

By Galilee



SABBATH AFTERNOON

THE MAN OF GALILEE. Though Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small town in the highlands, He made Capernaum, rather than Nazareth (*see Mark 2:1*), the base for His ministry. Capernaum was a city at the north end of the Lake of Galilee and a center of the fishing industry. When Jesus came “home” from His frequent travels, it was to Capernaum.

The Sea of Galilee dominates the landscape of northern Israel. Shaped like a giant heart, it is about thirteen miles long north to south and about eight miles at its greatest width. The greenish blue fresh water lake teems with fish; it is, in places, 130 to 148 feet deep. Because its surface lies about 700 feet below sea level, the climate around the lake is subtropical.

Here is where we find Jesus located in this week’s lesson. Every day’s study places Him either on the lake or on one side or the other.

The Week at a Glance: What lesson was Jesus teaching in the parable of the sower? Why did Jesus compare His eternal kingdom to a seed? What lessons can we learn from the storm on the sea? From the healing of the demoniac? From His ministry to two women almost at the same time? What traditions did Jesus overthrow, and why?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 4:1–5:43.*

Memory Text: “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” (*Mark 4:41, NIV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 23.

The Parable of the Sower (*Mark 4:1-20*).

This is one of those rare places in Mark's Gospel where he gives space to Jesus' teaching. Elsewhere he presents Jesus as the Man of action and does not pause to share specifics of His instruction.

The parables of Jesus are famous, even among nonbelievers. Drawn from the events of everyday life, they are simple in wording and ideas, but they teach profound truths. Jesus, the Source of all wisdom, never tried to impress people with His knowledge or dazzle them with intellectual sleight of hand. Instead, He laid truth on the line, presented through the disarmingly simple approach of stories from common life. The other Gospel writers record many more parables of Jesus, and often they have a surprise ending—the first become last and the last first. Those in Mark 4, however, do not share this characteristic.

Study Jesus' parable of the sower and the explanation He gave to the disciples (*Mark 4:3-20*). **Is this parable really about the sower, or is it about the different kinds of soil? What is He talking about here?**

Who are represented by each of the following?

People along the path: _____

People in rocky places: _____

People among thorns: _____

People in good soil: _____

Notice that the sower is the same in each case, and so is the seed. God's invitation goes out to all people to accept His salvation and become citizens of His kingdom. However, God never compels. He gives to everyone the opportunity to refuse Him and His gracious offer.

The parable also makes clear that following Jesus is much more than a single decision. Some Christians like to recount the actual day when they were "saved" by accepting Jesus, but the Christian life isn't complete in one day. In this world the Christian's life is a battle and a march; God calls us to grow in grace and in knowledge of Him. As Jesus explained in this parable, some people start well but do not complete the journey; the seed sprouts but never bears fruit.

Think about someone you've known who fits in each of these categories. To the best of your knowledge, what were the deciding factors that placed them there?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Mark 4:10, 11*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand what Jesus' parables and miracles, as recorded by Mark, tell us about the kingdom of God.
2. To demonstrate how this kingdom manifests itself in the midst of the everyday world.
3. To apply the lessons of the parables and miracles to our own lives.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Kingdom Is Like a Seed (*Mark 4:30-32*).

- A. The kingdom of God is distinct from—but in the midst of—the world.
- B. People have the option of ignoring or refusing the kingdom.
- C. God's kingdom can be contrasted with earthly authorities, who rule by force.

II. Things Not Seen (*Mark 4:35-40*).

- A. Faith may not always seem to be a rational response to external events.
- B. In times of trial it is easy to believe God does not care or even does not exist.
- C. We may have to have faith in spite of our feelings of doubt.

III. Toxic Faith (*Mark 5:25-28*).

- A. False interpretations of religious teachings in Jesus' time caused many to have misplaced faith or to lose their faith entirely.
- B. Legitimate teachings can be misinterpreted in such a way that they are dangerous to true faith.
- C. We must be discerning in how we apply our deeply held beliefs and practices.

Summary: Jesus is and was widely known for His miracles and parables. All these, especially as presented in Mark, were not merely random wonders and marvels but were tightly focused on Jesus' message and mission of salvation. To this day they teach essential truths about God's nature and character and His will for us.

COMMENTARY

This week's study deals with four parables and four miracles that present Jesus as the Master Teacher and the Lord of power.

I. Jesus: The Master Teacher.

The parable of the sower (*Mark 4:3-20*). The first lesson this parable teaches is how lavishly God bestows His truth and grace upon humanity. God casts the seed of truth far and wide. He does not, however, force anyone to accept the truth. The result of His

The Kingdom Is Like Seed (*Mark 4:21-34*).

In two short but penetrating parables Jesus likens the kingdom of God to seed. What a contrast with the empires that proud, ambitious humans have endeavored to set up. They took as their symbols weapons of brute force, mighty armies, horses and chariots, or in these days tanks, rockets, and fighter planes. “The only power that counts,” said one political leader, “is the power that comes out of the barrel of a gun.” But the Son of God comes to earth, announces that the kingdom of God is coming, and He compares it to seed. What does that mean?

What characteristics of seed are shown in these parables:

The parable of the growing seed (*Mark 4:26-29*)?

The parable of the mustard seed (*Mark 4:30-32*)?

How small is a seed! But it has within it an energy that, released, brings life and growth. The magnificent trees—the oak, the redwood—that stretch toward the heavens and make us feel so puny all began with a seed.

Charlemagne, king of the Holy Roman Empire, bowed to no one. It is said that when the pope was about to place the crown on his head, Charlemagne seized it and crowned himself. Yet this ruler, so strong and feared during his lifetime, at last grew old. Facing death, he left instructions as to how his remains were to be handled: He was to be clad in his royal robes with a crown on his head, scepter in hand, and seated on his throne. Then the tomb was to be sealed tight, never to be broken. He would reign forever even in death!

His servants did as he had instructed and closed the tomb. The years went by; the winds blew and the showers fell on Charlemagne’s tomb. And one day the wind carried a tiny seed, and it lodged in a crack. The rain fell, and the seed sprouted. It found a little soil and put down roots. Its roots expanded the crack, and the wind carried in more soil, and the plant grew larger. It grew and grew until one day the tomb cracked open to reveal a skeleton slumped on a dusty throne, robes rotted away, crown fallen to the earth, scepter in the dust. The mighty Charlemagne’s plans had been defeated by the power of a seed.

What practical steps can help you keep your focus on God’s eternal kingdom, as opposed to earthly temporal things that always end in dust and death? How could these texts help? *Matt. 6:19, 2 Cor. 4:18, Phil. 4:8.*

sowing depends upon the condition of the soil—the human heart. That is the parable’s second lesson. The difference between the first three types of soil and the last type is rooting and fruit bearing. Fruit bearing requires an absolute response to, and a firm rooting in, God’s Word.

The parable of the growing seed (*Mark 4:26-29*). This parable is found only in Mark. It does not emphasize human response but the inevitability of God’s reign. We cannot create the kingdom. Its growth is as imperceptible and as sure as the life in a seed. Its consummation is real and will lead to either harvest or judgment.

The parable of the mustard seed (*Mark 4:30-32*). This parable takes the smallest seed and shows how it grows to a size astronomically larger than its beginnings. (It takes some twenty thousand mustard seeds to weigh an ounce.) Jesus often spoke of the value of the small—the widow’s mite, the lost coin, a cup of cold water, one of these little ones (*Matt. 10:42, Luke 15:8-10, 21:2-4*). In such insignificant symbols of existence, God’s glory shines.

The Pharisees referred to the birds of the air in this parable as symbolic of the Gentiles. As the mustard plant provided shelter to the birds of the air, so does the kingdom create a nesting place for all peoples of the world.

The parable of the lamp (*Mark 4:21, 22*). Here, Jesus revealed certain essentials of the kingdom no Christian can ignore. The kingdom is light. Let the light not be suppressed by careless indifference or selfish hoarding. Genuine disciples will not hide the light under a bushel of plenty or a bed of ease.

II. Jesus: The Lord of Power.

Our lesson narrates four miracles that testify to Jesus as the Lord of power over nature, demons, sickness, and death (*Mark 4:35–5:43*).

Calming the storm (*Mark 4:35-41*). The Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level and surrounded by hills. Winds blowing across these hills often cause storms to arise quickly. So, this storm was no surprise; but it portrays the panic of the human and the power of the divine. The disciples had seen Jesus’ power over nature many times. Yet, in fear, they awoke Jesus to ask the most astonishing question: “ ‘Do You not care?’ ” (*vs. 38, NKJV*). Unbelief is the parent of panic, and it persists in human nature unless that nature continually submits to God.

The healing of the demoniac (*Mark 5:1-20*). The demoniac was a portrait of pity; but with Jesus came change. The demons certainly knew Jesus, and their impending doom aroused a strange request: “ ‘Send us to the swine’ ” (*vs. 12, NKJV*). Thus, a herd of 2,000 swine rushed to their death. The demoniac, however, rose to a new life. The villagers saw the miracle, but that made no difference to their worldview: Business was more important than the transformation of a soul.

Terror by Water (*Mark 4:35-41*).

C. S. Lewis wrote about what a great strain the death of his wife placed on his faith in God. “You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn’t you then first discover how much you really trusted it?”—C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (Harper, San Francisco, 1996), pp. 22, 23.

Keeping Lewis’s words in mind, read **Mark 4:35-41**. **How is the same principle he expressed manifested here by the disciples? Why do you think Jesus answered them as He did?**

How do we see in this scene a powerful example of both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus?

In verse 38, the disciples asked a question that, no doubt, millions of Christians have asked during times of crisis. And, of course, *by faith* we know the answer. Of course He cares. That was the whole purpose of the Cross, to save us so that we don’t have to perish (*John 3:16, 10:10, 2 Pet. 3:9*). Nevertheless, who hasn’t found themselves in a similar situation, where your “boat” is “full” of water and you are about to go down and you cry out, *God, don’t You care?*

When was the last time you found yourself in a similar situation as the disciples? What happened? Would Jesus have been right in asking you, “How is it that you have no faith?” What did you learn that, you believe, can help you the next time you face something like this?

The healing of a sick woman and the restoring of life to a dead girl (*Mark 5:21-43*). In addition to these two miracles also showing the value Jesus placed on a single person, they show that in Him there is no male nor female, no Jew nor Gentile. He is not only the Lord of life but the breaker of all barriers that divide and degrade life.

The woman had suffered 12 years with a hemorrhage and had gone bankrupt searching for a cure. Faith, however, conquers mountains. She believed that just touching Jesus would bring grace and healing. Knowing Jesus and dedicating your life to Him are not the same. The woman chose the latter, and divine power flowed from the Creator to her body. “She touched Him in faith—in desperate believ-

Inductive Bible Study

❶ The frustrating thing about gardening is that we can’t *force* something to grow. We can prepare the soil and provide water and fertilizer, but the actual growth of a seed is out of our control. In the parable of the sower (*Mark 4:3-9*) the only difference between success and failure was the soil. How can we help God turn rocky, thorny soil into good soil?

❷ It must have been some kind of storm that terrified seasoned, experienced fisher folk. Gradually, their attention shifted from the storm to Jesus’ inactivity on their behalf. They said, “Teacher, don’t you care?” (*Mark 4:38, NIV*). Often we struggle with circumstances that seem insurmountable. But just as Jesus answered His disciples with a question, so He asks us, “Why are you so afraid?” (*vs. 40, NIV*). Invite class members to share briefly when they felt deserted by God and how they were reminded of His presence.

❸ The story of the demon-possessed man (*Mark 5:1-20*) is another example of how the same situation sparked widely different reactions from the characters involved. Some saw Jesus as a Savior, some as a threat; no one stayed neutral. Jesus’ parting instructions to the formerly demon-possessed man are instructive (*vs. 19*): Our mission isn’t so much to convert strangers as it is to testify of God’s mercy in our lives. What is the gist of your testimony?

❹ Jesus’ miracles for the sick woman and the dead girl were about restoration. He didn’t just restore them to health and life; He restored them to their families, to their communities, to lives of service for God. How are you using your life in Christ to serve God and others?

Two Thousand Dead Pigs *(Mark 5:1-20).*

Read prayerfully and carefully the story given in these verses. If you could draw just one practical lesson from this story, what would it be? (Remember, focus on just one point.)

There are numerous approaches one could take to this story.

If you focused on the power of Jesus to cast out demons, what lessons could you draw from it about the power of God to help you overcome, for instance, habitual sin?

Maybe you focused on the reality of the demons and their power over the man. What lessons can you learn from this about the great controversy and how we need to rely totally on Jesus?

Maybe you focused on the reaction of these swineherders to what had happened to their herd. What lessons could you draw about how worldly considerations can come in and hide the true nature and character of God from us?

Maybe you focused on the reaction of the man to what Christ had done for him. What lessons can you learn from this about how we should respond to what Christ has done for us?

Maybe your emphasis was on what Christ told him to do after he asked to remain with Jesus. What lessons are there about what should motivate us to witness to others about what Christ means to us?

Whatever point you emphasized (and maybe it was another one) and whatever practical lesson you learned, go through the Bible and see if you can find another story, or other texts, that buttress and affirm your position. Take your point to class and share it with others.

ing faith and He stopped! The touch of one anonymous woman in a crowd halted the Lord of glory. That is the glorious truth of this incident. She touched Him. So can we.”—Peter Marshall, *Mr. Jones, Meet the Master* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1954), p. 182.

The raising of Jairus’s daughter from death (*Mark 5:22-24, 35-43*) also reveals that Jesus is no respecter of persons. It is the need and the faith of the individual that define Jesus’ saving ministry. The faith of Jairus was a saving faith, and it began when Jairus rejected the social and religious prestige that went with his position. He set aside his dignity, pride, and perhaps even his close friends to reach out to Jesus.

Faith gave Jairus hope that Jesus would bring the dead to life. Jesus did precisely that. “‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’” (*Mark 5:41*,

Witnessing

Training to become a great violinist begins early in life. Faithful practicing brings improvement: enhanced interpretation of the music, better control of the fingers, greater understanding of the instrument—its flexibility and its limitations. As time passes, with many hours of practice, strong determination, and unwavering focus, the sounds advance from “ear splitting” to “soul moving.” The process, however, can take a lifetime.

So it is with the Christian experience. Our spiritual journey begins the day of our conversion. Sometimes it seems the more we try to follow God’s plan for our lives, the more failure we encounter. The devil works hard to discourage and waylay us in every possible way. If we keep our eyes constantly focused on Jesus, however, we remain immune to Satan’s deceptions. As Peter found out the hard way, when we take our eyes off the Savior for even one minute, we begin to lose control and sink rapidly. Nothing pleases Satan more than to see God’s children in trouble. Nothing pleases God more than to answer our cry for help.

Spend time this week answering the following questions: Why is it so hard for us to ask for help when we know our heavenly Father wants desperately to hear from us? Why don’t we make more of an effort to help others whom we see struggling with sin? Why do we seem, all too often, to call on God only when we’re in desperate need?

Those around us who have not yet accepted Jesus as their personal Savior have not yet begun their spiritual journey. We must not miss any opportunity to open up the plan of salvation to them. Satan will *do anything* to throw up roadblocks in order to prevent us from witnessing. Be prepared for rough sailing at times like this, and remember: The more difficult the journey, the sweeter the destination.

A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman *(Mark 5:21-43).*

Back across the lake, probably in Capernaum, Jesus will manifest His power once more in dramatic fashion. His life gives life to the seed, where power works silently but marvelously. His power commanded the winds and the waves to be still and then brought calm to the troubled soul of a wild man. Now His power will drive away long-standing disease and then will raise a young girl to life from the dead.

Read Mark 5:21-43. What connections do you find between these two miracles? How do they show Jesus' interest in all types of people?

Here are two females, one at the beginning of womanhood, the other at the end. One has hemorrhaged for 12 years, the other has just reached 12 years of age. Both would be considered insignificant in society: One, because of her bleeding, was ceremonially unclean and defiled anyone who came into contact with her (hence, according to the Levitical law, she made Jesus unclean by touching Him). The other was only a girl, considered to be without status in society. Now she was dead, and to touch a corpse also brought uncleanness. But Jesus, setting aside the misuse of ancient laws took her by the hand and raised her to new life.

Of course, Jesus did this a lot; that is, setting aside misused and misinterpreted laws and regulations that, instead of promoting faith, worked to hinder it (*see Mark 7:13*). His Sabbath healings are, of course, one of the best examples. What about His driving the money-changers out of the temple, where they were used to selling their wares? What about His denouncing the practice of “corban” (*Mark 7:11*)? Or what about His words about washing or about food? Many of these things were, in fact, rooted in the Bible; they had just become perverted through human abuses and their true meaning hidden under human ideas and traditions.

What are certain things in your culture, and maybe even in some *interpretations* of our faith, that might, for a greater good, be violated? In other words, are there some practices, or some beliefs, that are often held as inviolable that, under the right circumstances, could be violated? If so, does that mean that, perhaps, these practices shouldn't be there at all? How are we supposed to know which should stay or which should go?

NKJV), Jesus commanded. Then He ordered that she be given some food. What a picture of compassion at a time when little girls were considered but things to be saddled with work beyond their years.

The lesson is timeless. Children are precious in the sight of Jesus. Child abuse violates the innocent and places on the child a lifelong burden. It is a deadly sin; abusers cannot escape the judgment unless they repent and abandon such behavior. But even for them, Jesus' grace is strong enough.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in his wife's eyes, the man tried to calm her, but no matter what he said, she continued to be hysterical. He held the hilt of the sword that he wore at his side. "Are you afraid of this?" Without hesitation she answered, "Of course not!" "Why not?" he asked. "Because it's in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me." To this he smiled and replied, "I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!"

Thought Questions:

- 1 The Sea of Galilee had a nasty reputation; so when Jesus calmed its waters, it was a really big deal. What did this miracle have to do with Jesus' establishing Himself as God? What kind of assurance comes with the knowledge that God has dominion over all creation?
- 2 The same disciples who witnessed previous miracles of Jesus were astonished when He calmed the sea. Why, then, do you think they raised the question, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (*Mark 4:41, NIV*)? What did they mean when they questioned His identity?

Application Questions:

- 1 Because Jesus was sleeping through the storm, the disciples assumed Jesus didn't care about them. What makes you question whether Jesus cares for you? How can you discover His care for you? How does knowledge of God in total control of the universe make a difference to you?
- 2 From the miracle of the storm, what lessons can you glean that can help you endure adversities in life? Why is mere knowledge of God insufficient to get you through difficult times?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White’s “ ‘Peace, Be Still’ ” and “The Touch of Faith,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 333–348; “The Sower Went Forth to Sow” and “ ‘First the Blade, Then the Ear,’ ” in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 33–69.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Have someone in the class who has done gardening explain in some detail the principles of what makes soil good for a seed to grow into healthy plants. What spiritual lessons can you learn from these details?
- 2** In the New Testament, the existence of demons is readily apparent. Some try to argue, however, that these were just manifestations of mental illness and that the Bible writers simply did not know any better. How would you respond to such accusations? Why is it important that we, as a people, understand the reality and power of demons?
- 3** In Mark 5:36, Jesus said, “Be not afraid, only believe.” Though He spoke in a specific context, what did He mean? How can those words be of value to someone who is now facing a terrible crisis? Why should we not be afraid? And what should we believe?
- 4** Discuss as a class this whole question of what are inviolable practices as opposed to mere traditions. Can traditions, no matter how “sacred,” ever work against the truth?

Summary: “Who is this . . . ?” cried out the disciples when Jesus calmed the storm. That exclamation of amazement and awe applied to each part of this week’s lesson. Who is this whose kingdom comes not with trumpets blaring and lavish display but silently like the growing seed? Who is this whom demons recognize and before whom they bow? Who is this whose power flows out from the hem of His garment to heal a woman’s suffering? Who is this who takes a dead girl’s hand and calls her back to life?

This is Jesus who turns upside down earthly expectations. This is Jesus, the Man extraordinary. This is Jesus, the Son of the living God.