

## BRIARCLIFF CHURCH

### Small Group Study Guide: Mark

Week of October 28th (Week 11)

Mark 4:1-20



### Sermon Overview

In Mark 4, we see the Gospel's first use of parables. The word "parable" means something that is placed alongside something else. The most common subject of Jesus' parables is the kingdom of God. Jesus illustrated his kingdom using episodes from everyday life — fishing, farming, housekeeping and family life. Jesus' parables required of his hearers no special knowledge or vocabulary to understand. However, many of Jesus' parables are confounding, knocking hearers off balance so that they must see things in a new light. Therefore, parables are not simply good advice, they are good news.

The parable of the sower is more than a metaphor of conditions of the human heart. The parable represents the historical in-breaking of God's kingdom in Jesus, the sower of the gospel. The astounding harvest in v. 8 is an important clue that the growth is not owing to human activity but to God's providential power. God is at work — hidden and unobserved — in Jesus and the gospel to produce a yield wholly disproportionate to human prospect and merit. Despite discouraging odds, the harvest of Jesus' ministry will be beyond compare.

[\*Listen to recent sermons\*](#)

[\*Visit Mark Resource Page\*](#)

### Getting Started

1. This passage is a familiar parable for many people. Regardless of its familiarity, jot down and share some initial thoughts of your reaction to this story Jesus tells in Mark 4:3-9.

### Starting with God

2. As we've seen already in Mark's gospel, Jesus' disposition toward crowds of people is different than toward individuals or small groups of people. How do you see this same reality playing out in Mark 4:1-20.

## Living God's Word

3. The parable in Mark 4:3-9 begins and ends with the command Jesus gives everyone to "listen!" Why is this such an important bookend to this parable? How does Jesus' command help to guide the understanding of this (and possibly other) parables?
  
4. The parable tells of a sower that spreads seed on different types of soil: hard-packed, rocky, thorn-laden and good soil. These soil types were readily understandable to the people listening to Jesus. The astonishing portion for the original hearers was the reported harvest – up to a hundredfold! What do you find surprising about this situation?
  
5. Mark 4:11-12 introduces a transition in setting. Jesus is now alone with his twelve disciples. They understandably question his use of parables and the potential for confusion. Jesus *seems* to say he intends to confuse!
  
6. Given the actions of Jesus as the sower in this parable, how are we to spread the seeds of the gospel today? What considerations should we take into consideration? Should God's sovereign purpose and redemption of his people give us pause in sharing the gospel?

## Prayer

*Father God,  
Thank you for breaking into our broken world with the message of your gospel. Please grow in me the fruit of your Spirit and let it be contagious and attractive to everyone around me that they may know you and love you.  
Amen.*