

Mark 4:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

Analysis

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine. Jesus' teaching method through parables (παραβολαῖς, parabolais) represents a divine pedagogical strategy. A parable (from παραβολή, parabolē, 'to cast alongside') places a spiritual truth alongside a familiar earthly story, illuminating divine realities through accessible imagery. Jesus taught 'many things' (πολλά, polla)—not a single lesson but comprehensive kingdom instruction using multiple parables. The phrase 'in his doctrine' (ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ, en tē didachē autou) indicates this was His characteristic teaching method, not occasional strategy.

Parables serve dual purposes: revealing truth to receptive hearts while concealing it from hard hearts (Mark 4:11-12). This fulfills Isaiah 6:9-10—judgment upon those who reject God's messenger. The parabolic method requires active engagement; hearers must seek understanding rather than passively receive information. Reformed theology emphasizes that understanding parables requires the Spirit's illumination—natural human wisdom cannot grasp spiritual truth (1 Corinthians 2:14). Jesus' parables thus divide humanity into two groups: those with ears to hear and those who remain spiritually deaf. The Sower parable that follows exemplifies this principle—the same word produces different results depending on soil condition, just as Jesus' teaching produces different responses depending on heart condition.

Historical Context

Parabolic teaching was common in first-century Judaism. Rabbis frequently used mashalim (Hebrew parables) to illustrate Torah principles and settle legal disputes. However, Jesus' parables were distinctive in content and authority—He spoke of God's kingdom breaking into history through His own ministry, not merely illustrating existing law. The Greco-Roman world also employed fables (Aesop's fables) and allegories for moral instruction, but Jesus' parables carried prophetic authority and eschatological urgency. Mark's Gospel, written for Gentile readers, doesn't assume familiarity with Palestinian agriculture or Jewish customs, yet includes agricultural parables because these universal images communicate effectively across cultures. Jesus taught primarily outdoors to crowds by the Sea of Galilee, using vivid imagery from daily life that both fishermen and farmers could grasp.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' use of parables—requiring active seeking rather than passive hearing—challenge our approach to Bible study and sermon listening?
2. What does the dual function of parables (revealing to some, concealing from others) teach about the relationship between spiritual receptivity and understanding divine truth?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐδίδασκεν	αὐτοῦ	ἐν	παραβολαῖς	πολλά	καὶ
And	he taught	them	by	parables	many things	And
G2532	G1321	G846	G1722	G3850	G4183	G2532
ἔλεγεν	αὐτοῦ	ἐν	τῇ	διδασκῇ	αὐτοῦ	
said	them	by	G3588	doctrine	them	
G3004	G846	G1722		G1322	G846	

Additional Cross-References

Mark 3:23 (Parallel theme): And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?

Mark 4:11 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

Matthew 13:3 (Parallel theme): And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

Matthew 13:10 (Parallel theme): And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?