**Mark’s Gospel:**

**Witness to the Son of God - #4**

**The Parables of the Gospel of Mark, Part 2**

**The Parables of Jesus listed in the Gospel of Mark**

1. The Parable of the Cloth and Wineskins ([Mark 2:21-22](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark2:21))
2. The Parable of the Strong Man ([Mark 3:23-27](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark3:23))
3. The Parable of the Sower ([Mark 4:3-8](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:3))
4. The Parable of the Lamp ([Mark 4:21-25](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:21))
5. The Parable of the Seed that Grows Itself ([Mark 4:26-29](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:26))
6. The Parable of the Mustard Seed ([Mark 4:30-32](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:30))
7. The Parable of Clean and Unclean ([Mark 7:14-23](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark7:14))
8. The Parable of Salt ([Mark 9:49-50](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark9:49))
9. The Parable of the Tenants ([Mark 12:1-9](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark12:1))
10. The Parable of the Fig Tree ([Mark 13:28-31](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark13:28)

**Why did Jesus teach in parables? The Kingdom of God …**

The kingdom of God was a common topic in the Jewish prayers even before the time of Jesus. It means the reign or sovereignty of God as King. It is contrasted with the kingdom of the worldly powers. The hope that God will be King over all the earth, when all idolatry will be banished, is expressed in prophecies and in songs (Exod 15, 18; Zech 14:9; Isa 24 23; Micah 4:7; Ps 29:10), and emphasized in the later Psalms (93-99). God's Kingdom is spoken of in Psalms 22:29, Obadiah 21, and Daniel 3, the most impressive Song of the Three Holy Children. The words "*The Lord shall be King*" are translated in the Targum, "*The Kingdom of God shall be revealed*"; and the ancient prayer that "*God may establish His Kingdom speedily*.”

**The Kingdom of God on earth**

The Kingdom of God, however, in order to be established on earth, requires recognition by man; that is, to use the common phrase among Jews who keep the Law: man must "take upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of God" ("'***Ol Malkut Shamayim***"), Kingdom of Heaven. "Heaven" is a synonym of "God." This the Israelites do daily when reciting the [Shema'](http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13548-shema)  “*Hear O Israel…*”, etc., so do the angels when singing their "Thrice Holy”; and in the future “all men shall take upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of God when casting away their idols.” Accordingly, says the Midrash (Cant. R. 2: 12), "when the Kingdom of Rome has ripened enough to be destroyed, the Kingdom of God will appear."

Upon the Red Sea, Israel first sang the praise of God's Kingdom (Exodus Rabbah and Targum to Ex. 15: 19), and at Mount Sinai they accepted the yoke of God's Kingdom, the Law, just as Abraham did according to late tradition (Book of Jubilees, 12:19).

**Old prayer**

The prayer [***Abinu Malkenu***](http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/323-abinu-malkenu) – Our Father, our King, we have no King except You” – may be among the oldest Jewish prayers:

*“May the great Name of God be exalted and sanctified, throughout the world, which he has created according to his will. May his Kingship be established in your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetime of the entire household of Israel, swiftly and in the near future; and say, Amen.*

*May his great name be blessed, forever and ever.*

*Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, honored elevated and lauded be the Name of the holy one, Blessed is he above and beyond any blessings and hymns, Praises and consolations which are uttered in the world; and say Amen. May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life, upon us and upon all Israel; and say, Amen.*

*Our father our king, hear our voice  
Our father our king, we have sinned before you  
Our father our king, Have compassion upon us  
and upon our children.*

**Did Jesus teach the same about the kingdom?**

Jesus teaches in parables almost like a short story.

First: In the parables there is no reference to the Law as the “yoke of the kingdom.” In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word ***masal/mashal***is used to describe the familiar as basis for the uncommon or the unfamiliar. So the “kingdom of God” is like not what it is, but [*described specifically that*] it is like this or that; something common that humans can relate to.

When Jesus' disciples asked why He taught them in parables, He told them,

*"The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside everything comes in parables ...*([Mark 4:11](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:11)).

**What put some outside the Kingdom is the Law.**

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:27), Jesus outlines the primary attributes of people who receive the rule of the Kingdom that Jesus brings. Nine direct references to “the kingdom” are in this sermon, calling for: humility (5:3), willingness to suffer persecution (5:10), earnest attention to God’s commandments (5:19), refusal to substitute false life for genuinely right life (5:20), a life of prayer (6:10, 13), the spiritual over material values (6:33), and above all, acknowledging Christ’s lordship as the Messiah who came to reveal will of God (7:21).

**The Yoke is Jesus Himself**

The Yoke of the Kingdom is not the Law but is Jesus himself,

“*For My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matt 11:30)

(In the Coptic translation “*My yoke is sweet*.”)

The Yoke is a piece of wood that is put on two oxen,



So that both together can pull a plow and drag a cart. So we can read the promise:

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.”* (Matt11: 29)

**Jesus** gives neither definition nor explanation of the kingdom but he used flexible and different words. It (the Kingdom) is a dynamic thing, “near” or “at hand” ([Mark 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%201.15)) and parallels what is the hope of kings and prophets of old ([Matt 13.16f](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2013.16f)/[Luke 10.23f](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2010.23f)). It is to be entered, sometimes with difficulty, or to be in, both now ([Mark 10:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2010.23-5) and parallels, [Matt 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2021.31), [Matt 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2011.11)/[Lk 7:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%207.28)) and in the future ([Mark 9:47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%209.47)/[Matt 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2018.9), [Mark 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2014.25) and parallels [Matt 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%208.11)/[Luke 13:28-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2013.28-9)). The Kingdom is a possession to receive, that belongs to poor and the broken, that is to be sought after ([Mark 10:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2010.14-15) and parallels [Matt 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%205.3)/[Luke 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%206.20), [Matt 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%206.33)/[Luke 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2012.31), [Mark 13:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2013.44-46)). It is present, hidden, and grows in secret, and is future and comes in power ([Mark 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%204.31) and parallels [Matt 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2013.33)/[Luke 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2013.21), [Mark 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%209.1) and parallels [Luke11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke11.2)/[Matt 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%206.10)).

All of these words are descriptive.

In what sense was the Kingdom “near” or “present,” and in what sense was it “future”? Could it be both? Jesus teaches that the kingdom had come in his ministry, and he also expects it in the near future. How could it be both?

Contrary to the prevailing understanding of his time, the Law is not central and in fact received a critical outlook in at least two parables, the parables of the Prodigal son and the Good Samaritan

Jesus sees the kingdom present in his victory over Satan expressed in exorcisms ([Luke 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2010.18), and especially [Matt 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2012.28)/[Luke 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2011.20)).

In [Matt 12.28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2012.28)/[Luke 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2011.20), the Greek **ephthasen**means that “the basileia” – Kingdom –“has come into your very midst; it is already touching you.” This points to Jesus himself. And although he insists that the kingdom is “either here, or it is not yet here” (that is, it cannot be present and future), and that for the disciples it is “not yet here, not even in its beginnings,” yet he concedes in the face of [Luke 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2017.20) (**he basileia tou theou entos humon estin**) that “the decisive beginnings of the rule of God are already present in their (the Pharisees’) midst.” Whatever the meaning of **entos humon**(most probably “amongst you” rather than “within you,” it seems that the emphasis is on the present reality of hidden and manifest Son of God.

In the end, these textual and exegetical criticisms are over-shadowed by the central theological one: Jesus rules as the Messiah the king who has the kingdom as seen in the miracles and in his teaching.

**The Parable of the Cloth and Wineskins –** [**Mark 2:21-22**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark2:21)

This parable that Jesus is telling came after the Pharisees came and asked him a question about fasting. They wanted to know why the disciples of John the Baptist fasted, but the disciples of Jesus did not. Jesus explained to them that the disciples of John fasted because John was dead. However, His disciples didn’t need to fast because He was still on earth with them. He then goes into the parable.

The message of both the cloth and the wineskin are the same message of patching up the old with the new. This mixing of the old and the new does not work.

Jesus uses the example of putting a new piece of cloth on old garment. When your parents were younger they use to have their jeans patched, usually on the knees. Look at your jeans that are made out of heavy denim material; imagine if you had an unwanted hole in the knee and your mom patched it with a piece of new light weight cotton that looks like denim. The tear becomes worse than it was.

**The Parable of the Strong Man – Mark 3:27**

*In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.*

The parable as echoing the [Book of Isaiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Isaiah)

*Can plunder be taken from warriors,  
or captives rescued from the fierce?  
But this is what the LORD says:  
"Yes, captives will be taken from warriors,  
and plunder retrieved from the fierce;  
I will contend with those who contend with you,  
and your children I will save. (*[*Isaiah 49:24–25*](http://www.biblica.com/en-us/bible/online-bible/?osis=niv:Isaiah.49:24%E2%80%9325:24)*)*

**Jesus’ Warning –** [**Mark 4:24-25**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:24)

*He also told them, “Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you, and still more will be given to you. To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”*

This teaching addresses the consequences of “hearing” for in Hebrew the verb “to hear” means also “to obey.” Consider: “*To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."*

1. If we have anything we protect it and it grows.

2. But if we think that we have nothing, what we have will erode and because of our attitude we are bound to waste it because we have no knowledge of its value.

**A note from Philemon**

**A child, not a sinner**

Our Lord told us not to magnify our burden to the extent that we forget the grace of God. Say not “I am a sinner,” but say, “I am a child of God in Jesus Christ his only Son.” You are a sinner if you are not in Jesus your Savior.

**The Parable of the Seed that Grows Itself (**[**Mark 4:26-29**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:26)**)**

***26****He said, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land****27****and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how.****28****Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.****29****And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."*

This "Kingdom parable" is told only in Mark's Gospel, and it may be recalled by St. James in [James (5:7-9](http://www.usccb.org/bible/james5:7)). The focus of the parable is the seed's power to sprout and grow "of its own accord" after the sower has liberally scattered his seed. It is a mystery to the farmer how this happens, and the farmer cannot control the growing process. In this modern age, scientists can provide chemicals to increase the yield and can describe what happens in seed germination and growth, but the root cause of germination and growth still remains a mystery:

1. We can’t hurry up the growth of humans.
2. More importantly, it is not our job.
3. In the Bible "the harvest” is a biblical image for the Last Judgment. (See Joel 4:13; [Matt 13:39-43](http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew13:39); [Rev 14:14-15](http://www.usccb.org/bible/revelation14:14).)
4. The growth of the Kingdom of God is a divine act of grace that is beyond human understanding. St. Paul will refer the work of grace when he writes about his work and the work of a fellow laborer for the Gospel:

*I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth* ([1 Cor 3:6-7](http://www.usccb.org/bible/1corinthians3:6)).

**The Parable of the Mustard Seed** [**Mark 4:30-34**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/mark4:30)

***4:30****He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it?****31****It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.****32****But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."****33****With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to understand it.* ***34****Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.*

Jesus uses words describing the idea of “magnified” in describing the mustard seed as the smallest of seeds and its plant in full growth as the largest of plants (a mustard plant could grow as high as 8-12 feet).

Jesus is telling the little group around him that they are like the mustard seed, the small beginnings of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and its future expansion to encompass the whole earth, sheltering all who come to dwell in the household of Jesus that is the Church.

The allusion to the kingdom becoming so large that birds of the sky come and dwell in the shade of its branches is probably a reference to the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in which he saw a huge tree that sheltered "birds of the sky" and other animals ([Dan 4:7](http://www.usccb.org/bible/daniel4:7)).

Daniel interpreted the tree and the animals to represent Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and the many different peoples over whom he ruled. The comparison is that the Kingdom of Jesus Christ will be even greater than the Kingdom of the Babylonians (also see [Dan 9:17-19](http://www.usccb.org/bible/daniel9:17)).

**A note from Philemon**

**Do not enlarge your self**

“Brother, despair is the product of pride, and those who think that they are a mighty tree [must] accept to be a mustard seed. The more we enlarge our self, the more we arrive at the edge of the pit, for we are nothing. But if you are a zero but next to the Lord the true source of your life you are a 10. If you think that you are 10 without the Lord, you may become a zero.”

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