

5

The Jesus Identity

Studies in Mark's Gospel

Starter

What's your favourite parable?

What is it about parables that makes them 'work' for people?

The word 'parable' literally means a 'saying thrown down alongside'. It is like a proverb that just sits next to us in life, rubbing up against us—sometimes annoying, sometimes comforting, always provoking us to think and evaluate.

Read Mark 4:1-34

There are 5 parables in this passage. Read each one and decide upon an appropriate title for each—try to be original! In the second column, identify the topic each parable addresses.

	Your Title for the Parable	What topic does this parable address?
Mk 4:3-9, 13-20		
Mk 4:21-23		
Mk 4:24-25		
Mk 4:26-29		
Mk 4:30-32		

Going Deeper

1. Jesus directly identifies the topic of the first (v11), fourth (v26) and fifth (v30) parables and so it's likely that the second and third parables are related in some way. How might the second and third parables address this topic?

.....

2. (*Optional*) The prophets of the Old Testament had great hopes for the future kingdom God would establish. What does each of the following passages expect will happen?:

- Daniel 2:44
- Daniel 7:13-14
- Daniel 7:17-18, 26-27
- Daniel 12:1-4

What are some other 'kingdom expectations' that arise from the Old Testament? See

The people of Israel knew that God had promised a future time when all the troubles of life—in particular, political enemies and the sinful behaviour of the people—would be done away with. Then God's people would rule forever in a glorious kingdom in which God himself would have an undefiled and open relationship with his people.

It was usually thought of as far off, distant, at the end of time. The Old Testament was always vague about the timing, using the term "in that day, the day of the Lord" (the day of judgment) or "at the end". This is why Jesus' declaration that the Kingdom was arriving was so radical.

Do you identify yourself with the sower or the soils in this parable?

What difference does this make to your understanding of the parable?

3. What does the first parable (Mk 4:3-9, 13-30) say about the expected range of responses to Jesus' declaration of the Kingdom's arrival?

.....

4. Following in Jesus' footsteps, Christians are also messengers of the Kingdom. How does this parable 'take the pressure off' Christians? How might it lead them to prayer?

.....

5. Look back over Mk 4:21-23. What does it have to say about Jesus ministry of announcing the Kingdom?

.....

The lesson of the second parable is reinforced by the third (Mk 4:24-25). It is both a promise and a warning. As the Kingdom is openly declared, those with some understanding and faith will be given more, but those who harden their hearts to the message will be even more in the dark.

6. Look now at the fourth parable in Mk 4:26-29. What does this show us about the Kingdom? What does it lead you to expect about the Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaims?

.....

How do these parables shape your view of the church?

How do they impact your expectations of the way your friends will respond to the gospel?

7. Look now at the final parable in verses 30-32. What does it lead us to expect about the Kingdom of God? How is this an encouragement when it appears that few are responding to the message of Jesus?

.....

8. (*Optional*) Jesus taught only in parables (Mk 4: 34). Why does Jesus teach in parables (see Mk 4:10-12)? Turn up Isaiah 6:9-10 from the Old Testament—how does the context of this passage help to inform our understanding of why Jesus 'concealed' his teaching in parables?