

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?

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.*

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?

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.

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?

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.

Two Invitations

J. H. Zachary

The Hungarian Union conducts soul-winning seminars for its members. Nearly 300 members attended one recent seminar. After discussing how to share Jesus with others, participants divided into teams and went into the city to practice what they had learned.

After some time, two of the seminar participants stepped inside an open church to rest and pray. They heard someone weeping bitterly in the pew behind them. Tivadar, an Adventist pastor, stood and walked to the pew and found an elderly woman weeping. He slipped into the pew and sat beside her.

“I heard you weeping,” the pastor whispered. “May I help you?” The woman told him her name was Eszter (Esther). Then she poured out her heart to him.

“A few weeks ago I became seriously ill. I was taken to the hospital, where the doctor told my children that I was dying. But the Lord healed me, and I recovered. When I was released from the hospital, I returned to my apartment to discover someone moving in. I learned that my children had sold my apartment and all of my belongings. Now I have nothing and no place to live.”

Pastor Tivadar answered, “I do not know the solution to these serious problems, but God does. May I pray with you?”

“Oh, thank you,” she said. Pastor Tivadar prayed for Eszter, then he invited her to attend the seminar the next day. “It is a very spiritual meeting,” he encouraged. “You will enjoy it.”

“You are from the Adventist Church?” Eszter asked.

“Yes, I am a pastor in the Adventist church,” Tivadar replied.

“Yesterday, a woman invited me to attend. I must have misunderstood the address, because I could not find the meeting place. That is why I was weeping here in the church today. God sent you to give me a second chance. Yes, I want to come.”

The next day Eszter arrived at the meetings. She told everyone why she was there and thanked God for giving her two invitations to the meeting. “I am all alone in this town, and I need friends. I think God has sent me to some new friends.”

Eszter returned the following day and brought two young people with her. She had already become a missionary to others.

The church is working to help meet Eszter’s physical and spiritual needs.

J. H. Zachary is a coordinator for outreach among the Muslim and Jewish populations in North America.