

Daily Bible Study

“Teaching by Parables ~ ‘Ears to Hear’ ”

Mark 4:1-20

January 24-30, 2010

THE LORD’S DAY – This week we begin **chapter 4** of Marks *gospel of Jesus Christ* and we come to a very familiar piece of Jesus’ teaching; namely “The Parable of The Soils” which is found in its entirety in a portion which will be our text for several weeks, **Mark 4:1-20**. This chapter of Mark contains 4 different parables and this section of **verses 1-20**, “The Parable of The Soils” makes up one of the most detailed recordings of Jesus’ teaching in the entire book of Mark. We are going to take several weeks to get through this section since in the text we find Jesus stops and adds important information in the middle portion and then He goes on to give the explanation of its meaning. Our goal this week is to begin to introduce the Parable itself as well as focus on some of the information in the text which explains why it was that Jesus spoke in Parables in the first place. Read **Mark 4:1-20**.

The Word Applied & A Suggestion for Prayer: Prayerfully read the text then ask God to both teach you from His Word this week and then give you opportunity to practice what you learn.

MONDAY – We have entitled the introductory lesson of this passage *“Teaching by Parables ~ Ears to Hear”*. As Jesus went about His earthly ministry He taught the people and preached the Gospel of the Kingdom to them. Often He would use language such as that from **verse 3**, *“Listen”!* Or, as it is recorded in **verse 9** of our text, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”*. The verb *akouo* in **verse 3** is an invitation and an exhortation to “listen up”. The word is translated *“hearken”* in the Authorized Version and that word choice is a good one, as it sums up well the idea of Christ calling for attentive ears to what He is about to say. As we continue to **verse 9** we again are informed to listen but now Jesus narrows down the pool of who can *“hear”* to those *“who have ears to hear”*. Finally in **verses 10-12** we find Jesus gives the purpose for His speaking in Parables which seems at face value to be paradoxical. He has called for men to *listen and hear* and then He uses the astonishing words of the prophet Isaiah when He says, so that *“...hearing they may hear and not understand.”* We will explore this in greater detail later but for now let us be reminded that we are called and commanded to listen to Jesus and are also told to *“take heed how you hear”* (**Luke 8:18**). We listen to Jesus when we listen to His words, or The Word of God. He speaks today through Sacred Scripture and we are commanded to listen to Him. This command applies universally; to the saved and to the lost as well. In fact, this Parable deals with this entire matter of evangelism in which hearing and listening are crucial. How shall they *call on Him, believe in Him, or hear without a preacher?* We are shown among other things, the life giving power of The Incorruptible Seed. We hear, listen and then once we’re brought to spiritual life in Christ; we go tell others or as Jesus said it, *“sow seed”*. Read **Romans 10:8-18**.

The Word Applied: Do you really listen to The Word of God? You can hear it and not listen to it. Remember, it is those who obey by following Jesus that really hear His voice as true Sheep.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, give me ears to hear and also give me a consistent, steady, growing hunger and desire to attentively listen to Your Word and then obey.

TUESDAY – In the first two verses, **Mark 4:1-2**, we are given a bit of information which sets the scene for this teaching. The first verse informs us that there was a *great multitude gathered to Him*. If you look back to **Mark 3:9** you will remember that Jesus told the disciples to have a small boat ready for Him because of *the multitude*. Jesus was taking precaution in **chapter 3**, *lest they (the multitude) should crush Him*. Interestingly we find that Jesus does indeed get into a boat in the text before us and we read that now the multitude has increased so that Mark now calls it a *great (polus – much, many, large) multitude*. The picture is painted for us and we can see Jesus out in the boat as the *whole multitude was on the land facing the sea*. Another detail Mark adds for us is the fact that Jesus *sat* out there in

the boat as He taught. Sitting was the typical and common position assumed by Jewish Rabbi's as they taught and some see significance in this. Jesus may very well have been seated for the simple reason that He was standing in a boat which may not have provided Him a lot of stability as it rocked and moved in the water. Either way, we are told Jesus *sat* and addressed this great host of people who are all facing Him with what seems to be a sense of eager anticipation. Read **Psalm 81:8-16** and see The Lord call to His people to listen to Him, to obey His voice, and walk in His ways and receive His blessing.

The Word Applied: Do you receive admonishment from the Lord with a grateful attitude of thanks for His love for you? Or do you have the stubborn heart of **Psalm 81:12**? May we have the attitude like that of David in **Psalm 42:4** where He expresses the joy of coming to The House of God to join with the multitude in praising and worshipping The Lord.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, forgive my stubborn sinfulness in not always bowing in humble obedience before You and Your Word. Grant me the desire to long to come before You and Sacred Scripture both in quiet time by myself and also with the congregation of Your saints.

WEDNESDAY – We mentioned that some folks make a great deal out of the fact that Jesus *sat* here as He taught the people. It is helpful that we stop and consider the variety we see Jesus employ in His public teaching ministry. Some have said here in our text Jesus used the boat as His “pulpit”. We read that Jesus was not one to neglect the corporate meeting of God's people to worship. Scripture tells us it *was His custom* to come to The Sabbath worship (**Luke 4:16**). We have previously seen in Mark that Jesus taught and attended the regular synagogue service (**Mark 1:21, 3:1**). Furthermore, Jesus also tells us Himself in **John 18:20** that He taught in The Temple. Substituting “home worship”, “my own Bible study”, or any “Christian gathering” for the God ordained gathering together of the corporate body of Christ in worship was not something Jesus' example approved of. Neglecting the public meeting of God's people is sin; and it is greatly detrimental for growth. God takes very serious His ordained and established *ekklesia* (assembly, church) which He bought with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**). His *ekklesia* is made visible today in the true local church under the oversight of Jesus' under shepherds. But Christ did take many additional opportunities to spread and preach the gospel to both the lost as well as to those who were His family, His *brothers and sisters and mother*. Christ preached and taught from a mountainside (**Matthew 5:1**), a house (**Mark 2:1-2**), the seashore (in our current text-**Mark 4:1**), and even at graveside or in a cemetery if you will (**John 11**). Jesus was faithful in spreading the Good News of The Kingdom and bringing people face to face with God's Word wherever He was. But He also demonstrated by example the importance and command to gather together for worship and edification as believers. Read this command in **Hebrews 10:24-25**.

The Word Applied: How obedient are you to the command to not forsake gathering together as believers? Meditate on **Hebrews 10:24-25**, noticing the importance & reasons for this command.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, Thank You for the privilege of being with Your people under Your ordained means of grace in the local church. Help me to be more faithful to Your Body Jesus.

THURSDAY – We saw yesterday that Jesus spread the gospel wherever He went, and throughout His ministry His audience was made up of both great multitudes and individuals. He also was the master teacher, the greatest communicator of truth to ever live. Scripture tells us the truth that the officers uttered when they said, “*No man ever spoke like this Man*” (**John 7:46**). There was eternal truth in all of Jesus' words and He was the master of all various forms, ways, and types of communicating. He could admonish, command, question, refute, predict and illustrate like no one ever could. We learn the particular type of teaching Jesus used in our text when we read in **verse 2** ...*He taught them many things by parables...* Parabole literally means “a placing of one thing by the side of another, juxtaposition, as of ships in battle”. Metaphorically it means “a comparing, comparison of one thing with another”. As the definition suggests, this word parable has the idea of “setting along side”. As Jesus spoke in parables, He set a spiritual truth along side a common daily truth of everyday life. By way of comparison, He taught a deeper spiritual lesson than was

obvious and “on the surface” of these brief narratives. There was a depth of meaning in Jesus’ parables that only those with *eyes to see* and *ears to hear* could comprehend. **Verse 10** tells us that when He was alone the twelve asked Jesus about the parable of the soils which He tells in this text. In **verse 11** Jesus said “*To you it has been given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God...*” God, by His sovereign grace chose to give understanding to those He willed (i.e.- Peter in **Matthew 16:17**). Read **2 Corinthians 4:3-6** and notice it is *the God* who created physical light that must create “spiritual light” in the soul for one to see and believe. Notice this power and light comes through the preaching of the Gospel.

The Word Applied: God alone saves. Even the Arminian ironically prays that God would save souls. Beloved, He uses means to accomplish His purposes and the means He uses in salvation is the “Word of Christ”, The Gospel. Are you faithfully proclaiming it to the blind and lost?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, use me to proclaim Your Gospel and shine Your light in many.

FRIDAY – Matthew Henry gives us the following helpful comments: “He *taught them many things*, but it was by *parables* or similitudes, which would *tempt them to hear*; for people love to be spoken to in their own language, and careless hearers will catch at a plain comparison borrowed from common things, and will retain and repeat that, when they have *lost*, or perhaps never *took*, the truth which it was designed to explain and illustrate: but unless they would take pains to search into it, it would but amuse them; *seeing they would see, and not perceive* (v. 12); and so, while it gratified their curiosity, it was the punishment of their stupidity; they willfully shut their eyes against the light, and therefore justly did Christ put it into the dark lantern of a parable, which had a bright side toward those who applied it to themselves, and were willing to be guided by it; but to those who were only *willing for a season to play with it*, it only gave a flash of light now and then, but sent them away in the dark. It is just with God to say of those that *will not see*, that they *shall not see*, and to hide from their eyes, who only look about them with a great deal of carelessness, and never look before them with any concern upon the things that belong to their peace.” Read **Psalms 78:2, Matthew 13:34-35**.

The Word Applied: Do you want to see, know, and obey Divine truth or just “play with it”?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to obey and be guided by what I see & hear in Scripture.

SATURDAY – It is *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* that has been made to shine in our hearts (**2 Corinthians 4:6**) as believers. Let’s close on this thought with a quote from John MacArthur: “...since the fall of Adam, every person on earth has been born spiritually blind. They fall into two categories: those who will never see and know God and those who, by the grace of God and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, are enabled to see and to have intimate fellowship with Him. The deciding factor is how a person is related to Jesus Christ. The person who rejects the Savior remains forever blind; the person who confesses Him as Lord is given spiritual sight as well as spiritual life. Unfortunately, men do not universally have the desire for spiritual sight that they do for physical. The vast majority do not know they are spiritually blind and do not care. Even when offered sight, many refuse it.” (*MacArthur New Testament Commentary –Matthew 16*) Read **Psalms 82:5, John 1:9-11**.

*The Word Applied: Are you walking about in darkness? Embrace, love, and live in **The Light**.*

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for illuminating my dark life with Your Light.