

READ THIS FIRST

The Gospel of Mark: The King and His Kingdom

Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as his “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) and expects us to faithfully represent him to the world. In order to faithfully live out this mission we must grow intimately familiar with who Jesus is and what he has done. Thus, it makes sense to have our first weekly study focus on the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Though this series, “The King and His Kingdom,” will not be an exhaustive study of the person of Jesus, we will become thoroughly acquainted with his message, mission, attitude and actions. Not only will we see Jesus in action, but we’ll also get a glimpse of what life looks like in Jesus’ Kingdom. Mark is a fast-paced, hard-hitting, action-packed book and we will spend fourteen weeks examining the highlights of his account.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to deepen your love for Jesus. Whether you are just beginning to explore what it would be like to follow Christ or you’ve trusted him for a long time, my hope is that your heart would be delighted by his majesty, power, humility, trustworthiness, sacrifice and victory. Only as we grow satisfied in Jesus will we be able to bring his love and grace to our hurting world.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons
Lead Pastor

The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Mark’s Gospel. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to info@secondmilechurch.com.

Week 5

KINGDOM PICTURES

Mark 4:1-34

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*But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones
who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold
and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*

(Mark 4:20, ESV)
.....

Introduction

Many people are visual learners. They don't necessarily prefer to read books or listen to lectures, but if you can draw something on a napkin or with a compelling picture, they'll track with you the whole way. What makes masterful communicators so compelling is that they can paint a verbal picture with their words. They think in illustrations and tell stories that make their points stick. Jesus was the master storyteller and teacher, and he had an amazing ability to tell stories using every day experiences that people could grasp.

This section of Mark's Gospel is a series of "parables" about the kingdom of God, each of which gives us new and thought-provoking angles about what it means to follow Jesus.

Part of what makes this section of Scripture unique is that it contains one of the few times in the Bible (in the Parable of the Soils) when Jesus actually explains the meaning of the parables. Though modern preachers are always attempting to explain the value of their illustrations, Jesus often just told the parable and trusted that those who had "ears to hear" would understand it (4:9).

Even the disciples, who were closest to Jesus and spent the most time with him, had a difficult time interpreting the parables. Therefore, it's important that we approach them with a prayerfulness and dependence on the Holy Spirit, asking him to illuminate the truths of these parables. At the same time, we should study hard, think hard, and ask hard questions of the text and ourselves so that we can most accurately interpret the parables and apply them to our lives. It's not enough to simply understand what the parables teach. We want to be people who are transformed by the truths that Jesus is proclaiming.

Investigation

Read Mark 4:1-34.

1. In the Parable of the Soils (4:1-20), what is the difference between the good soil and every other kind? Do the other soils represent genuine saving faith?
2. Jesus says that the good soil produces grain, "growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold" (4:8). What are we supposed to learn from this?
3. What is the point of the Parable of the Seed Growing (4:26-29)?
4. What is the point of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30-32)?

Implication

5. Jesus says that the things that derail people in their spiritual pursuit are trouble, persecution, cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things (4:17, 19). Why do these things often cause people to walk away from God?

6. Which of the four soils do you most identify with? Why?

7. The Parable of the Seed Growing (4:26-29) and the Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30-32) both seem to teach that God does his work over a process that takes time. How have you seen God work in your life over time?

8. What kind of new spiritual fruit would you like to see in your life? What do you need to do to see this kind of growth?

Other Issues

In Mark 4:12, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 and says that he speaks in parables “so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.” Does this mean that Jesus does not want his listeners to understand his teaching and be able to repent?

This is a difficult saying to interpret. Jesus is not saying that he is deliberately trying to be obscure. Rather, he is saying that the parables-method reveals people’s hard hearts, since they will simply not take the stories and “plant them” through deep meditation and reflection.

First, there are those “outside” the kingdom. The parables will basically remain opaque to them. This does not mean that they will be consciously confused by the parables. They may “get” the point intellectually, but they will not let the parables draw them in to personal understanding and deep conviction. In other words, they will not truly hear them. For example, in 2 Samuel 12, Nathan the prophet tells David a parable, but though David “gets” that it is really about him, he does not see the massive implications of the story for him. In the same way, people outside the kingdom are not personally convicted about Jesus’ teaching. They are not humbled by it and they don’t see its ramifications for them. They do not see how it reveals the deep workings of their heart. Thus they “hear but do not hear.” They will never be able to accept the deeper truth behind them.

Isaiah 6:9 is quoted, and the context is important. In Israel’s day, the people rejected God’s word, so in response God blinded and deafened them. If we resist the truth we have, even that will be taken from us. So we must not ignore the “so that” of v. 12a or “otherwise” of v. 12b. It means because of humanity’s rejection of God, God blinds and deafens them.

Second, there are those (by implication) “inside.” Jesus says that he chooses some people to explain the parables to, to get them to understand. This means that Jesus, by grace, comes and opens our minds to the truth. This is probably the “secret” of the kingdom.

This is not an easy teaching, but it is true to our experience. Most of us spend years “hearing” the Biblical truths without really hearing them. But then at some point, we realized the implications of it all for ourselves. What happened? This text suggests that Jesus “came” to us through the Holy Spirit and opened our eyes to it. This raises some difficult questions. If He comes to us, why does He not come to all? But we are not told that. We do learn from this that anyone who stays blind has freely chosen to do so. By nature, we all dislike the truth, and we have willfully closed our hearts.¹⁴

¹⁴ Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 42.