

A TEACHER OF PARABLES

Mark 4:21-34

Intro: It is difficult for us to understand how the truth of God had been misinterpreted, and sometimes even put out of sight by men, when our Lord came into the world. The Jews were inclined to feel that because they were Jews, they were the children of God. And they deliberately scorned the Gentiles as not being on a par with themselves as far as their relationship with God was concerned. Even though the OT spoke of salvation being extended to the whole world, that emphasis was buried as far as the Jews were concerned.

In these parables of our Lord we see that He emphasized the sovereignty of God in salvation, and He pointed out in very clearly in the first parable that it was never God's purpose to save everyone. But He also stressed the fact the being in the kingdom of God was a matter of one thing: a person's response to and relationship with the Word of God. So the Lord was not speaking of a literal kingdom (which the Bible deals with in other places, and which is yet to be fulfilled), but He was actually talking about salvation. That is brought out in the first parable of this chapter, Mark 4.

(Review the first parable briefly.)

Now in the parables that follow, the Lord was obviously building upon the first parable. He indicated as much by what He said in verse 13. Thus that parable is the key to the others.

Following the first parable, the Lord gave three others that were based upon the first.

In verses 21-25 we have the parable of the candle, or lamp, and what you do with it when it is lighted. And in verse 22 the Lord was clearly referring to His reference to the phrase, "the mystery of the kingdom of God," in verse 11. This word has a special meaning in the NT, as I have mentioned many times. It is a word which speaks of the progressive nature of the revelation given to us in the Word of God. Truth was revealed progressively in the OT, but the revelation has now been completed in the ministry of our Lord and in the ministry of the apostles who followed Him. But the Lord indicated in the first parable and its interpretation that God revealed the truth in a progressive way, and held some of it back for a time, not because He did not want to make it known, but because He did

want to make it known. And that is what He was doing here. And our Lord indicated that this was not something new, because it was what Isaiah had been told about his ministry. Verse 12 is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10. Please turn with me to that chapter so that we can see the type of ministry that Isaiah had.

It has never been God's purpose to save everyone, and those who interpret these parables with the idea that He did want to save everyone, have missed the point of what He was saying. If the Lord had wanted to save everyone, He could have done that. An omnipotent God can do anything that He is pleased to do. A part of our Lord's reason for teaching in parables, was to conceal the truth from many of His hearers. People can read the Bible. Non-Christian college professors can teach the Bible like they usually do, as "literature," without ever seeing the truth of salvation, or, if they see it, they don't understand what it is all about.

An example of religious people who are blinded was demonstrated around the world in the last couple of weeks where people continuously were speaking of the Pope as the "holy Father." Anyone who reads the Bible ought to know that "holy Father" is one of God's titles, and no man has the right to take it for Himself. People who use it of a mere man, regardless of who is, are guilty of blasphemy. But you can attribute this to spiritual blindness.

Now John Mark, guided by the Holy Spirit, had a reason for following the main parable with three others which we find in verses 20 through 34 of this fourth chapter. They are an elaboration of the kingdom of God, or, as we might say, of salvation itself.

The first had to do with a candle, or a lamp. The purpose of a candle or lamp is to give light. Long ago the Psalmist had written, "The entrance of Thy Words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple" (Psa. 119:130). And even before that in Psalm 119, we find these words in verse 105: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." So as the Lord taught in parables, He was giving more light, light about the Gospel, so that His disciples would understand more fully the work of God in the world.

You might find some elements of the truth the Lord gave in the first parable of this chapter – you might find illustrations of it in the OT, but the Lord here by His teaching was giving light that His disciples needed

to understand.

It verse 22 the Lord was indicating that there was more to come. And it was not to make it more difficult for people to be saved, but so that the disciples would understand what they could expect, and what they should look for as they preached the Gospel. Not everything that appeared to be salvation, was salvation.

And then in verse 23 we come to that expression again which the Lord used in verse 9 of our chapter. All of us have ears. In fact, we have two of them. But it is possible for people to hear, and yet not hear, because they do not understand what they are hearing. If you have ears to hear it is because God has given you ears to hear and to understand His Word. Do you remember the words of that hymn that we sing frequently, #271, verse 3 which says this:

Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?

Every day we ought to thank the Lord that He has given us ears to hear. This is what God does. We can't do it for ourselves. By nature man is deaf as far as understanding the Word of God is concerned. And only God can make us hear.

Verse 22 is a promise from the Lord that the Spirit of God would eventually reveal everything that God intends for us to know. And we now have it all in the Bible.

But we are not only to hear, but we are to pay particular attention to what we hear, that is, what we hear as the Word is read, so that we can take full advantage of what God has revealed. Isn't this *a command* for us *to meditate* on the Word? I believe that it is! We hear the Word, and then we meditate on it. And the purpose of meditation is to gain a greater understanding of the Word. To those who respond to the Word in this way, more is given, that is, more understanding, more enjoyment, and more profit from the Word.

But for those who do not have ears to hear, even the truth that is written upon their hearts will be taken away, so that they are not affected by the Word of God the way they should be.

Then the Lord gave two more parables to illustrate the Gospel even more fully.

Remember from the first parable that the seed is the Word. “The sower soweth the Word” (Mark 4:14).

Sowing the Word is likened unto planting a seed. And obviously this is seed in good ground. But it takes time for the seed to grow. And that may take a while. It usually does when you are sowing corn, for example. The sower sows the seed. Paul used this illustration when he said, “I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). After the seed is sown, and someone else may come along to water it, *but it is always God who make a seed of corn to produce a crop – always God!* And that is why this work cannot fail. We may not see results every time, but God gives fruit where He is pleased to give it.

A farmer is wasting his time if God does not give fruit. We put the seed in the soil, and God does the rest. If we sow the seed, we will see a harvest.

Then we come to the final parable in this chapter. It has to do with a mustard seed. The Lord was not talking about sowing an oak tree, or a pine tree. He was speaking of garden plants. You would never expect from the size of the seed that such a large plant would be the result.

Now what are the prospects that the Gospel will succeed. Think of our Lord, and the humble beginning of His ministry. We know that He was the Son of God Who came to earth as a Man, but to most people He was just a man. And the men He chose were not prominent men who had a lot of charisma about them. They were poor. None of them had any money. They were not really trained for anything. Matthew was a tax collector, and that meant that he was a crook, robbing people by making them pay more than the Roman government required. And finally the Lord died on a Cross as the worst of criminals. We know that He arose from the dead, and then went back to the Father in heaven, but most people in the world think of that as a fairy tale.

But where is it all headed? The kingdoms of this world are going to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. People will be saved out of every tribe and tongue and

nation. The saved will be more than any of us could number. The purposes of God will all be fulfilled, and none of the elect will be lost.

From an insignificant beginning, like a mustard seed, under the blessing of God, the Gospel will triumph above everything else, and God will be glorified for all eternity.

Concl: The Lord intended that this should encourage and inspire His disciples to be faithful in sowing the seed. And it should be for our encouragement too. God's purposes will not fail, and He will not lose a single person for whom Christ died. We need this encouragement for these days when the harvest seems to be lacking. We need to have faith and be faithful. God cannot, and He will not, fail.