

1. You are sowing, is it bearing? Mark 4: 1-20

Here, in this parable, the sower is Jesus and the seed is the Word of God. The plant is you, and the types of soils are the kinds of hearts people have. Jesus is constantly sowing the word but was not deceived. He knew the human heart and wanted us to learn about it from the parable. This parable is definitely about making disciples.

The first heart did not even take the Word of God in. With the first heart, the problem was not Satan taking away the Word of God, but that the heart was hard, thus the Word of God never went in. Hence Satan took it away. The second heart allowed the Word of God to go in, rejoiced for a short while but never allowed the roots to develop. Jesus says there will be persecution, but this heart was not ready for it. And so the plant died. The third type of heart is where the seed grows but then riches and desires choke up the plant. Only the fourth kind of heart produced fruit.

Discuss the nature of the heart. If it is the first kind, then sin has hardened it, the solution is to confess in a deep level. If they are scared of persecution, then encourage them to stand strong in the Lord. Also have a quiet time with them. If they are struggling with riches and desires, then help them to repent and trust God with their life. If their heart is like the good soil, then ask them the question -How seriously have they taken the challenge of Fruit and Vine in 99? Let us not get deceived by just seeing a plant, but let us ask the question, "Is it bearing fruit?"

2. What is concealed will be revealed Mark 4: 21-23

Jesus is the light that came into the world. We never take a lamp (Light) and put it under a bed. Jesus (being the light) lived his life openly. He had no hidden agendas, secretly storing up great wealth or having two lives - private and public. When people saw Jesus, they saw Jesus. He never had double standards. Since Jesus is the light, our dark deeds will be exposed. This is one reason why many don't want to study the Bible. The truth is, that nobody escapes from the light of God. Either our dark secrets get revealed on earth, thereby we get a chance to Repent, or our dark deeds will be revealed on the day of judgement and hence we receive the due punishment. Have you gotten involved in any dark sins? Are your eyes pure? Are you listening to foul language and entertaining them in your heart? Is your speech pleasing or disturbing? Are there sins of the heart that you need to talk about? (Share) Jesus promises us that if we confess our sins he will cleanse us and make us new.

3. What not used will be taken away Mark 4: 24-25

Jesus is emphasizing listening. He wants us to pay careful attention to what he says. Jesus gives a strange teaching about receiving and losing. He says the one who has will be given more and the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. This is strange teaching and does not seem acceptable. Why should Jesus give more to one who already has, and worse, take away the little that another has? This particular teaching of Jesus centered upon accepting or being skeptical about Jesus. We must understand and acknowledge that Jesus is God. What God says and does is always true and

right. Sometimes, because of our unbelief or hard heart, we doubt or reject Jesus and his teaching. For example, the Jews, though they worshipped the true God and read the scriptures, rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Since they rejected Jesus, what little they had (their grand temple) was also taken away (destroyed by the Romans in 70AD). With Jesus, it is all or nothing. Whatever talents, skills, and bible knowledge we have, let us put into practice and God will give us even more. Remember, whatever we have, it is given to us to bring him glory.

4. What is sown will be known Mark 4: 26-29

Jesus gives another illustration about the kingdom of God (The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven are the same. Generally in the New testament Kingdom stands for Church). Here, a man scatters seeds, and without his knowledge -whether night or day- the seed sprouts, grows and produces grain. Once the grain is ripe, they are cut. Jesus is talking about the Power of God's word. We may be weak, not fully understanding all the bible doctrines, but the Word of God by itself can influence people. Whenever we invite people and share the word we need to rejoice. Some may become a Christian in 6 days. Some may take 6 years. (Share: I want to share about a sister Soumia, who now lives in Bahrain. 6 years ago she came to our Church, but she did not become a disciple. Raja kept persevering with her, sent her the Sunday sermons, sent her e-mails, they also had phone conversations. And after 6 years, Soumia came all the way from Bahrain just to study the Bible and get baptized. Raja never saw Soumia changing. But the Word of God was producing the change in Soumia.) We have several disciples who have stopped coming to church. We should never give up. We should make those phone calls, write e-mails, send Sunday sermons through WhatsApp or share the Good news that is happening in the Kingdom. God's Word will always make an impact. We just don't know when the harvest is ready. When we sow the Word of God in Love, it will be seen and known in people's eyes.

5. What is smallest becomes the largest Mark 4: 30-34

Here, once again, Jesus talks about a mustard seed. When sown, it grows and becomes the greatest plant. A true Church will grow. Our movement 'The International Christian Church' was planted by 42 disciples, who came out from Portland. In 10 years, the 42 disciples have grown to over 5,000 disciples in 76 churches, in 31 nations, on all 6 populated continents of the world. We literally have brothers and sisters all over the world. All glory to God.

There is an interesting statement that Jesus makes. He talks about the mustard seed growing with big branches that the birds can land or sit on. If you have seen a mustard plant, then you know that there is no way that the birds can sit on its branches, because the branches cannot bear its weight. Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament.

In Ezekiel 17: 22-24, we find the phrase in verse 23. God was talking about how He will take a shoot and plant it in Israel, and it will produce branches where birds of every kind can find rest in their shade. In effect, Jesus was saying that he was that shoot and that he would provide shelter, solace, and peace to all mankind. What an awesome God we serve, who wants to protect us and give us the best. Let us decide to always run to him when we are anxious or fearful or simply need rest.

6. What is terrified can be modified Mark 4: 35-41

Jesus and his disciples were planning to go to the other side of the lake in a boat. Jesus, probably tired, was sleeping on a cushion, suddenly a storm broke out and the waves started break over the boat. The disciples were afraid and woke up Jesus. Jesus calmed the storm and asked the waves to be still. He then asked his disciples why they lacked faith. In our day to day life we face several storms. Sometimes, we are unable to pay our rent, have proper meals, provide proper food and education for kids; go through sleepless nights, fights with the spouse, suddenly losing jobs, or people treating us badly- and we get terrified. We must remember that God is with us. When Jesus got baptized, God sent the Holy Spirit. And when we got baptized, God sent the same Holy Spirit to reside in us. When we go through troubled and terrified times in our lives, we must remember that God is with us, the Holy Spirit within us and that the situation can be modified if we trust in God, irrespective of the outcome. So whether in good times or in bad times, whether in plenty or in need, let us keep in mind nothing is hidden from God's sight and nothing is outside God's control.