# The Seed, the Storm, and the Sovereign Savior

**by Harrison Conley**

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If you have a Bible, Mark 4. Mark's Gospel, chapter 4. If you haven't been here over the last few weeks, we're in the midst of a series. Sixteen weeks going through the book of Mark. This morning, we are in Mark 4. As you find your place there, let me just start by saying this. In the life of a believer, Jesus doesn't only teach us truth, but He also allows moments that test whether or not we actually believe that truth. Mark 4 is one of those moments.

Before we begin to read this morning, before we zoom in, I want to just kind of give you a quick overview of the chapter, because what we'll find is that Mark is very intentional about what he includes in this chapter and where he places it in the chapter. So, here's a quick overview. The chapter opens with Jesus, and He's teaching the multitudes on the seashore. The Bible says that the crowd grows so large that Jesus actually has to get into a boat and push out a little way from the shore. He begins to teach using the water as a natural amphitheater so His voice will carry to the crowd. Mark says that Jesus begins to teach the people using parables.

Now, biblically speaking, a parable is a short, simple story that's drawn from everyday life. The point of a parable is to reveal deep spiritual truth about the kingdom of God. Here in Mark 4, Jesus tells four parables or four stories, all with a similar underlying truth. But then, after the teaching, after the parables, after the stories, after the crowds begin to disperse, Jesus turns to His disciples, and says, "Hey, boys, let's get in the boat and go to the other side." So, they all get into the boat. They push out into the water when suddenly Mark records that a storm arises.

Now, make no mistake, this chapter is not about Jesus giving a nice devotional on farming and then accidentally running into bad weather. No, everything in this chapter is intentional. Everything in this chapter is formation. What we're going to see is actually discipleship under pressure. Hear me, what you hear in the stillness will always be tested in motion. What you believe in theory will eventually be tested in reality.

This morning, if you're taking notes and you'd like to write down a title, I'd like to simply speak to you from the subject and the topic, The Seed, the Storm, and the Sovereign Savior. They all start with the letter S. I worked very hard on that. I hope you appreciate it. We're going to make our way through the chapter today, but I want to begin where Mark begins. He begins with the seed.

Again, if you're taking notes, maybe just write this down. This is sort of a framework statement for us as we move forward today. Here's the statement: What you hear shapes what you become. What you hear shapes what you become. So Jesus gets into the boat, begins to teach the crowds, and He opens this sermon, this first teaching, with the Word. Mark 4:3 records that first word for us. The word is "Listen!" Listen. Not "consider," not "reflect." He says, "Listen." You'll notice in your Bible that there is an emphasis there because there's an exclamation point at the end of that word, "Listen!" Why is there an emphasis here? Because what you hear shapes what you become. In hearing—real hearing is never passive.

Think about a high school football coach. You are there in the locker room. You are listening to him lay out the game plan. Some of you, I'm taking you back to your playing days. You're like, "Put me in, coach." But you're there in the locker room. He's laying out the game plan. You can hear it, and you can nod along with the coach. You can even repeat back to him the play that he's calling. But the real question is this: Are you going to be able to run and apply the play when the pressure hits? The reason I bring that up is because I think that's exactly what Jesus is getting at in Mark 4.

Now, I've sat with this passage for the last couple of weeks. If I'm honest, at first, I didn't know even how to preach this message because it seemed like it's just a bunch of unrelated, isolated, unique parables thrown together with this random storm at the end. But the more that I've sat with this chapter, the more I've realized Mark is actually very intentional about how it's all arranged and that there's nothing random or unique or isolated here. Each parable actually builds upon the last, sort of like steps in a progression or steps on a ladder. And together, they are all moving us forward toward one moment.

Again, sort of quick overview, what we are going to see is that Jesus begins by teaching us how the Word is received. Then He begins to teach about how that Word is handled. Then He shows us how the kingdom grows beyond our control. And finally, He teaches us that something that starts small actually can become really powerful. Then, once that foundation is laid, Jesus leads His disciples forward into a real-world situation where everything that He's just taught them and everything that they've just heard is going to be tested under pressure.

Let me maybe say it like this. The parables prepare the disciples for the storm, but the storm reveals whether or not the parables were truly heard. Before Jesus ever leads His disciples out onto open water, fully aware that a storm is going to arise, He teaches them how the kingdom works. Not because Jesus is going to cause the storm, but because He knows the storm is actually going to reveal what they've heard and what they believe.

Jesus starts here in Mark 4 with the parable about reception. He talks about the seed and the sower. My plan today, just so that we're all on the same page—I want to touch on each of these parables, but I'm going to spend the lion's share of the time on this first one because Jesus goes on to say that understanding the first parable here is actually the key to understanding all the rest of them. Here's where we begin in Mark 4:3–9 NKJV. Jesus says,

> 3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." 9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Now, most of us have heard this parable taught a time or two. If you read ahead in verses 13–20, Jesus is actually going to explain these parables in full. But here's sort of the cheat sheet for us this morning. Jesus is going to tell us that the seed is the Word of God and that the soil is actually a picture of the state of our hearts. The greater point that He is communicating is this: that the seed, the Word—it's good.

The seed, the Word, it always does what it's intended to do. The Word, the seed, is always true. The problem is never the seed. The problem is never the Word. The problem, however, sometimes is the soil. If you're anything like me, for a long time, as I've read through this parable, I thought it was only about salvation, as if Jesus is sort of dividing the world into two sections, right? Believers and unbelievers, good soil and bad soil.

But Jesus is doing something deeper. I think in some contexts, this certainly applies to believers and unbelievers, but in His truest context, I believe He's talking about you, and He's talking about me. He's talking about believers. He's talking about how our hearts actually respond to truth over time. Let me maybe say it like this: Soil is not a fixed category. Soil is actually a living condition. Which means this, you can actually be genuinely saved and still have a hardened heart in a particular season of your life.

Listen, hard soil doesn't always look like rebellion. Sometimes, hard soil looks like familiarity. Sometimes it looks like routine. Where we can come to church, but we've heard it all before. Or we can walk through those doors because it's what we're supposed to do on a Sunday. It's part of the Christian handbook. So, we come in out of routine, and we check the box. We stand in worship, but we have heard that song before.

We sit under the Word, but we've heard that verse before. We have sat through this sermon and our bodies are here present, but our hearts are unprepared. The preacher can stand up and faithfully sow the Word, but it only hits the surface of our heart, never penetrating. Because over time, what happens?

Familiarity creates resistance, not because the Word has lost its power, but because our hearts have stopped expecting encounter. That's why cultivating our hearts doesn't start when the music begins on a Sunday morning. Cultivating our hearts starts long before we ever get up for church. Long before we ever step into the room, it starts with our daily devotion. Church, if we don't intentionally soften our hearts through prayer, repentance, and a hunger for the Word, we can come to church. We can sit in the seats. We can sit under the living truth and still leave unchanged. Think about natural soil. Natural soil doesn't prepare itself in the moment of sowing. No, it has to be prepared. So too is the soil of our own hearts. It must intentionally be cultivated before the seed ever hits the ground.

Jesus goes on and says, "Not all soil is hard. Actually, some soil is shallow." Shallow soil doesn't mean fake faith; it means unformed faith. There could be joy. There could be emotion. There could even be tears in worship. The Word is received quickly, but it never gets deeply rooted. In other words, sometimes when obedience costs us something, or when following Jesus becomes inconvenient, or when the pressure of the world is threatening our comfort, the Word within us begins to wither. Not because the Word wasn't true, but because it never had room to grow deep into our hearts. Let me maybe say it like this. Shallow soil looks like faith that lives on Sunday but then disappears on Monday; a faith that responds to atmosphere but struggles with everyday endurance. That is shallow soil.

Then Jesus talks about another condition of the heart. He talks about thorny soil. The truth is, this one might be the most dangerous of them all. Because on the surface, it doesn't look resistant. It looks busy. It looks productive. It looks full. But Jesus would explain it like this in Mark 4:19 NKJV. If you have your Bible open, you can look at it. He's talking about thorny soil. He says,

> [19] "And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

Now, the phrase that jumps out at me when I read that is when Jesus says, "The desires for other things," other things. I'm convinced these can actually be good things, busy things, necessary things. Things like family, things like work, things like responsibilities, things like schedules or bills or news cycles. However, if we're honest, we look around, and it's endless input. Jesus makes it clear. It's not that the Word is rejected; it's that it gets crowded. There's no intentional resistance to the Word. It just gets crowded out by constant distraction.

Let me explain it like this. I don't know, parents, if this ever happened to you. The other night, my wife and I were sitting down. We are having a conversation, when one of our sons walked in. He didn't seem to care that my wife and I were talking. He just began to talk, and he began to talk about whatever was on his mind in that particular moment.

I was just thinking, "How rude is this? But he just began to talk, talk, talk. Then two minutes later, one of our other sons walks in and starts doing the exact same thing, talking about whatever's on his mind. Now I have two kids talking, babbling, talking about things that don't even matter, and I can't follow along.

At the same point, my wife is still talking. Then my third son walks in, and he does the same exact thing. All of a sudden, I'm getting so frustrated because there are so many voices. I can't hear my wife anymore, and I forgot what we were talking about in the first place. Any other parents, has this ever happened to you? I look at that, and I smile, but then I also look at it, and I frown because I realize sometimes in our life, the same thing happens with our relationship with God.

Because honestly, I'm trying to hear His voice. I want God to speak to me. But at the same time, I've also have my phone out checking the scores, checking my emails, and checking the news. Suddenly, there are so many different voices, so many different notifications, so many different headlines, opinions, and expectations all vying for my attention that I can't even hear the voice of God anymore.

Again, these aren't even necessarily sinful things. There are just too many things all competing for the same space. What happens is slowly and quietly, God's voice and His Word gets choked. Not by rebellion, but by overload. The Word doesn't get rejected; it gets crowded out.

Then Jesus talks about one more condition of the heart. He talks about good soil. Good soil—not flawless soil, not impressive soil, but prepared soil. Good soil is receptive, meaning that it listens to the Word with expectation, not with familiarity, not with an attitude that says, "I've already heard this before." Good soil is rooted, meaning that the Word is allowed to go deep. Listen, that only happens in our life through prayer, through obedience, through repentance, and through time. Good soil is patient, meaning that it doesn't rush growth, and it doesn't demand immediate results. It actually trusts what God is doing beneath the surface.

Again, the key here with good soil, it's not a one-time decision. If you want good cultivated soil in your life, it's not a one-time decision. It's a daily posture. It's a daily cultivation of a heart that's ready to receive. It's a heart that keeps showing up, even when growth feels slow. It's a heart that keeps yielding, even when obedience to His Word costs us something. It's a heart that keeps making room, cutting back on those different things, those different voices that compete with God's voice, so that the Word can grow within us and breathe and bear fruit.

Let me say it like this: Good soil doesn't ask, "How little can I do and still grow?" Just pause—but if that's not a picture of our world, if that's not a picture of consumer Christianity in America today. "What's the least I can do and still be called a Christian? What's the least I can do and still get God's blessing?" Good soil doesn't ask, "What's the minimum I can do here?" Good soil says, "What's currently in my heart that needs to be removed so that God can do more?" And over time, quietly and faithfully, that kind of heart, it produces fruit, fruit that remains. Then Jesus ends this parable with a warning and with an invitation. Mark 4:9 NKJV, if you have your Bible: He says,

> [9] And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" In other words, not everyone who hears Jesus is actually listening, and not every believer is going to be receptive in every season. So, the question actually becomes, "How do we apply this? How do we make sure that our hearts are receptive soil?" I think it starts with us taking an honest inventory of our lives and going, "What does my heart look like?" Asking ourselves, looking in the mirror and saying, "Lord, what does the soil of my heart look like today?"

Letting other people, trusted voices in our life, ask us, "Where's your heart at? How's your soul? How's the soil of your heart?" Maybe take a moment and even ask yourself, "Holy Spirit, reveal to me, what's the current condition of my heart?" As He speaks to us, we need to be brave enough to actually make those shifts to cultivate our hearts into a posture that can receive and then apply God's Word. Again, if you don't know what shifts need to be made, you don't know how to make those shifts, like I said, ask the Holy Spirit. He's the one who leads and guides us into all truth, and He's always speaking.

"Holy Spirit, what is it in my life that needs to shift and change?" Then ask other people around you, trusted voices, men and women of a good reputation, mature believers, people who have been there, done that, got the t-shirt, people who have your best interest at heart and want to see you become the person God's called you to be. Give them access. Let them hold you accountable. "What in my heart do you think needs to change? What are you seeing in my life right now that's not in alignment with Scripture?"

Then I think as well, if you want to make those shifts and changes, this is not hard. This is not rocket science. Just go back to the fundamentals: creating daily habits, daily disciplines of prayer, worship, repentance, and reading the Word. Because ultimately, as believers, if nothing else, may we be people whose hearts are ready to receive and allow God's Word to do its work in our lives.

So, Jesus starts with this parable, the seed and the sower. Then He tells a second parable. He tells a parable about light. Here's what Mark, our author, wants us to notice: Jesus doesn't just stop with the condition of our heart. He doesn't just say, "Pay attention to how you receive the Word." He goes further because receiving truth is never the finish line. Hearing and receiving always carries a responsibility with it.

So right after Jesus talks about the soil of our heart, He immediately tells this second parable. Verses 21–25, He tells the parable of a lamp. Because the Word that takes root in you is never meant to stay hidden within you. In other words, what God speaks to you in private is actually ultimately meant to shape how you live in public. Let me go back to that framework sentence

that we wrote down at the beginning: What we hear is meant to shape how we live. Jesus says this in Mark 4:21 NKJV, if you have your Bible open it. He says,

> 21 "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed?

And then He asks a rhetorical question. He says,

> "Is it not to be set on a lampstand?"

In other words, is it not supposed to be there so that light can come to the house? Now remember the flow. Jesus has just talked about receiving the Word. Now He is talking about revealing the Word. In other words, truth is not just given to inform you. Truth is given to transform you. A lamp has one job. I bet you can't guess what it is? To shine light. But if you don't turn on the light, what good is that light? You don't turn a light switch on to hide it.

You don't just flip a switch to feel spiritual. Light demands visibility. Light demands a response. Jesus is making this crystal clear that the word God places in your heart, that He plants into your heart, it's ultimately meant to show up in your life. Then Jesus says something that is incredibly sobering, but also full of hope. Mark 4:24 NKJV, if you have your Bibles open. He says,

> 24 "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given."

Here's what He's doing: He's making a direct connection between how we listen to God's Word, and how we allow God's Word to actually shape our lives. Let me say it like this. For Jesus, the issue isn't access to the truth; it's our attention to the truth. So when Jesus says, "Take heed," He's simply saying, "Be intentional about what you're hearing. Be intentional. Lean in. Listen to the word of truth with expectation."

The way we receive God's Word actually will determine in our life what God builds next. If we listen casually, truth is going to stay shallow. But if we listen with humility, if we listen with hunger, if we listen with obedience, Jesus promises that more is going to be given. That's why one of my favorite daily prayers that I pray is this old Puritan prayer from the 1700s. It's just five words, and I pray it over and over throughout the day. It's a simple prayer. It goes like this: "More light, Lord. More light. More light, Lord. More light."

I have got that prayer. I have it written on the wall in my office. I also have it written on the inside cover of my Bible. It's always within eyesight. The reason I pray this prayer is because it captures the posture that Jesus is calling us to live with. Not a posture that says, "God, give me everything at once." Not a posture that says, "God, explain it all to me right now. I need to know the end from the beginning." But a posture that says, "Lord, help me faithfully walk in the light that You've already given. As I walk faithfully in that, I trust that You're going to give me more." That is how spiritual growth really works in our life. Little by little.

Can I say it like this? God loves to build on faithfulness. When we honor the truth that we've already received, He then entrusts us with more clarity. He then trusts us with more understanding and more light. But anything that God gives us that we refuse to walk in will eventually lose its influence in our life. Why? Because light was never meant to be stored away. It was meant to be used. Let's be honest, unused light is pointless.

Imagine having a flashlight. You put fresh batteries into it. Nothing wrong with it. It works perfectly, fully functional. It has plenty of power. But you leave that flashlight in your bottom drawer, and you never use it. You never turn it on. Then, a couple of years later, when the day finally arrives that you need it, what happens? You flip the switch, but the light is super weak if it comes on even at all. Why? Not because the batteries were bad when you put them in, not because the flashlight was defective, but because light was meant to be used, not stored.

In the same way, truth that we don't walk in, won't stay bright in our lives. Meaning it slowly loses its influence in our lives, not because we rebelled against it, not because we don't believe the truth, but because we neglected the truth. So when Jesus tells us, "Take heed to what you hear," He's not trying to scare us. He's actually inviting us. He's saying it's not enough to just hear the truth. You actually have to pay attention to it, and you need to now live out that truth that you've heard. Because for Jesus, He's not just interested in what goes into our lives; He's interested in what will shine out of our lives. So the issue is not "Did you hear the Word?" The issue is, "Did the Word shape how you live?" James, the brother of Jesus, in James 1:22 NKJV, would say this.

> [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

So again, the issue is not, did you hear the Word? Did you hear the truth? The issue is, did the Word, did the truth, actually shape how you live? Again, here's the hope. Jesus promises that every small step of obedience invites greater clarity. Every faithful response to the truth opens the door to more light. So again, we simply pray, "More light, Lord. More light."

If I could, I want to just draw your attention back to the overarching flow of our text. I want you to notice what Jesus has been doing and is doing. He's moving us step by step. First, He shows us how the Word is received into the heart. Then, secondly, He shows us how the Word is supposed to be revealed through our lives. Now Jesus begins to shift the focus again, because once the Word has taken root, once the light of the Word is shining, the next question isn't whether we can control the outcome; it's whether or not we can trust God with the growth, if we can trust God with what He's doing in us.

So Jesus moves on from the lamp that must shine to the seed that grows when you're asleep. For the sake of time, I'm just going to paraphrase this particular parable because we still have to get to the storm and the Savior. But in verses 26–29, Jesus tells the parable about a man who scatters seed on the ground. What I love about it is the simplicity. Literally, the farmer does what he's supposed to do. He scatters the seed, and then he goes about his life.

He sleeps, and he wakes up day after day. All the while, something is happening that he can't see. Something is happening beneath the surface. The seed is taking root. The seed is sprouting and beginning to grow. First, the blade pops through, then the head, then the full grain, and then the ear.

But here's the key line. If you have your Bible, verse 27, here's the key line: Jesus says, "But the farmer doesn't know how it happens. The farmer doesn't know how it happens," which means when it comes to growth, the farmer didn't force it to grow. The farmer didn't manage the seed's growth. He didn't control it.

Growth wasn't his responsibility. Faithfulness was his responsibility. Jesus is teaching His disciples, and ultimately, He's teaching us that the work that God does in us and through us—our spiritual growth, our maturity, our fruitfulness, doesn't come through our human effort or

through constant anxiety. But rather, it grows through God's power. It grows in God's timing, often when we're not even aware that it's happening.

Again, here's the point. Our role is obedience. To be obedient to what we hear, to be obedient to the truth of God's Word, to cultivate a heart that is receptive to the seeds of God's Word. But God's role is growth.

God is the one who makes His Word move into action. Once Jesus makes it clear that real growth—spiritual growth, kingdom growth—is not something we can force or something we can control, He tells one more parable. Because now the question becomes, if God is the one who truly brings growth, and if that growth often starts small and unseen, what will that growth ultimately become?

So, Jesus moves on from how God grows His work in us to what that work will actually look like. He moves from how the kingdom grows to what the kingdom becomes. This is where the mustard seed parable comes in. In verses 30–32, He says, "The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed."

Are we doing okay so far? Okay. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Now, if you or I would have been there that day to hear this parable in person, I think it would have landed with a little bit of shock value. Because the mustard seed is the smallest seed you've ever seen.

I thought about going to the store and buying some and holding one up for you. But as I looked at them, I realized I could hold it up, and the camera could zoom in with all of its power, and you'd still not be able to see it. Because the seed by nature in all of its appearance, it's unimpressive.

The seed is easy to overlook. It seems insignificant, but Jesus makes this point: that if this small seed gets planted into the ground, over time that tiny seed is going to grow, and it's going to grow into something far bigger than anybody ever expected. He says it turns into one of the largest plants, so big, in fact, that it gives shade to the birds, and it gives them rest.

Here is the point that Jesus is making. Don't underestimate what God can do with small beginnings. When it comes to the kingdom and its work in our lives, listen, it doesn't always start loud. It doesn't even always start visible. Rarely does it even start impressive. Most of the time, growth in the kingdom starts with us making a small decision. It starts with a prayer. It starts with a little act of obedience. This seed gets quietly planted in the soil.

Let me say it like this. I think some of us, if we're honest, we discount what God is doing in our lives because it doesn't feel big yet. We look at our lives, and go, "I believe this stuff. I'm trying to implement this stuff, but I'm still struggling. I'm still learning. I'm not where I want to be. I'm not even where I thought I would be at this point in my walk with God."

To which Jesus would say, "That doesn't mean nothing is happening." If the seed has been planted, whether you can see it or not, something is happening because contained within the seed is the supernatural, manifold power of God. The power of God is in the seed. The power of God is in the Word, and whether you can see it or not, that Word is at work. Think about planting a tree in your own yard. You plant that little sapling. You plant that little stick on day one. It looks like a little stick in the ground. There's no shade, There is no strength, there's no visible growth or fruit.

I remember years ago, my grandfather planted a bunch of fruit trees in his backyard along the side of the house. I remember going over there, and he said, “Pretty soon we’re going to have fruit. We’re going to have avocados, apples, lemons, and grapefruits.” As a young kid, I remember him saying that, and as a kid really lacking in patience, I was like, “Well, when is all this going to happen?” And he said, “Before you know it.” I said, “Okay, cool.”

So I came over the next week, and those little sticks, those little saplings, they looked exactly the same. I’m like, “Where’s this fruit you’ve been promising?” Of course he said, “You have to be patient. Growth takes time.” Fast forward a few months, even a year—the same little stick in the ground, it has grown quite a bit.

Suddenly, there are branches sticking out. Suddenly, there is little fruit beginning to bud for the first time. Fast forward five years—that same little sapling has become a tree. All of these trees producing fruit, more fruit than our entire family could eat, more fruit so we could actually bless those around us. All of a sudden, the birds are making nests and having shade, and it’s causing shade for the house. Again, I realize we all know how this works. It’s a simple kind of parable-esque illustration.

But here’s the point: Growth never happens overnight. Yet growth was happening all the time. Jesus says that is how the kingdom works in your life. He’s reminding His disciples, and He’s reminding us that just because we can’t see it doesn’t mean that God’s not growing it.

If you’re taking notes, maybe write this down: Faithfulness today becomes fruitfulness tomorrow. The seed that we plant in obedience, God will grow it in His timing. What starts small in our life, if we stay faithful with it, eventually becomes a place of blessing, not just for us, but for those around us. If you will do the right thing long enough, you can’t be ignored.

Consistency is a superpower. I think sometimes we just want the big ending; we just want the big successful thing. “God, give me this.” God’s saying, “Do you know what I want from you? A long obedience in the same direction.” One foot in front of the other. Consistency.

This is not in my notes, but I’m just thinking about it in the moment, so I’m going to say it. Hopefully, this fits. Someone was asking me the other day, “Harrison, you pastor this huge megachurch. How did you get a megachurch?” I said, “Well, really, there are only three ways to get a megachurch.” They’re like, “I’m interested; tell me your secrets.”

I go, “Well, one, you can inherit. it. That’s what I did. Two, you can plant a church in a big city with a bunch of other megachurches, and all their pastors have moral failings, and then all their people leave and come to your church. But the third way, and this is the hardest of them, Forty-three years. Cottonwood church is forty-three years old. How do you grow a megachurch? By putting one foot in front of the other. Every day, a small, simple step of obedience. Every day, a faithful step. Every day, teaching the Word faithfully. Every day, I’m going to keep showing up.”

God loves faithfulness. He builds on faithfulness. Consistency in our lives when it comes to His kingdom is a superpower. If people do the right thing long enough, you can’t be ignored. What starts small ends up growing something large. God is so faithful. Jesus tells these four parables, each one building on the last, each one a progression, each one the next step in the ladder. He shows us how the Word is received. He shows us how it’s meant to be revealed, how growth happens beyond our control, and how what starts small becomes significant.

Again, I want to just highlight, none of this is random. Jesus is actually preparing His disciples not just to understand the kingdom, but to trust the kingdom. Because once the teaching is finished, once the foundation has been laid, Jesus looks at His disciples and says in verse 35, “Boys, let’s get in the boat and go to the other side.” This is when the lesson moves from the shoreline to the open water. This is when it moves from theory to reality. Let me show you what I mean. If you have your Bible, Mark 4:35–41 NKJV. Jesus said,

> 35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to
> the other side.” 36 Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the
> boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. 37 And a great windstorm
> arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 38 But He was in
> the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You
> not care that we are perishing?” 39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to
> the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. 40 But He
> said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” 41 And they
> feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and
> the sea obey Him!”

Mark tells us that on the same day, after all the teaching, after all the parables, that Jesus and His disciples, get into a boat, and they’re going to cross the sea. Somewhere along the way, a great storm arises. I love that Mark highlights that it’s a great storm. This is not just some drizzly weather. This is not an inconvenient little weather system. Waves are actually crashing into the boat. The boat is filling with water. Keep in mind, these disciples are seasoned fishermen, expert watermen. They are salty dogs. The Bible says that they are so afraid for their life. This is a big storm.

But where’s Jesus in all this? I love that Mark highlights that He’s in the back of the boat. He’s in the stern, asleep on a pillow. On a pillow! What a detail. It means Jesus came prepared. He’s asleep on a pillow. It tells us something important. Jesus isn’t panicked. He’s not rushed. He’s not surprised. The storm didn’t catch Him off guard. But this storm does expose something in the disciples. They wake Jesus up and go, “Teacher, don’t You care that we’re perishing?”

I read that, and I’d like to say that I wouldn’t have done that. But honestly, even on my best day, that is probably the same response I’m going to have. The disciples are afraid. Notice what fear does: Fear doesn’t just make them panic; it makes them forget. It makes them forget.

This is the key to understanding the whole chapter, because this storm, again, it is not random. It’s not disconnected. It’s not an isolated event away from the parables. It’s not a new lesson. No, the storm is actually the test of the parables. Let me show you what I mean. Just hours earlier, on the same day, Jesus has been teaching them how life with God actually works. Remember, He teaches them about the seed, that God’s Word can be trusted, and that when it’s planted, it’s doing something whether you can see it or not.

He teaches them about the soil of our hearts, that what matters most is receptive, surrendered hearts before Him. He teaches them about the lamp, that truth is actually meant to shape how we live, not just what we know. He taught them about the growing seed, that growth actually happens beyond our control. It happens quietly. It happens slowly, even when we’re asleep. He taught them about the mustard seed, that small beginnings, when they’re entrusted to God lead to significant outcomes.

Now, fast forward. They are in a boat. It's dark. The waves are crashing. The boat is filling with water, and suddenly, everything Jesus has just taught them feels really far away. Here's what they forgot. They forgot that God is still working beneath the surface, even when they can't see it. They forgot that growth and the outcomes are not dependent on what they can control. They forgot that small beginnings don't mean that God is far away or absent. They forgot that the Word that was spoken on the shore is still true in the middle of the sea and in the middle of the storm. So instead of trusting what Jesus had said, they actually question whether or not Jesus cares.

Look at verse 38. "Teacher, don't You care? Don't You care that we're about to die?" This question actually tells us everything because the storm didn't cancel out the truth of the parables. The storm revealed whether the disciples actually believed the parables.

Let me maybe explain it like this. I'm going to put it in everyday terms. Did you ever get really good advice from somebody? Like clear advice, helpful advice. You nod your head. You know you agree. You leave that conversation going, "Yeah, I'm going to apply that. This is really, really good. This makes sense to me." But then later that day, something stressful happens.

Pressure rises. Fear kind of kicks in, and suddenly, all that good advice kind of just goes out the window. Kind of like when you're sitting in the doctor's office, and the doctor calmly explains the treatment plan for what's going on in your body, and you trust it. You feel peace about it. You're like, "This guy went to school. This guy has done this so many times before. He knows what he's talking about."

So you walk out with peace, but then later that night, symptoms start to flare up. That pain begins to increase, and suddenly anxiety sets in, and now you find yourself on the Internet googling things that you know you shouldn't be googling. And what happens? It just reinforces fear, and you begin to question everything that you were just told. Listen, same truth, same information, but now just different pressure. This is what's happening on the boat with the disciples.

They didn't forget the content of what Jesus had taught, but they forgot the confidence that the teaching was meant to produce in their life. This is why Mark, our author, puts the storm right here in the narrative, because the parables answer the question: How does life with God really work? But the storm asks the question: Do I actually believe those things when life stops working the way I expect it to?

See, the parables taught them how the kingdom works, but the storm reveals whether or not they trusted the Word enough to rest even when the waves start crashing. And this is where everything begins to shift. We read it. Jesus, He stands and He speaks to the wind. He rebukes the sea. He says, "Peace, be still!" I love it. "Instantly," the Bible says, "Instantly, there's a calm." Then Jesus turns to His disciples. In verse 40, He says, "Why are you guys so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?"

I think it's really important to note that the storm didn't create the disciples' lack of faith; it actually exposed it. In essence, what Jesus is saying to them is, "Didn't you hear what I told you on the shoreline? Why did you fail to trust it when it mattered most?" I love it. This is where Mark lands the plane. Here's the destination he's been taking us to the entire chapter. The storm is gone, but now the disciples are more afraid than they were in the storm.

The final verse of the whole chapter, verse 41, says this. Mark said, “They feared exceedingly, and they said to one another, ‘Who is this guy that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” For the whole chapter, He has been a teacher. Now, He is something completely different. Now, He is something so much more.

This is the point of the whole chapter. The parables weren’t the end. The storm wasn’t the end. The revelation of who Jesus truly is—that’s the point of Mark 4. The one who speaks about the seeds and growth is the same one who commands the wind and the waves; the one who teaches about trust is also the one who is worthy of our trust.

Suddenly, the disciples realize they are not just following a teacher. They are not just listening to a rabbi. They’re actually in the boat with the Sovereign Savior. This is the journey Mark has been taking us on the entire time: from the seed to the storm to the stunning realization of who Jesus is.

Now that same question comes to you, and it comes to me. Do we recognize who’s in the boat with us? Do we trust His Word enough to rest in Him even before the waves stop? From the seed to the storm, to the moment the disciples realize who Jesus really is, Mark is showing us that faith isn’t proven by what we hear in calm moments, but by who we trust when the waves are still crashing.

So the question today is not, “Will Jesus calm the storm?” The question is “Do I trust Him enough to surrender my life to Him even before the storm calms?” Because faith isn’t trusting Jesus after the storm; it’s trusting Him even in the midst of it. My time is gone. I have still have so much more to say, but not enough time to say it. So we’re going to trust the Holy Spirit to fill in the gaps. Let’s pray,

> Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You that it’s living, it’s breathing, it’s active, and it’s sharper than any two-edged sword. We thank You for the power of the Holy Spirit that makes Your Word come alive. It helps us to realize where we need to shift and what we need to shift. It empowers us to do that. Holy Spirit, we are dependent upon You. We want to be people defined by receptive soil. Help us, O God, to daily cultivate our hearts, to prepare to hear Your Word, to hear Your truth. May that truth then make its way out of our lives. May it shine bright like a light to those around us. May it instruct our actions.
>
> O God, may we trust You that You’re the one who brings growth, that You’re the one who brings increase, whether we can see it happening or not. May we also trust that the things that You start small in our lives, You are developing them, and day by day, they’re growing into something that can be a blessing to those around us.
>
> O God, help us not to just hear Your Word today, but to be doers. Help us in the storms of life to realize that You who speak the truth are worthy of our trust. So, Lord, we trust You. We trust that You’re present. We trust that You see us. We trust that You are at work.
>
> Lord, I pray for the people in this room, the people who are under the sound of my voice. So many of us are in the midst of what we would deem a storm. Father, help us to put our eyes on You. Help us to trust Your faithfulness. Help us to trust that You are the one who is the Sovereign Savior. And regardless of how the wind and the waves

beat against the boat of our life, You remain faithful. You remain kind. You remain patient. Help us to trust You more and more.

Holy Spirit, today, the things that You are putting Your finger on, those things in our heart that need to shift and change, the truth that we need to hear and receive, help us to hear it and apply it by Your power. Because we don't want to just come into church and check a box. We want to be changed by Your living truth. Help us, O Lord. Help us, O Lord. Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit.

Father, I pray for those in the room today that as they look at their life, they realize that Jesus is not King, they realize that they are sitting on the throne of their life, I pray that even right now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, You would reveal Your kindness to them. You would reveal their need for a Savior. Would You reveal the true person of Jesus? May they see Him in His beauty. May they see Him in His majesty. May they see Him as the all-sufficient Sovereign Savior.

Father, reveal to them their need. Convict hearts of sin, I pray. I can't do that. I'm not interested in doing that, but Holy Spirit, You can do it, and You can do it so kindly. You convict hearts of sin, but then You also go to work convincing those same hearts that although the sin is great, there's a Savior who gave Himself, who loves us, and who wants to carry that sin for us. Holy Spirit, reveal people's need for a Savior and reveal the beauty of Jesus as the Savior.

As You do, I pray that You would give them the words to cry out for help, words to cry out for salvation, sincere words from a humble heart, words that say, "Rescue me, Lord. I believe that You're God. I believe You died for me. I believe You were raised from the dead. I believe that You're the only way to the Father. You're the way, the truth, and the life. You're the only one. Save me. Rescue me. Bring me into Your kingdom."

Father, as they form words like that, words of dependence, words of humility on their lips, I thank You for the promise in Romans 5:5, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, You pour out Your love into their hearts. You apply salvation to their lives. Thank You for bringing them into the kingdom. Thank You for taking them from darkness into light. Thank You for taking them out of death and bringing them into life, taking them out of the miry clay and setting their feet upon the rock, which is Christ. Only You can do that. Thank You for the work of salvation.

As we dismiss today, Father, as always, I pray that You would bless Your people and that You would keep Your people, that You would cause Your face to shine on them. God, I ask that You would be gracious to them, that You would lift Your countenance upon them. That You would give them Your peace. Today, may they know the love of the Father. May each of them experience the grace of the Lord Jesus. May they walk in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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