

Parables of Mark 4

by W.F. Anderson

The sermon explores the purpose of Mark's Gospel, which is to present Jesus as the Servant and to get us to commit ourselves to Jesus as the Son of God.

Duration: 44:03

Scripture: Mark 4:21

Topics: "Christian Witness", "Spiritual Light"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing how we can learn a lot about a person by observing their actions. He uses the example of watching someone work with tools to illustrate this point. The speaker then transitions to the Gospel of Mark, specifically focusing on chapter 4, verses 21-25. He highlights the importance of not hiding the light of the lamp, but rather letting it shine for all to see. The speaker also mentions the mixed reactions Jesus received, with some recognizing him as the Christ while others accused him of being controlled by Satan. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the significance of our actions and the need to let our light shine for others to see.

Transcript

Now let's look at God's Word again this evening in Mark's Gospel, Chapter 4. Mark Chapter 4, verses 21 through 25. I think, however, I should remind you that when John Meyer talked about, when you get old you reminisce, he was doing the reminiscing. He forgot to tell you that 25 years ago I was the first child preacher they ever had at that conference.

In Mark Chapter 4, verse 21, And he said unto them, Is a lamp brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which shall not be manifested, neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come to light. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear, with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you, and unto you that hear shall more be given.

For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath. Now I'm not telling you anything new when I describe the different emphases of the four Gospels. All of you are familiar with them.

If I were to ask you, you could tell me that Matthew presents our Lord Jesus Christ as King, and Luke presents our Lord Jesus Christ as perfect man, and John presents our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of

God, and Mark, of course, presents our Lord Jesus Christ as the servant. All of us know that. Sometimes we forget, however, that the purpose of Mark is not one bit different from the purpose of John.

John spells it out for us at the close of his Gospels that the things that he has written, particularly the miracles that he has chosen to write about, are written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name. That's exactly Mark's purpose. He starts his Gospels with the indication of his purpose.

John finishes his Gospels with the indication of his purpose. But you remember how Mark begins his Gospels. The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And right away, Mark tells you what he's going to do. He's going to do exactly what John will do in his Gospels. He's going to present to us the evidence that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is indeed the Son of God.

Now, the way these two writers do it is different, but that's simply a matter of methodology. Their aim is the same. They want us to realize who Jesus really is.

And their second purpose is to get us to commit ourselves to Jesus as the Son of God. Now, the way Mark does it, after a very brief introduction of thirteen verses, is to show us who Jesus is by what he does. Not so much by what he says as by what he does.

In that brief introduction, he gives us two primary witnesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He gives us first the witness of John the Baptist, and Mark is very careful to present the credentials of John so that we will know that John the Baptist is a reliable witness. And then he tells us what John says about Jesus.

The second witness that Mark presents occurs at the baptism of our Lord, when there is the voice from heaven, and God himself attests who Jesus is. The third witness comprises the bulk of the book, and that's what Jesus did. And when you watch what he did, you discover who he is.

And that's what I like about Mark's gospel. I think when we talked about Mark's gospel three years ago, I suggested that one of the things I love to do, and if anyone here tonight is not committed to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, I'm not the least bit interested in preaching to you what you already know. All I would suggest you do is take the gospel of Mark, and just read through it, and from what this man did, try to describe him, and see if there is any other category in which you could honestly put him except the category that this is the Christ, the Son of God.

We can tell very much about a person by what he does, can't we? Sometimes that's good, sometimes it's bad. If you were to take five minutes and watch me working with tools, you would learn a great deal about me. If you were to watch my friend Morris Martin work with tools, you would learn something about him, and you would learn that he and I are totally different when it comes to tools, just by what we do.

Now, if the job I am working on takes more than five minutes when I am using those tools, you'll discover something else about me. You'll discover whether or not I am a patient man, just by watching me with those tools. And when I hit my thumb with a hammer, you will discover whether or not I am a self-controlled man.

You'll learn a great deal about a person just by watching what he does. And I have learned from my friend Paul Taylor back in Florence, who was one of the top engineers with the DuPont company, that when you were thinking about a man for a position in a company, you don't just interview the man. You find some way of seeing that man and his wife together.

And the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. We've been in many homes in our lifetime, and other people, of course, have been in ours, and have discovered the same thing. By watching what a man does, as far as his wife is concerned, you'll learn a great deal about the man.

And we learn the kind of person a man is by what he does, more than by what he says. Some of us have learned how to use words to cloak what we are, and to make you think we are something we are not. Jesus said, by their words ye shall know them.

What did he say? By their deeds, by their work, ye shall know them. It's by what they do that you discover what they are. Now, that's the way Mark operates.

Here is what Jesus did. And by watching what he did, we discover who he is. But Mark has a second purpose, of course, just as John does, and that is to get us to commit ourselves to Jesus.

And I like the way Mark does it. It seems to me that what Mark is saying, it's implied, it's not as direct as John's, but it seems to me what Mark is saying is, do you see what Jesus did? Do you see who he is? Do you see the great power and wisdom and love and authority by which he works? Let him go to work in your life and see what he'll do. If he did all that when he was here, can you imagine what he could do in your life if you would just let him? And I would begin in Mark chapter 2, where Jesus said to that paralytic man, Son, your sins are forgiven.

Wouldn't it be great to have him do that in your life now? To say to you, Son, your sins are forgiven. And then to say to you what he said to that paralyzed man. Whatever it is that has paralyzed your life, take up your bed and walk.

And release you from the bondage that has crippled your own life. Imagine what he could do in your life if you would commit yourself to him. Imagine what he could do through you.

And Mark allows us to see these men whom he called to be disciples and apostles. And particularly Peter. Ancient and rather reliable tradition tells us that the gospel of Mark is Mark's written record of Peter's preaching.

And you discover when Peter preached about what Jesus said and did, Peter doesn't spare himself. Other gospel writers aren't quite as hard on Peter as Peter is. But do you see what the Lord Jesus Christ could do in Peter? Do you see what he did through these men when he sent them out? Imagine what he could do through you.

If you would let him. And in this way, Mark is telling us commit yourself to Jesus as the Lord, the Christ, the Son of God. See what he'll do.

See what he'll do. Now, to come to our own chapter, we have to look at the background to it. What Mark is doing through this gospel, by what Jesus does, is leading up to a great climax in chapter 8. And in chapter 8, Peter makes his confession that Jesus is the Christ.

And that's what our Lord has been leading these men to for over two and a half years. It struck me like a thunderbolt when I discovered it was less than a year before the crucifixion that Peter made that confession. Patiently working with these men for two and a half years.

So they came to the clear realization this man Jesus of Nazareth is more than a prophet. He's more than a good man. He is not John the Baptist risen from the dead.

He's not Elijah come back. He is the Christ. And Mark is inviting us to take the same journey those men took and come to that same conclusion.

And everything Mark puts in the gospel up to that point is designed to lead us to that confession that Jesus is the Christ. At that point, the whole gospel story changes. And there are two primary changes at that point.

One is in our Lord's audience. He begins to concentrate on these twelve men. He is not so much out in the public anymore.

He is spending time on these twelve men. Now that they know who he is he is ready to train them very specifically for the ministry they are going to have once he returns to heaven. Not only does his audience change but his message changes.

Now he concentrates on the subject of his approaching death. And over and over again chapters 8, 9, and 10 he tries to get these men to realize now that you have discovered who I am don't go out and preach that because you don't have the whole story. I haven't come as you think.

I have not come to go into Jerusalem and take the throne of David. I have come on the contrary to go to Jerusalem and take a cross from Rome. And he began to teach why he had come.

The startling, unbelievable news to them that he had come to die. And you'll notice that change at the close of chapter 8. Once Peter has made his confession then the change comes and our Lord starts to tell them why he has come. That he has come to die.

Now what our Lord did in chapter 1 you find his miracles you find his power in various areas of life his power over nature, his power over disease his power over the demon world. And as a result of that great crowds come flocking around him. Eventually the crowds are going to become so great that he can't go into a village and preach.

He has to go out to the countryside. He has to get into a boat and push out from the shore so that the crowds can hear him so great as they become. And then in chapter 2 there is a dark, somber note that enters.

Strangely enough not everybody is happy with what he's doing. There are some people who set themselves against him end up hating him and in the opening verses of chapter 3 plotting to kill him how can it be? And you find that mixed reaction in chapter 3 people who are delighted with him and people who hate him and while some were coming to the realization that this man is the Christ there were others who came to the conclusion that he is a man controlled by Satan himself. How in the world can people come to those two opposite conclusions? And if I had been one of the disciples of the Lord Jesus I would have found that opposition impossible to comprehend.

So in chapter 4 our Lord starts his teaching ministry and he begins to teach his disciples why such a mixed reaction occurs to his good works. And you have that a parable of instruction in the parable of the sower and the seed. I really don't want to talk about that parable let me throw out a couple of ideas.

All of you know and I may have talked about this three years ago I don't remember now. So if I don't remember I'm sure you don't. But farming in first century Palestine farming in first century Palestine is quite different from farming in 20th century United States.

Anybody knows even I know and I'm a city boy even I know that you have to break up the ground first and then you plant the seed. I may plant it the wrong depth I may put it the wrong place but I do know you break up the ground first and then you put the seed in it. Isn't that right? First century Palestine, no.

You sow the seed and then you broke up the ground. That may seem stupid to us nevertheless that's the way they farm. So a farmer goes out and he sows his seed and then he comes along and puts the plow into it into the ground and as he's running that plow across the field where he has already sown the seed scrape goes the plow share and a few inches under the ground there's a layer of rock.

Nothing's going to grow there. He doesn't know that over in this portion of the field there is the seed of thistles and thorns and briars and weeds. He doesn't know that.

One thing he does know you better leave a pasture there where the people have been walking. When you were going down to the corner grocery store in first century Palestine you didn't jump in your car and destroy your heart. You walked.

You walked everywhere. And if you didn't want people trampling down your grain at the harvest time you left a path for them to walk. They'd already walked there.

You sowed seed and in that part of the field you didn't plow. And what happened to the seed that you had already sown there on that path? It was left there for the birds to pick up. And that's the story.

What is he saying in that story? Well, just to look at it from a farmer's point of view what in the world determines the harvest? Apart from the sunshine and the rain and the quality of the seed what determines the harvest? The kind of ground into which you put the seed. And that's what our Lord is saying. How do you explain people doing what they did in light of our Lord's ministry? It's the condition of the individual's heart that determines what happens to the words and the works of our Lord Jesus.

And so our Lord was giving a parable of instruction to his disciples. This is why some people follow. Some people follow until things get difficult and then they turn and leave as they did in John 6. This is why there is absolutely no response on the part of some people.

And this is why there are some who respond, take in the word of God. Oh yes, they understand it and they receive it. Fine, we understand that because he explained it to them.

And then our Lord turns with a word, a parable of warning to them. Well, wait a minute. I know you're disciples, I know that.

But I have something to say to you. And that parable of instruction is followed by a parable of warning. And then being the good teacher that he is, our Lord follows that with a parable of encouragement.

That parable of the automatic growth of the seed. He takes that great burden off us. We don't make the seed grow, we sow it.

And we may have the privilege of reaping the harvest. But that seed has life in itself and it must have been a tremendous word of encouragement to these men. But there is here the parable of warning.

It's a figure that our Lord uses on more than one occasion, a lamp that's brought into the home, a one-room home of a Palestinian peasant hut. Now when he lights that lamp and he brings it into the room, what does he do with it? Well, he doesn't put it under some sort of a house utensil, some cooking utensil, or some storage utensil so that nobody gets the benefit of it and the light goes out. No, there's a niche in the wall or there's a special holder for it and he puts that lamp in that niche or on that holder so that light shines through the whole room.

Now it seems to me in this context, our Lord is using that of his own parabolic ministry. And when he talked in parables, his purpose was not to conceal truth. His parables were like lit lamps to shine in the room to give light to people.

What do you remember easiest about a preacher's message? Are you willing to confess it? What do you remember most about a preacher's message? Oh, you're not willing to confess it. I know what it is. I've had to put up with it for years.

What is it you remember most? His story. And if his stories illustrate the point he is trying to get across, you will remember the point. If his stories are just stories to fill in time because he lost his notes, then you don't get the point, right? Our Lord told these stories because they stick in our minds.

And what I remember from my childhood in Sunday school class are the parables and miracles of our Lord. And he told these parables to get a point across, to shed light. Sometimes people don't see it immediately, but as they think about it, they'll see the point.

And that's why our Lord told these parables. So it seems to me in the context, this time he is using the figure of a lamp to describe his teaching ministry. It was light flooding a dark room.

Now let's suppose there is someone in that room when the lamp has been lit. The lamp has not been put under a bushel. It has not been hidden under a bed.

It's been put in that proper niche in the wall or on that lamp stand. Yet the person says, I don't see anything. Where's the problem? Yes, with the person.

Now our Lord is saying to his disciples the same thing he has said about the multitudes around them. What's wrong with the seed that is sown? Nothing. Then why is there no harvest? Because of the condition of the hearts of the people.

Here is my teaching ministry, the Lord Jesus is saying. It's like a light flooding a dark room. Why don't my disciples see it? Because there is something wrong with them.

What's wrong with them? Oh, very often the same thing that is wrong with the people who are not his disciples. Did you think that when you trusted Jesus Christ, such a tremendous transformation was made that there was no carryover from your unsaved days? If you believe that, you haven't talked with your wife lately. No, we carry many of the same characteristics as the non-Christians.

What did our Lord say to his disciples later on? Are your hearts also hardened? Same language he used of the non-Christians, the non-believers. Having ears, do you not hear? Having eyes, do you not see? I have lit this lamp. Don't you have eyes to see? I forget how my friend Paul Taylor puts it, but there's something about looking and not seeing.

It is possible to look and not see. He's an amateur taxidermist, and he gets his specimens lying along the roadside, birds particularly. And you can be driving with him down the roadside.

Did you see that bird lying beside the road? Good night? No, I didn't see a bird lying beside the road. I was looking, but I wasn't seeing. He was both looking and seeing.

It is possible to look without seeing. It is possible to hear without listening. Your children taught you that a long time ago, didn't they? That it's possible to hear without listening.

Perhaps your wife or your husband taught you the same lesson. It is possible to hear without listening. This is what our Lord is saying to his disciples.

You be careful. I have lit the lamp. Be sure that you see the light.

I am teaching you truth. Be sure you listen when you hear. How did you know when your child was listening when he heard? What was the difference between his merely hearing and his listening when he heard? What difference did you notice? He obeyed.

When he was listening, he did what you told. When he was only hearing, he didn't. When do disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ listen when they hear? When they do what he is saying.

And this is what our Lord is trying to teach them in this parable. Yes, you have responded. Yes, you were among the disciples.

That's true. But as a disciple, you must listen when you hear. You must see when you look.

What is the warning? If we do not do that, we will lose what we have. That's the warning. Oh, is that possible? Of course it's possible.

In high school, in my first two years of engineering, in high school, my favorite subject was math. Loved it. I got into geometry.

I thought I had already gone to heaven. Calculus. I could hardly wait to get the calculus class in college.

Understand now they're giving that in high school. We weren't that smart. We had to wait for college to get it.

I loved it. The other day, oh, it's been some time ago now, going through some old files, I ran across my first year calculus notebook. And I opened it to page one.

It might as well have been written in Sanskrit. That whole notebook was absolutely useless to me. Why? In the two years since I graduated, in all those years, I have never used it, and I lost it.

What you don't use, you lose. There is no way to escape that law. What you don't use, you lose.

And I have totally lost calculus. Completely. The only thing that saved me with my kids is they invented this new math, and I never had it.

So they don't know I don't even remember the old math. I used to say, well, I never had that. Go ask your brother, you know.

But I have lost the old math because I never used it. I took Latin in high school. I understand they don't even teach that anymore.

But I have lost Latin. No, no, the foreign language department now consists of English. But I have lost Latin because I never used it.

How do we lose God's truth? Same way. We don't use it. We don't keep God's truth by knowing it intellectually.

We don't keep God's truth by being able to repeat all the basic doctrines. I don't know anything that I am not using. I think I could safely say that would be a Jewish viewpoint.

I think from an Old Testament viewpoint, from a rabbinic viewpoint, no man knew anything of God's words that he wasn't obeying. The only truth from a biblical point of view that I know is truth that I am obeying. That's the problem James faced when he wrote his epistle.

People who knew what was true up here, but whose lives denied it. They did not know the truth, and they did not know God. I know only what I am obeying.

Anything I do not use, I lose. So the truth of the word of God, the light that God has lit in our lives, can be kept, can be seen only as we obey it. If you were to ask me, do you know dispensational truth? Intellectually I could say yes.

Do you know that Jesus Christ is coming for the church before the tribulation? Yes, I know that. The apostle John might come along to me and say, no you don't know that at all. Well of course I do.

No you don't. He that hath this hope set on him purifies himself even as he is healed. But it's before they do unto you, is that it? No, do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Something to that effect. Do you know that? Of course you know that. Or do you? Do I know that? Am I characterized by putting myself in the other person's place before I act? I have thought of husband and wife relationships.

I'm always harder on the husband than I am on the wife. But I have seen some husbands and their actions toward their wives. My first impulse was to wring their necks.

I thought better of it because that wasn't severe enough. But I have thought, suppose the roles were reversed. Is that the way you would like to be treated? I go into a restaurant.

I've never been a waiter. I have worked behind a counter. One of our daughters works in a department store.

And she talks about some of the customers. Absolutely impossible people. I don't know anybody more overlooked, maybe there are, I'm sure there are, than a waitress.

In a restaurant, she usually has a name tag on. And I wonder how many of us could tell what her name is once the meal is over. If you were a waitress, how would you like to be treated by the customer? I go into a restaurant, what am I thinking of? I'm not thinking of that waitress.

If I think of her, it's only what she can do for me. Do I ever go into a restaurant and sit down to a table with the idea, what can I do for this girl? Suppose I were in her shoes. Suppose I were the waitress.

How would I like these people at this table to treat me? And until I am thinking and acting that way, I don't know the golden rule at all. Yes, apply that up in the dining room at the lodge. If you were waiting on us, how would you like to be treated? If I do not put God's truth into practice, I will lose it.

I may discover one day when I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, that Jesus Christ himself will strip away from me everything I thought I had. Isn't that what he says here? He that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath. You lose what you do not use, and that includes the truth of God.

I know only what I obey. I believe, in the language of Dorothy Sears, only what I take for granted and act on. That's all I believe.

And so the strong warning of our Lord Jesus to his disciples, We lose what we do not use. Now, isn't that the glorious thing about him? That's Mark's gospel. What was our Lord doing? Putting truth into action.

That's what he was doing. How do you know he knew the word of God? Of course, apart from the fact he is his author. How do you know that he knew the word of God? You watch the way he lived.

How do you know that he knew the word of God and the Pharisees didn't? By what they said? No, theologically he was a Pharisee. He was not a Sadducee theologically. Theologically he was a Pharisee.

But he knew the word of God and they didn't. How do you know that? The difference in the way they lived. Now, that's what Mark is saying.

Look at him. Look at the way he lived. Look at what he did.

That's how you know who he is. Wouldn't it be great if people around us could know something of God's truth, not by what we say, but by what we do? Wouldn't that be great? And when that starts happening, oh, we will discover more and more is added to us. If you remember nothing else tonight, remember that statement, we lose what we do not use.

Let's pray. We thank you, our Father, for incarnate truth, our Lord Jesus Christ, the word of God. And we thank you in every word and deed we see that truth in action.

Help us, our Father, as we face your word to listen as we hear and to see as we look. Help us each to put into practice what you have taught us. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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