

MARK

Lesson 4 w/Answers

Mark Chapter 4

As we now study Chapter 4 of Mark, we again find Jesus teaching along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. I have included this picture of it below, looking towards Tiberius, so that you can see what it looks like on a calm evening. Jesus spent a lot of time along this beautiful lake, and many of the disciples fished in it as well. As you travel along its shoreline, it is easy to imagine the large crowds that gathered along the shore to hear him teach. In this lesson, Mark provides us direct insight into what Jesus was teaching the crowds and his followers, the disciples.

We will examine the parable of the Sower and the Seed, as Jesus begins to open the disciples' eyes to His kingdom and to their purpose. At the end of his teaching, while sleeping on the boat, Jesus is awakened by his followers who are fearing for their lives, due to a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee. Through this event, Jesus will show them his authority over all creation.

Given that background, read Mark Chapter 4 and consider the following questions:

1. In this chapter, we see that Jesus has once again left Capernaum and is teaching "by the sea,"—the Sea of Galilee. In Mark 4:1-12 we get a firsthand look at Jesus and his teaching. As we can observe in this text, the crowds were again so large, probably numbering in the thousands, that Jesus gets into a boat to continue teaching the growing crowd on the shore. The lesson that he teaches is a story, a parable, about a sower, seed, and the soil conditions of the field in which the sower was planting. What is he specifically telling the crowd about the seed and the soil?
 - a. ANSWER 1: As the sower was spreading seed, some of it fell beside the road, other seed fell on rocky ground, some of it fell among the thorns, and some of it fell on good soil.
 - b. ANSWER 2: He taught them that the seed that fell beside the road was eaten by birds; it never had a chance to germinate. He said that the seed that fell on the rocky ground only had a thin layer of dirt in which to grow. It took root, but not enough soil was available to nourish it, so the seed withered and died. The seed that fell among the thorns was choked out and was thus unable to yield any crop. It was only the seed that fell on good soil that grew, and increased, and yielded a large crop.
2. Did the crowd understand what Jesus was teaching? No, probably not. As far as they knew, he simply gave them a farming lesson that most of them would have understood from a practical perspective; but there was probably little understanding of the knowledge and wisdom that Jesus was imparting to them, including on the part of his disciples. The followers of Christ, his disciples, did not understand; and when Jesus was alone with them, they asked him for an explanation. What was Jesus' response in Mark 4:10-11?
 - a. ANSWER: He revealed to them that they alone would be given understanding of the mystery of the kingdom of God, but it would not be given to those "who are outside," who would receive everything via parables.
3. In Mark 4:12 why did Jesus tell them that everyone else would only be revealed his message through parables? Doesn't this seem like a harsh response? (See also Isaiah 6:9-10 and Romans 16:25-26.)
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus was responding to the stubborn unbelievers, just as Isaiah was speaking to the stubborn Jewish people of his day. God had rejected them, and they would be judged accordingly—and so it was during Jesus' ministry. Only true believers would understand the "mystery" of God's Kingdom. Using parables, all would hear, but only believers would be given understanding. As Jesus' followers, his disciples believed in Him; so they would be given that understanding. This was not the case for those who rejected Him.
4. Jesus then explained the parable to the disciples. He tells them that the "sower" is a person who is sowing the word, the Gospel. Then, what does he say that the different soils represent? (See Mark 4:13-20.)
 - a. ANSWER: He tells them that the seed beside the road represents all those along the way who will hear the word, but Satan comes and quickly takes the word away. He goes on to say that the seed sown on rocky places are received with "joy," but having no internal roots, they are only temporarily rooted. So when affliction or persecution arises, they immediately fall away. He goes on to tell them that the seed sown among the thorns represent those who hear the word; however, the worries of the world and the desire for riches and other things choke the word out, and they become unfruitful. He concludes by telling them that those who hear the word, accept it, and bear much fruit are the seeds sown in good soil.

5. Having explained the parable of the Sower and the Seed, he explains another important principle about spreading the Gospel. What illustration does he use to make this point? (See Mark 4:21-22.)
 - a. ANSWER: He points out that no one buys a lamp to put it under a bed or a basket. No, anyone who buys a lamp wants to light it and let it shine so that it can be seen. The Gospel isn't a secret to be kept to themselves. Now that it had been revealed to them (his disciples), they were to let it shine so that all could see it—and hear it. The mysteries being revealed were to "come to light," so that all could see it. Jesus was not establishing a secret society, so that only a chosen few could know the mysteries of God's Kingdom; it was to be revealed to everyone.
6. Jesus continues to teach regarding the lamp in Mark 4:23-25. What lesson is he teaching the disciples in these two verses?
 - a. ANSWER: The disciples were to be discerning regarding who they listened to. They were to use good judgment. Further, anyone who hears the Gospel and accepts it will be fruitful and produce much; but those who reject the Gospel will not be fruitful and will actually lose even more in the end, missing out on eternal life.
7. Jesus extends the parable of the seed further in Mark 4:26-29. What can we learn from this parable?
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus is showing us that, once the sower plants his seed, he waits patiently for the harvest. He does not understand how the seed is transformed into a harvest, but he knows that it will—at the proper time. In this way, Jesus was showing the disciples that now was the time to plant seed, and we are to continue to do so today, until harvest time. We plant, but in ways that we do not understand, the Holy Spirit will nourish the seed and the soil and produce a great crop at harvest time.
8. Mark continues this theme of teaching about seeds with the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Read Mark 4:30-34. What is Jesus teaching them in this parable?
 - a. ANSWER: In its simplest form, Jesus is showing them that even when the smallest of seeds is planted (i.e., the mustard seed), a tree of large size can emerge over time. The tree gets so big that the shade it gives off provides the birds a place to nest. Many different interpretations can be given to this parable, but in its simplest form, Jesus is showing them that even with this small beginning, the Kingdom of God will eventually be revealed to the whole world.
9. Following his teachings, as evening came, he told his disciples that they should travel over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Note that this account points out that "other boats were with him." Clearly some of the crowd had also gotten into boats to follow Jesus. A terrible storm developed and the disciples feared for their lives as the boat was taking on water. They believed they were going to sink and drown. When studying this account, it is always interesting to consider that, while the sea was raging, the boat was taking on water, and the disciples were in great distress; we see Jesus sound asleep, apparently unaware of the impending danger. What can we learn about this aspect of the story that can help us when our lives appear to be in turmoil beyond our control? In fact, there are several things that we should note here that can help us during times of great stress and uncertainty. What do you observe along these lines? (See Mark 4:35-38.)
 - a. ANSWER 1: First, we see that absolutely nothing that can happen to us is a surprise to Jesus.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Second, when we have fears and anxieties, it's okay for us to tell Jesus that we are fearful. Jesus knows our innermost fears and weaknesses, but he wants us to have enough faith to depend on him and let him assuage our concerns. We get ourselves in deeper trouble when we try to deal with it on our own, using our own strength. What got Jesus upset with the disciples was not that they feared, but that they had no faith that Jesus could calm the seas for them. Instead, they accused him of being asleep at a time when they needed him to do something. They basically accused him of not caring about them.
 - c. ANSWER 3: We should see in Jesus' response to the disciples that we should never question whether Jesus cares for us—of course he does. Never think for a moment that Jesus has abandoned you, no matter what the circumstance. Instead, turn to him; he is always there for us.
10. Jesus then spoke, and immediately the sea became "perfectly calm." Amazing! Jesus has authority over everything, even the winds and storms. The disciples had seen him perform miraculous healings and cast out demons; and now this. With all that they had witnessed before the storm, what was their reaction to Jesus calming the wind and the sea? (See Mark 4:40-41.)
 - a. ANSWER: They couldn't believe it; it was somehow a surprise to them regarding Jesus that "even the wind and the sea obey Him." In spite of all the miracles that Jesus had performed while they were with him, this was beyond their comprehension.
11. In addition to being surprised, Mark tells us in the aftermath of Jesus calming the seas, the disciples "became very much afraid" when they saw the power over nature that Jesus commanded. What does it mean when the text states that they were afraid of Jesus? Does it mean they were scared of him, or could it mean something else? Read Psalm 89:8-9, Psalm 104:5-9, Psalm 106:8-9, and Psalm 107:23-32. Who did they believe controlled the seas and the winds?
 - a. ANSWER: Clearly, and finally, the disciples realized that Jesus had the same power that God has over His sovereign creation. They would have been in complete awe of what they had just seen, knowing that only God controlled these things. Because now, standing in front of them, Jesus was demonstrating that he also had that power. It would have been overwhelming, leaving them almost speechless. Their "fear" would have been out of respect and awe regarding what they had just witnessed. However, this event would just be the beginning of Jesus revealing his authority over creation—as we will see in the chapters and lessons that follow.

Jesus now has the attention of his disciples in a way that they could have never previously imagined. Having demonstrated complete and sovereign authority over creation, Jesus will go on to continue his ministry on a scale not yet witnessed by his disciples. We will be examining this in the next chapter of Mark.

As we close this lesson, let it be clear to us as believers that we have been commissioned to sow the seed of the Gospel, regardless of the soil or the field he places us in. Then, we are to wait patiently for Jesus' return. Furthermore, as the toils and tribulations of life toss us to-and-fro, he is always there for us; and we are to depend on him and nothing else.

Have a great week everyone!

In Christ,

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