

Handout 3: Gospel of Mark Notes (Talk 14)

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Summary:

Jesus' parables were stories that pointed to truths about the kingdom that would have run contrary to some of Jesus' contemporaries' beliefs/hopes. What do these parables mean?

Outline:

1. Review from last week:

- a. Jesus' speaking in parables was not just about judgement on the listeners who weren't paying attention to what was going on, but also about maintaining a certain veil of secrecy concerning certain realities of the Kingdom that may have gotten him into premature trouble
- b. Mark's "Seed Parables" are selective and focused on the Kingdom of God as it pertained to the current reality of Jesus' ministry.
- c. The Parable of the Sower
 - i. About Jesus' current ministry and how people were responding to it
 - ii. Also about God's ministry to Israel and the reality of hardening, judgement, and the promise of a hopeful remnant ("a holy seed")
 - iii. One of main messages: Be careful how you listen and respond to Jesus/the word of the Kingdom
 - iv. Notice that The Sower is still a bit opaque on it's own, even after Jesus' provided interpretation

2. Parables Part 2: (picking up where we left off)

- a. Mark 4:21-25
 - i. Who is being spoken to here?
 1. Is this still a private conversation happening between Jesus and the disciples or not?

- a. What are the indications that may help answer question?
 - i. Luke's placement of the same sayings (Lk. 8:16-18)
 - ii. Indirect Object: "to them"
 - iii. Nature of the sayings themselves
 1. Not parabolic in same way as main three parables in this section
 2. Not seed parables
 3. Feel more straightforwardly an explanation to a group interested in what he is saying than to people not inquiring.
- ii. Part 1: A Lamp on a Lampstand
 1. A Peck-Measure?
 2. Lamps go on lampstands (i.e. they are meant to provide light)
 - a. Therefore: Things are hidden only at some point to be revealed and secrets are meant to come to light
 3. What is the message of this saying?
 - a. Speaking in parables about the kingdom will not always be required.
 - b. The truths being veiled now will become evident at some point in the future
 - c. If this interpretation is correct, it lends credence to the conclusion that this is still a private conversation between Jesus and disciples
 4. What is the hidden / secret thing in the parable of The Sower that will come to light?
 - a. Who are the people represented by the fourth soil?
 - b. What is counter-culture/shocking about this reality?
 - i. Not all Jews will be children of the Kingdom

- ii. Relatively few will enter
 - iii. Those who do will be defined not by “X”, but by having responded to Jesus’ kingdom message
 - c. Does this saying have anything to do with the “Mystery of the Kingdom” (vs. 11) that Jesus’ disciples and followers get that others do/will not?
- iii. Part 2: Standards of Measure
 - 1. What does “measure” mean?
 - 2. What is the message?
 - a. Vs. 25 For those who pay attention well, lean into the struggle to understand because they see in Jesus something more than a miracle worker who might give them bread and healing, their embrace/paying attention will be rewarded. “More will be given”??
 - b. For those “on the outside”, those unwilling to lean in, even Jesus’ temporal benefits will evaporate.
- b. Implications to seeing 4:21-25 as being part of Jesus’ private explanation to disciples:
 - i. Allows us to assume that Mark has included only three true parables here and each of them are “seed” parables about the kingdom.
 - ii. Allows us to assume that Mark’s inclusion of this explanation was meant as a helpful interpretive lens to his readers
 - 1. Each parable shares something about the kingdom that was not known to people BUT tha
 - 2. Each parable’s true meaning will be made known more fully in time (after
- c. Parable of the farmer and the seed:
 - i. Unique parable to Mark’s Gospel
 - ii. What is the main idea being articulated here about the kingdom?
 - iii. What questions about the kingdom does this parable answer?

1. The Kingdom comes about through a mundane, quiet process, the mechanics of the growth is inscrutable to those interested/onlooking.
 - a. There is a passivity in this growth
 2. There will come a time when it is clear that the “telos” of the seed has come (“when the fruit permits”)
- d. Parable of the mustard seed:
- i. What, if anything, is different about this parable from the Farmer and Seed?
 1. The parable points to the contrast of the seeds small start compared to it’s end point—the largest tree in the garden.
 2. The anticipation that the kingdom would be come about immediately is potentially negated

3. Summary: In what ways do these parables potentially subvert the expectations (by various groups) of the Kingdom?

- i. Kingdom will include all Abraham’s biological descendants?
- ii. Kingdom will only include the right kind of Jews?
 1. Torah Intensifiers
 2. The Priesthood and Religious Elites
 3. The Qumran group
 4. Etc...
- iii. Kingdom will come through force/battle?
- iv. Kingdom will emerge swiftly?
- v. Kingdom will not include the nations (“outsiders”)?

4. What is the Kingdom then and now?

- a. First century Palestine was not the time for the longed-for fulfillment of restoration of all things
 - i. But... something significant began there, then.
- b. For those with eyes to see, Jesus’ resurrection was a PARABLE, par excellence, (the story of the seed enacted) that provided the HOPE/FIRST FRUITS of that Kingdom—the model for how God was going to go about restoring all things.
- c. In what sense was God’s Kingdom inaugurated in Jesus?
 - i. Resurrection and exaltation?

- ii. The people of the kingdom took on new definition?
- d. In what sense are there still pieces of the Kingdom to “emerge”?
 - i. Has the mustard seed fully grown yet?
 - ii. Has the farmer put in the harvest yet?

5. Implications