

The Gospel According To Mark

Part Eight

Mark 4:1-2 [New King James] *“And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:”*

Jesus Christ had been forced to discontinue speaking in synagogues where He had a captive audience.

Now Jesus Christ was speaking to crowds who needed a new approach to receive the message He had been given by God the Father to bring to all humanity, not just Jews in the synagogues.

Jesus Christ now used parables to teach the people.

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly, spiritual meaning.

An earthly illustration that all people could understand and remember, even if at that moment they did not understand the spiritual teaching within it.

Mark 4:10-12 [New King James] *“But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, ‘To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that “Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.””*

Again we see that God is selective of who and when He calls a person to have their opportunity to receive salvation, for only He knows when will be the best time for them, [**Psalms 139:1-16**].

Why parables? –

First and foremost simply to make people listen. Jesus Christ was dealing with a crowd in the open air who were quite free to walk away at any time, therefore the first essential was to capture their attention.

Also Jesus was using a teaching method that the audiences were entirely familiar with.

There are parables in the Old Testament of which the most famous is the story of the one ewe lamb that Nathan told King David, [**2 Samuel 12:1-7**].

Still further when Jesus Christ used a parable to teach He was making the abstract idea concrete.

Very few people can grasp abstract ideas, most people think in pictures.

For example, we could talk about beauty for a long time without the other person understanding what we are talking about.

But if we say to that person, *“look, that is a beautiful person”* or *“that is a beautiful view,”* [**Romans 1:20**].

There is a sense that every descriptive word must become flesh or part of the physical creation about us.

The New Testament talks about faith, then gives us the example of Abraham and his relationship with the Creator God.

Lastly, a parable compels a person to think for themselves.

Truth has always a double impact when it is a personal discovery.

Jesus Christ presents people with the truth which if they make the right effort in the right attitude of mind they can discover for themselves.

The parable of the sower is explained to disciples –

Mark 4:13-20 [New King James] *“And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 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. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.’”*

Every detail of this parable would be real to the hearers of Jesus, because it came from everyday life.

Seed was sown broadcast from a handheld basket in Jesus Christ’s day **not** in straight lines by a drill as today.

The fields in Palestine were in the form of long narrow strips, divided by grass paths which were a right of way, the result was that they were beaten as hard as a pavement by the feet of those who used them.

Any seed that fell on such ground had little chance of growing.

The Word of God, the Christian Bible, fails to make an impact on many people, not because they are hostile to it, but because they are indifferent to it. They consider it to be irrelevant to life and that they can get on well enough without it.

In stony ground there was little soil to retain any moisture, the seed may germinate but the heat of the sun would soon cause any growth to wither.

It is always easier to begin a task than to finish it.

In a Christian life the reason for such a falling away early is that the person has failed to realise what it means to be a Christian, they have failed to count the cost.

Luke 14:25-28 [New King James] *“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it,’”*

The Greek word translated “hate” is “*misēō*” meaning to love less by comparison.

“To bear our cross” means to crucify our old way of life, [**Romans 6:1-6**].

“Sown among thorns” – the Palestinian farmer was often lazy, they would cut off the top of the weeds so the field might look clean but below the surface the roots of the weeds were still there, and grew so rapidly that the life of the growing seeds sown were choked to death.

It is all too easy to fill our lives with so many worldly things that there is no time left for the study and meditation on God’s Word, the Christian Bible, that is essential for our Christian life to grow and mature. We all need to get our priorities right, are we feeding this temporary physical life or seeking to be a part of eternal life?

Finally, there was good, clean, deep soil in which the seed of God’s Word might flourish.

Three things have to happen for such Christian growth –

We have to hear what God’s Word is saying –

We cannot hear unless we listen, and it is characteristic of life that so many of us are so busy talking that we have no time to hear, so occupied in advancing our own opinions and our own views that we have no time to meditate on the words of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

We must receive what we hear and read in God’s Word –

Just as our eye automatically closes whenever a foreign body threatens to enter it, so our mind automatically closes and forgets when the truth is unpleasant and hurts.

We must put into action what we hear and read in God’s Word –

This could involve changes in our lives that are difficult to accept ourselves and by those close to us.

All Christians in some measure become the “odd one out” for there are things in this society we have to reject, [John 17:14-17].

Accepting and applying God’s Word, the Christian Bible, to our lives will cause the world to reject us.

Our growth as a Christian will depend on how we apply these three things, which are the “fruit” that God is looking for, [Galatians 5:22-25].

Mark 4:21 [New King James] *“Also He said to them, ‘Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?’”*

This verse is referring to the truth, that is Jesus Christ, [John 1:1-5, 14; John 14:6]. There may be times when it is very dangerous to tell the truth about Jesus Christ and Who He is, the very Son of God, one person in the Triune Godhead.

The history of Luther’s stand against the Roman Catholic Church is an example of this.

The example of the early Christians in Rome who refused to sacrifice to the emperor who had pronounced himself to be worshipped as a god and by doing this faced death.

It is often easier and safer to keep quiet about the fact we are a Christian but our Christianity must be a light that can be seen by all we come in contact with on a day-to-day basis.

Mark 4:22-23 [New King James] *“For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

The truth cannot be suppressed, the truth is indestructible.

You can threaten to torture a person for discovering and experiencing the truth, you can call a person a fool to believe God’s Word as the truth, but this does not alter the truth.

This also applies to our own life and conduct, in the end we all will be judged by how we have used the life we have been given by the Creator God, even if we do not believe in His existence.

This has happened from the very beginning of human existence, although we try to hide from the truth it has a way of emerging, [**Genesis 3:8**].

To help us understand this revelation of the truth in the end we need to meditate on a Psalm written by King David about how much the Creator God actually knows about each one of us, [**Psalms 139:1-16**].

Mark 4:23-24 [New King James] *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.’ Then He said to them, ‘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.’”*

In life there is a natural balance, what we receive will depend on what we give.

This is true about the study of God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

The more time a person is prepared to give to the study and meditation of God’s Word, the deeper understanding of God’s mind we will have.

A superficial study of any subject will only leave us unsatisfied, while a really intensive study will leave us thrilled and fascinated, seeking an even deeper understanding of the very purpose of human existence.

Mark 4:25 [New King James] *“For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”*

This verse simple means that each of us are responsible to use well what we have been given by the Creator God.

How much in talent and opportunities we have is not nearly as important as what we do with what we have been given stewardship of in the life we have been given.

The parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14-30** expands on this verse and shows us where the person who ignores this verse in Mark will end up.

Mark 4:26-29 [New King James] *“And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’”*

The Kingdom of God is referring to the reign of God in every individual human being as well as humanity as a whole.

We are to pray that God’s Kingdom will come when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, [**Matthew 6:10**].

For us to understand what is being taught by Jesus Christ in this parable we need to consider what He teaches at other times.

Luke 17:20-21 [New King James] *“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’”*

The reference to the Kingdom of God being “*within you*” can be taken to mean two things.

The Greek word translated “within” is “ἐντός” which can mean “among you,” that is Jesus Christ as the King of the Kingdom of God was standing there among them but they did not recognise Him as that King.

Or it can literally mean what is unseen within an individual.

John 3:3-8 [New King James] *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”*

Jesus Christ tells the Pharisee Nicodemus that to see or be a part of the Kingdom of God it is essential that there is an active presence of the Holy Spirit within a person.

1 Corinthians 3:6 [New King James] *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”*

The planting of God’s Word and the watering of that Word are both within the reach of human beings but the spiritual growth is only by the work of the Holy Spirit producing the needed “fruits” of the Holy Spirit, essential for every created child in the Kingdom of God.

Such spiritual growth in a person is often imperceptible on a day by day basis as is the growth of the seed in the parable in Mark’s gospel, but this change can be seen over a period of time.

This parable also tells us that we **cannot** of our own strength make this spiritual growth, no more than the farmer can make the seed grow.

We do not create the Kingdom of God for the Kingdom is God’s.

The power behind the growth of God’s Kingdom is total, and is illustrated in measure by the power of growth in God’s physical creation.

A weed can push its green head through an asphalt path.

A tree can split a concrete pavement with its power of growth.

Nothing can stop growth in God’s physical kingdom.

This parable tells us there will be a time of harvesting, when the good fruit will be gathered and the weeds and tares [false fruit] are destroyed [**Matthew 13:24-30**]. Harvest and judgement go hand in hand.

When we read this parable of the Kingdom recorded in Mark, three attitudes of mind we need to develop. –

Patience –

We all tend to be creatures of the moment and inevitably we think in terms of the moment.

We need to learn to wait on God, [Psalms 25:5; Psalms 27:14; Psalms 37:34].

Hope –

We are living today in an atmosphere of despair as we look at the world in which we live with shuddering dread on what the future will bring, [**Romans 8:18-25**].

Preparedness –

There is coming for every human being a **time of judgement which we all need to be ready for**, [**2 Corinthians 5:10-12**].

Mark 4:30-32 [New King James] *“Then He said, ‘To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.’”*

Jesus Christ is using this parable to explain that although Christianity had very small beginnings, it would grow into a worldwide community of believers, [**Isaiah 9:7**].

Mark 4:33-34 [New King James] *“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as **they were able to hear it**. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.”*

The key to understanding why Jesus Christ spoke in parables to the crowds is in the words “as they were able to hear it.”

Even the disciples had to have the spiritual meaning explained to them.

It was only after the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost after Jesus Christ had returned to the Heavenly Father, [**Acts 2:1-4**].

Until this happened only a few men and women had received the Holy Spirit in their lives and then only to fulfil a certain task for God.

John 14:13 [New King James] *“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”*

It is only an active Holy Spirit in the life of a person that allows them to understand spiritual truths.

1 Corinthians 2:14 [New King James] *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

Eventually all human beings will be blessed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, [**Joel 2:28-29**].