

THE DILIGENCE OF CHRIST

Mark 4:21-34

Intro: One of the most difficult things in preparing messages week after week, is in finding titles for a particular message that brings out in a few words what you are going to speak about. I read somewhere that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones never gave titles to his messages; he just announced his text, and that was all. The titles that you find in most of his messages that have been put in print, have been made up by those who have taken the task of preparing them for print. But most pastors and preachers that I have known about, have had titles to their messages, and I know that each week that has taken a good amount of time.

Many men who teach homiletics, which has to do with the preparation and delivery of sermons, tell you that your title should not be more than six or seven words, and that it is better the shorter you can make your title.

The important thing is the message, but I believe that titles help those who hear to understand what the pastor, or anyone who is teaching the Word, has seen in a particular passage.

In Mark 4 we have several parables that the Lord gave in his preaching and teaching. There are not as many here as we find in Matthew, chapter 13, but it is a chapter of parables. It is hard to identify each parable from verse 21 on like I did the parable of the sower in the first twenty verses without having a title that might be as long as some of the Puritans had whose titles were often more like a paragraph than a simple title. Maybe if my titles were longer, my messages would be better. I am not going to fault the Puritans for what they did. Most of them were great “physicians of the soul,” as they have been called, and I personally have profited greatly from the Puritan sermons that I have read.

As soon as I get through with one message, I start thinking about the next one. And reading through a book like the Gospel of Mark, or the epistle to the Philippians through which Pastor Will is preaching on Sunday night, you are able to think ahead. That is one of the distinct advantages of reading and re-reading any book of the Bible that we might be teaching. I am just trying to show you what many of you probably already know, especially those of you who are teachers of the Word. There is no one way of preparing to speak. We all have to find our own way.

Now having said all of that, as I decided on my text for the morning, I asked myself, “What is it that the Lord was doing here?” And, as I re-read the chapter over several times, my mind was directed to two parts of the chapter, and a fact that I have been emphasizing with you Sunday by Sunday. The first was verses 10, 11, and 13. **(Read.)** The Lord wanted His disciples to know what the parable of the sower meant with respect to the kingdom of God. And then as I read down to the end of my text for this morning, I found verses 33 and 34. **(Read.)**

And so I saw that the particular object that the Lord had in mind, was the instruction of the twelve apostles. I do not mean that He was not interested in other people knowing the parables because Mark makes it clear in this chapter that others were around when the Lord was speaking to His apostles when He gave them the meaning of the parable of the Sower. But suddenly it occurred to me *that the Lord was being very diligent in what He was doing: teaching the apostles, preparing them for ministry!*

And so I have entitled my message, “The Diligence of Christ.”

The word diligence in some form (diligent, diligently) some 62 times in the Old and New Testaments, and there are at least four different words in the NT which are translated with some form of the word *diligent*.

But what does *diligence* mean?

It is obviously a word of action. It does not tell us what the Lord did, but it tells us how He did what He did. It means that the Lord was very earnest and sincere in what He was doing. It tells us that He was very careful and very faithful in what He did. It tells us that He persevered in what He did. Actually Philippians 1:6 described the Lord’s diligence even though the Apostle Paul did not use the word in that verse.

And the diligence that the Lord displayed here in teaching His disciples, is the same characteristic that we as the people of God are to display in our lives, and in the way we serve the Lord. Cf. Hebrews 6:10-12:

10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

So we are all called to be diligent like the Lord was. We are to be “followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

But now let us look more specifically at the text.

Going back to verse 11 of our chapter we read that our Lord said to the twelve, and to others who were with them, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God.” The word “mystery” means *a secret*, not something that is difficult to understand, but truth which prior to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world as a Man, had not been revealed. It had to do with details during the work of our Lord in the souls of people which had not yet been revealed. We know now that it had to do with the outreach of the Gospel to the Gentile world. The godly Jews in our Lord’s day were looking for the Messiah to come to establish a literal kingdom on the earth over which He would reign. That eventually will happen, but not yet. Instead there would be a revival of the true Gospel, it would be sent to Jews and Gentiles alike, and from them the Church, the body of Christ, would be formed. The Lord did not say all of this here. He was just lighting a candle. Most Jews were of the impression that being a Jew constituted a person a child of God. Of course that never was the truth. The Gospel has always been by faith in a Redeemer, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but those who were born of God. This was, and always has been, an inner work of God by which believers became born again.

So when the Lord spoke of “the mystery of the kingdom of God,” He was talking about the completed revelation of the true Gospel, how, as our Lord explained to the Pharisee Nicodemus, people could enter the kingdom of God.

And so now let us talk about:

I. THE CANDLE THAT OUR LORD LIGHTED (Mark 4:21-25).

A candle, or lamp, does not give a lot of light, but you don’t light a candle or lamp, and then put it under a bushel basket, or under a bed, but you put it on a candle holder or a lamp stand so, as we read in Matthew’s Gospel, that it can give “light to all that are in the house” (Matt. 5:15).

In these days of plentiful electricity most of us don’t understand how important a single lamp can be. The Lord could have flooded the world with

blazing lights if that had been His purpose, but instead, as He usually had done, He gave a little light here, and more light there, until His message was complete.

And so I believe that in verse 22 the Lord was speaking about the completion of His revelation, the Bible, and that eventually He would reveal all that it was the intention of God to do and to make known. And it was to be the responsibility of the disciples to make this revelation known.

Abraham did not know about this present age which was introduced on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, but the Lord lighted the candle, and the Apostles were commissioned to make known this light to the uttermost parts of the earth. And that is our charge as well. And to emphasize how very important the light was, our Lord added in verse 22, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

But then the Lord sounded a warning in verse 23.

The apostles were to "take heed what" they heard. Even in those days there were many false teachers, and the scribes and Pharisees were among the worst. So what the apostles were to hear was what the Lord told them, and everything that they heard was to be examined in the light of the candle that the Lord was lighting. But this message was not just to be kept for themselves. They were to measure it out to others, a way of describing the preaching of the Gospel, and to the degree to which they were faithful to the message, so their reward would be. They were to cultivate the habit of hearing the revealed will of God, and then spreading the message to others.

And so in verse 25 the Lord indicated that the more the apostles heard, and the more truth they spread, the more truth they would understand. But if they did not spread the truth, even what they had been given to a point would be taken away from them. In the history of the church there have been many who started out preaching the Gospel, but for some reason, perhaps to please people, they began to compromise with the truth, and soon they were denying the very truth that they once preached.

These are encouragements and warnings that we all need to take to heart. It is impossible for me to say what I am going to say exactly, but I would imagine that there has never been a time when the truth of the kingdom of God, the truth of salvation, was needed more than it is today. And I say

that because there many churches where the Gospel used to be preached, but now it is denied. And it used to be that you could find a Bible in almost every home. Now it is not difficult to find people who have never seen a Bible, let alone hold one or own one. The Lord was stating a great principle regarding His blessing: the more we given out the truth, the more the Lord will open our ears and hearts to understand more of the truth. Nobody needs to go beyond the Bible in understanding the truth of God because no one has ever exhausted all that the Lord has given us in His Word.

Before we move on to the next point, let me remind you that practically all that the Lord has said to this point, has been in form as parables.

At this point the Lord gave:

II. TWO ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE MEANING OF THE LIGHT (Mark 4:26-32).

And both of these illustrations are parables.

A. The Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29).

I don't think that the Lord intended for us to look at every word to find some hidden meaning in what the Lord had to say. He was preparing His apostles to go out into the world to serve Him. Remember that this is all what you can see in candle light, or lamp light. This is such basic truth that you would think that every child of God would understand what the Lord is teaching here.

At this point we need to go back to the first parable, the parable of the sower, to learn from it what will help us in understanding this and the following parable.

Here we have a man sowing seed in the ground. The Lord explained in the first parable that the seed is the Word, the Word of God. See verse 14. I see no reason to change the meaning here. The seed represents the Word of God. The ground has to be the good ground of the first parable. Put the seed in good ground, and immediately it begins to grow. First a blade shows up, then the ear, and finally the ear is full of corn. Then the corn is harvested, and eaten. But the point that the Lord was making was that the farmer does not need to understand how the seed grows from one

stage to another. He just needs to plant the seed in the ground. The seed is a living seed. God has placed life in it. And that is exactly what the Bible tells us about itself. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the Word of God is quick.” That is an old English expression for *living*. *It is a living seed. And when it is planted in a human heart, it grows and produces fruit.* This is what Isaiah said about the Word of God long ago. Listen to what He said. It is written in Isaiah 55:10-11:

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Do you and I want people to understand what the kingdom of God is, and how to enter the kingdom of God? Then give them the Word. You don't need to sing them a song first. They don't need to be told to clean up their lives so God can save them. Give people John 3:16, or John 5:24, or Isaiah 53:6. I don't mean to spray them with verses like you were shooting a shot gun in their direction. But give them God's Word, explain it to them, and then pray it into their hearts. If you and I will plant the seed, the Lord will make it grow.

Nobody is ever saved unless the Word of God is sown in their hearts. That was the simple truths that the Lord wanted His disciples to understand. It is the Word that produces eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ.

But let me move on to the next parable:

B. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32).

In verse 30 the Lord indicated that there really isn't anything that can clearly show us what the Kingdom of God is, or what the Gospel is. But then He mentioned again an illustration from creation that helps us to understand the new creation. He said that it is like the kingdom of God because you would never think that something so large and so beautiful and so strong could come from such a little seed.

But that is exactly what happens. You sow the seed of God's Word in a human heart, so small and insignificant in most people's eyes that it is

hardly worth the trouble that it takes to plant it. But what tremendous results there can be by planting just a little of God's Word in some person's heart. The results go beyond what anybody could possibly imagine unless they have previously had an opportunity to see the amazing results when the Word of God is planted in a human heart.

But what about those birds? Birds in the first parable spoke of Satan and his opposition to the ministry of the Word. Here it is too late for him to hinder the ministry of the Word, but not too late for them to cause confusion for one who has recently been saved. The Christian life is a battle, but greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world. See 1 John 4:4.

Here in these two parables we have basically two simple truths that we need to remember as we seek to serve the Lord. What an amazing work the Lord began when He came to a wicked world to die for the salvation of sinners! There is nothing in all of history that can even begin to compare with the kingdom of God.

Concl: The last two verses of my text, verses 33 and 34, tell us what the Lord continued to do. So do you see why I have called verses 21 to 34 an account of *the diligence of Christ*? Could we have a better testimony to the diligence of Christ? See how earnestly and faithfully and persistently and carefully He taught His disciples. His simplicity is amazing. And yet He did not leave them to understand on their own these words of comfort and guidance.

We know that it took time for these simple truths to become clear to the apostles, but let us be sure that we have gotten the message ourselves. The Lord's work has not changed from that day until this. If we want to see fruitfulness, then the Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way.