

Mark 4:1-20 The PURPOSE of PARABLES

PRELIMS. We are taking a **cursory** look through Mark, noting what we did not note before! **Not** an ‘in-depth’ but **cursory** look at Mark.

Have you noticed in films/novels that when people want to **think** or **reflect**, they are often found standing on a pier looking at the sea, or walking by the shore! Watching the waves lapping on the shore!

People who have worries or in love and want to **contemplate**, often go to the seashore! It seems to be a place where people **feel** they can **consider** things better. They think there is something **spiritual** and **peaceful** in the waves coming in! *“O that you had paid attention to My commandments! **Then** your **peace** would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the **waves of the sea**”* [Isa 48:18]

Well, Jesus was at the seashore here, and *“a very large crowd gathered about Him”*[1]! So Jesus took the **opportunity to make** them think/reflect - on something worth thinking about! He often spoke to the people in the **Temple** and in **synagogues** - but he also spoke in many **other places!** He preached here in a boat, but also in a desert, on a mountain, on the road, in a cemetery, house, beach, etc!

And He also spoke to **all kinds of people** - to those who **wanted** to hear Him, to those who argued/opposed Him, Jews, Greeks, poor, rich, wise, foolish! To people! It was **whoever**, and **wherever!**

Here, I think, Jesus was speaking to those who **wanted** to hear Him! They came to Him deliberately. (If it is the same occasion as [Luke 5:1] they were *“pressing in on Him **to hear the Word of God**”*). No one spoke like Jesus - He always made people think. So, Jesus made them **think** seriously about the realities of true religion! What Jesus said here was really quite **disturbing** and **challenging!** He actually spoke to them in a **puzzle** - in **parables!** Before He started, He asked them to *“**Listen...**”*[3] and then at the end of the parable He **challenged** them *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”*[9] That’s a pretty **pointed** call to **think** seriously and to **consider** what He says, and above all, what **significance** it had for them as individuals!

In this parable, Jesus is giving His an **illustration** of the **gospel** and

the **effects** and **results** of its message. Ie, He is speaking of the preacher preaching the Word of God! “*A sower went out to sow*” seed! The seed, Jesus tells us the seed is the Word [14].

He tells us of **four** different types of **results** of the seed sown. Jesus says that all the results are due to the **nature** of the ground upon which it fell. That information in itself is a **challenge** to us! The different results had nothing to do with the sower or the seed. It was the same sower and seed that landed on all the soils. The **path** had a particular response; the **rocky** ground had a particular response; the **thorn** ground had a particular response; on **good** ground it had a particular response. All four soils had a particular response.

The seed on the **path** never ‘sank in’. As soon as it landed it was snapped up by the birds of the air! **APP** There are those who hardly hear the gospel who, for one reason or another, are completely **distracted**, and it never ‘touches base’! It **never affects** the person, not even for a moment! Satan, Jesus tells us [15b] employs some ‘agent’ to **remove the thought** immediately from their minds.

The seed on the **rocky** ground, **did** have some **depth** - but not deep enough!! **APP** The Word must **sink into** our hearts and become as it were, part of us! “*they have no root in themselves*” says Jesus [17] Note: they do have some **joy**, but it does not **last**. Such people “*endure for a while*”[17] As soon as problems, difficulties, arise, and sacrifices have to be made in order to obey the Word, they do not have what it takes to continue. They do not feel it is worth it. There is no root there, **to** grow and provide **spiritual** life.

The seed among the **thorns**, had some depth also but the thorns grew and choked it. There was **no nourishment**. It was starved of **oxygen**! **APP** Many people have lives so filled with **other** duties and **responsibilities** which they have instigated themselves, there is no time and room left for the seed to develop and grow. Their lives are so filled up with work and **busyness**, Instead of nourishing the seed, the other ‘interests’ in their lives, absorb all the time and energy at their disposal, and the seed is **starved** of food. Xnity, in order to take root and grow needs **time**! It requires **attention** and **planned** and

organised discipline! Xnity will not come **naturally**. Things will **not pan out** unless deliberately planned! There must be proper **feeding and exercise!** We must **weed out** thorns and nettles and “*put away all*” things which will **stultify** spiritual growth - especially those things which occupy and fill up so much of our time/attention.

Now, there was fruit **only** on the good ground! Three out of the four soils, did not produce fruit! **Think** about that, says Jesus! Ie, those of you who have **understanding**, who have “*ears to hear*”, consider what this means for you!! It means there has to be some **special property** in the soil which produced the necessary fruit! Ie, there has to be something in **your heart** which will respond to the gospel! That ‘something’ friends, is the **grace** of Christ - the Holy Spirit! You/I need the God’s Spirit within us, before we will respond positively to the gospel. We must **ask** God to **grant** us that Spirit.

There are various **degrees** of growth - thirty-, sixty-, hundred-fold! Some produce more than others! It was Jesus Himself who said “*Everyone to whom **much** was **given**, of him **much** will be **required*** [Luke 12:48]! The **more** you get, the more is **expected!** The **less** you get, the less is expected! God is **not** like Pharaoh - a hard taskmaster!

Jesus told the parable of the **talents** to **encourage** us to work hard for Him! “*Take **from him** the pound, and **give it to him** that has ten pounds*” [Luke 19:24 AV]! The world: ‘Those that have will get’! **APP** That principle applies in the spiritual realm as well as the secular. “*He gives **more** grace...to the **humble***” [Jam 4:6] The very **opposite** of the ‘**Robin Hood**’ philosophy, of robbing the rich and giving to the poor!! We need to **add** to our graces as Peter tells us!

Now there were those who **did hear** what He said and **wanted** to **understand more!** They **were affected** by what was **implied** and **suggested** in the parables! **That** would have encouraged Jesus! His sermon did **not** go unnoticed but **did provoke** thought! So, in the house afterwards, they **asked** Him about the meaning of the parables.

Jesus replied “*To **you** has been **given** the **secret** of the kingdom of God, but to those **outside** everything is in parables*” [11] Note: the

‘secret’ was “**given**” to them, it was a **gift** to them! And it was said to the ‘inner few, who were “*alone*” in the house! [10] Jesus **deliberately** did not mention this to the crowds ‘outside’! Now here is where we indeed learn some heavenly **secrets**! Secrets which our Confession of Faith says “is to be handled with special prudence and care” [3.6]! What did Jesus mean when He said, for ‘those outside’? ‘**Outside**’ **what**? Outside the Covenant community. Outside the Church. Outside the favoured few who are told some **inner details**, detail which **can** be most **helpful** - if made **proper use** of!

Jesus asks “*Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?*”[13]. He means that if they do not understand **this** parable they will **never understand any** parable!! So it is **important** that they know the meaning of this parable!

Jesus is saying that our whole **natures** need to be changed **before** we can **receive** the gospel! Salvation all depends on the kind of **soil** the seed is planted in. The soil needs to have this special property of grace. If it is **stoney** and **rock hard**, it will just **not** take root - it cannot **receive** the seed! As Jesus said at another time: “*A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven*” [John 3:27] Here, Jesus says: “*they may indeed see, but (but they will) not perceive*”, they “*may indeed hear, but (but they will) not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven*”[12]

Now both Matthew **and** Luke say the **same thing** as Mark says here. The first word of [v12] here, is ‘hina’ = ‘**so that**’ “*they will not perceive*”... ‘**so that**’ “*they will not understand*”! It is almost as if **all** three evangelists are saying ‘Jesus speaks in parables to ‘outsiders’, ‘**in case** they will **understand** and be **converted** - **and that is not His desire or purpose**’!! But of course that is not true, Jesus **does desire** everyone to believe and be saved. The “*so that*” here means: so that the **choices** they made, **confirms** their unbelief, and that in **spite of** their seeing and hearing the very Words of Jesus Himself!

Solemn words to **think about**! No wonder He said “*Listen... he who has ears to hear...*” So...the **lesson**? **Pray** that God would **change** your **heart**, and **make it responsive** to His call to believe and follow!