle! The man they had known as a crazy person, now sit in front of them completely sane! Instead of rejoicing over the marvelous deliverance of the man, the people were afraid. Their fear was no doubt caused by the presence of one with power to perform such a miracle. The people asked Jesus to leave their region. In fact, they pleaded with him to do so. They were afraid. They recognized that a mighty force was at work within him, but they could not understand it or control it. If this power was able to destroy an entire herd of pigs, might not this power strike again with even more severe consequences? They asked Jesus to leave and he did. He never stays where he is not wanted. Jesus had

come to the East side of the Sea by boat and now he was preparing to return the same way. The former demoniac wanted to go with him – a perfectly normal reaction. He was eager for Jesus’ company, for no one had ever shown him such love and compassion. But Jesus would not allow it. Instead, he hands the man the more difficult task of returning home to his family to bear witness of what Jesus had done for him. The man obeyed without argument and began to bear testimony of what Jesus had done for him. The Decapolis was a league of ten free Greek cities located for the most part east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. These cities heard the testimony of the former demoniac and responded with amazement.

## A Sick Daughter and Desperate Lady

Again the scene shifts. Jesus is now on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. On the east side he was asked to leave, but here large crowds anxiously greet him. We don’t know the exact place that Jesus and his disciples landed, but it was probably near Capernaum. Jesus was probably busy teaching when he was interrupted the by plea of one of the Synagogue rulers. Synagogue rulers had a very important administrative position. They looked after the building in which the congregation met and they were in charge of the worship. This ruler was desperate. Jairus fell at Jesus’ feet and pleaded with him. His daughter was dying and he asked Jesus to come with him and put his hands on her so that she would live. Jairus had apparently heard about how Jesus had healed many people in the vicinity and believed that he could heal his child.

Mark records no oral response of Jesus. He simply reports that Jesus went with him. A large crowd, probably just curiosity seekers followed along after them, probably wanting to be amazed by another healing.

Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house and a woman who had been subject to hemorrhages for 12 years saw him coming. Mark goes into vivid detail describing how the woman had been under the care of a number of doctors and had spent all of her money but to no avail. In fact she continued to get worse instead of better. The precise ailment the woman endured is not stated, but most medical doctors who read this passage conclude that it must have been some kind of uterine disease that caused the problem for it to have persisted for 12 years.

The woman had obviously heard reports about Jesus and she desperately tried to find some way to contact him. The superstition of the day held that even the clothes of a Rabbi or Holy person carried great healing power. Mark tells us that the woman thought to herself that if she could only touch his clothes she could be healed. She reached out and touched his garment and immediately the bleeding stopped. Jesus realized that someone had touched his clothes and turned around in the crowd to see who it was. His disciples were incredulous. Couldn’t he see the crowd pressing around him? How could he single out one person who touched his clothing? What the disciples didn’t know was that Jesus felt the power leave his body to heal the woman.

Jesus’ purpose in finding the woman was not to rebuke her but to commend her for her faith. The woman responded to Jesus’ searching eyes. She knew what had happened to her; and, though trembling with fear she came forward, prostrated herself before Jesus and told him the whole truth. This must have taken incredible courage, especially when you realize that the woman was ceremonially unclean.

Jesus addresses her with an endearing name, “daughter.” This is the only place we have recorded that Jesus used this word. He made it clear to her that her faith in God that had made her whole. The word used for healing in this passage refers to both spiritual and physical healing. In Mark’s Gospel the two concepts are often used together.

Jesus told the woman to “Go in peace.” The word “peace” means not just freedom from inner anxiety, but wholeness and completeness of life. Jesus had given her life back to her. Her existence no longer revolved around doctors, medications, weakness, uncleanness and pain. She was finally free to really live, both physically and spiritually. Jesus’ last statement to the woman was “be freed from your suffering.” Jesus actively participated in making this woman whole. While Jesus was speaking to the woman some men brought Jairus the news of the death of his daughter. Since death is final, they advised him not to bother Jesus any longer. Nothing could be done, or could it. One can only imagine the scene. This father was so desperate to find some help for his child. How must he have felt to see Jesus perform yet another healing, and then to hear the words, “your daughter is dead.”

Jesus ignored the messengers and told Jairus, “Don’t be afraid, only believe.” These words of encouragement must have been all that the grieving father needed. He doesn’t try to dissuade Jesus from going to his daughter’s bedside. Jairus made his way to his daughter with Jesus and a few select disciples.

When they arrived at the house there was no small commotion going on. The professional mourners were already at work. Van der Loos in his book, “The Miracles of Jesus” describes what the scene might have been. “The lamentations consisted of choral song or antiphony, accompanied by loud wailing and hand-clapping.” Since Jairus was an important official in the Jewish community, the number of the mourners was probably large. Along with the family members who had gathered, there must have been a great uproar.

When Jesus entered the house he asked them why they were making such a commotion since the child was not dead but only asleep. The crowd laughed in derision. What a terrible thing to say at a wake. The child is dead; everyone can see that. The laughter is a clear indication of the superficiality of the grief of the professional mourners.

Jesus did not want the noisy crowd present when he performed this incredible miracle, so he put them out of the house. Only Jesus’ most intimate disciples and the mother and father entered the room where the child lay dead. Jesus stood by the bed of the child and spoke Aramaic words to her. Aramaic was the language of the Jews; it is a form of Hebrew. The actual words he spoke were *Talitha Koum*, which Mark conveniently translates for us, “Little girl, I say to you, get up.” The young, twelve-year-old girl responded immediately to Jesus’ words. She not only stood up; she began to walk around. The five witnesses to this healing were completely amazed. Who ever heard of someone being raised from the dead? After the healing Jesus gave two orders to the witnesses. First, they were not to reveal the facts about the miracle. Jesus wanted the miracle to be as private as possible. He did not want to sensationalize this event, possibly to protect the girl that he had just raised from the dead.

His second order was to give the girl something to eat. What a delight this must have been for parents who had already resigned themselves to the loss of a child. Jesus is

not just concerned about spiritual needs. He is also concerned about the ordinary every day needs of life.

Earle Ellis, in his amazing commentary on the Gospel of Luke, sums up the theological meaning of this miracle. “In the presence of Christ, death becomes a ‘sleeping.’ ‘Finis’ is transformed into prelude. Until the Second Coming its sting remains, but its ultimate threat is broken. If we believe, we need not live in dread: ‘fear not!’”

## **Week 7:**

### ***Day 1 / Beyond our Control!***

**Read: Mark 4:26-29**

1. What part do Christians play in the growth of the Kingdom of God?
2. Read the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22. Which of the fruits are most important when dealing with the growth of the Kingdom?
3. Read this parable and write down what you think is the main point.
4. Why was this parable valuable for the people to hear?

### ***Day 2 / There's a Great Day Coming!***

**Read: II Pet. 3:11-18**

1. In what ways can you see God's continual work in your life?
2. Read the passage from II Peter and write down all the things that should be happening in your life because the harvest is coming.
3. Of the three things we need to consider because harvest is coming, with which do you need the most help?

### ***Day 3 / The Power in Small Beginnings***

**Read: Mark 4:30-34**

1. Read the parable of the mustard seed. What do you think is the main point?
2. Do you think the birds that roost in the branches of the mustard bush have any significance? Explain.
3. Why would this parable be important for the disciples to hear and understand?
4. Think of some reasons why parables are so important to Jesus' teaching? Why did the people have such a tough time understanding what the parables meant?

## ***Day 4 / Jesus is in the Same Boat!***

**Read: Mark 4:35-41**

1. How do you think the disciples felt about Jesus when he remained sleeping in the middle of the storm?
2. Did they believe that he could do anything about the storm? If they didn't, why did they awaken him?
3. What lessons did they learn about Jesus during this event?

***Read verses 40 and 41. What is the difference between being afraid and being terrified? Why were the disciples terrified after the calming of the Sea?***

## ***Day 5 / Possessed!***

**Read: Mark 5: 1-10**

1. What do we learn about demons from the reaction of the demon to Jesus here?
2. Do you think there is a connection between mental illness and demon possession? If you do, what is the connection?
3. Why did people believe that evil spirits lived in graveyards?
4. Why do you think the demon possessed man fell at the feet of Jesus?
5. How did the demon know Jesus' personal name?

## **Week 8:**

### ***Day 1 / Pigs Out!***

**Read: Mark 5:11-20**

1. What kind of feeling would the word "legion" provoke in the minds of people living under Roman oppression?
2. Why did the demons beg to be sent to live among the pigs? Where could Jesus have sent them so that they would be in torment?
3. Why were the people of that region afraid to have Jesus among them?

## ***Day 2 / Jesus Cares!***

### **Read: Mark 5:21-24**

1. Would it be unusual for a synagogue ruler to fall at the feet of a person like Jesus? Why?
2. Why did Jesus get up immediately and go with the man?
3. Why do you think the crowd on the west side of the Sea of Galilee was glad to see Jesus when the crowd on the east side had asked him to leave?
4. Was it appropriate for the woman with the hemorrhage to be in the crowd with the people who were following Jesus? Why? Why not?

## ***Day 3 / He Made Me Whole!***

### **Read: Mark 5:24-34**

1. Read the accounts of the woman's healing in the other gospels (Matt. 9, Luke 8). What additional details about this event do you learn?
2. Why did the woman try to touch Jesus' clothes instead of just asking him for healing? What did she believe about his clothes?
3. Why did Jesus use the word "daughter" when referring to the woman? Does it say something about her age or something about Jesus or something else?
4. Why do you think Jesus made the woman reveal herself?

## ***Day 4 / She Was Dead, But Now She Lives!***

### **Read: Mark 5:35-43**

1. What impressions do you have about Jairus?
2. Why were professional mourners employed when a person died?
3. List ways that Jairus displayed his faith in the event.
4. Why do you think Jesus made the mourners wait outside?
5. Why did Mark record the actual Aramaic words of Jesus when he healed the girl. Are the actual words revealed in the other accounts?

## ***Day 5 / The End is Only a Beginning!***

1. What messages about Christ does this miracle teach you?