**BCM Bible Study – Sept. 8/9, 2021**

**Mark 3:7-4:34**

**Getting Started:** In this part of Mark we will begin to experience an uptick in Jesus’ use of parables, and so many of Jesus’ parables have an agricultural and rural feel to them. With this in mind, here are a couple related warm up questions:

Warm up question #1 - **Who is the best storyteller you know and what makes them great at telling stories?** Warm up question #2 - **On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being “I’m very urban” and 10 being “I’m at home down on the farm”) how immediately do you relate to Jesus’ more homespun agricultural stories?**

**Some Recurring Recurring Patterns!**

As part of last week’s study we examined some repeated points of emphasis about what Jesus’ disciples saw and experienced as they followed him. Here are themes in last week’s passages that continue:

1. Miracles - physical healings and spiritual deliverance from demons (Mark 3:10-11)
2. Continuing to deal with the press of crowds. (Mark 3:7-9, 3:20)
3. Jesus still finds ways to have moments of solitude (Mark 3:7, 3:13).
4. Opposition continues from Pharisees, teachers of the law, and scribes (Mark 3:22), and now opposition from his family is added (Mark 3:21)

He also continues to have teaching and preaching at the center of his ministry, but we begin to see a couple consistent tools emerge in his teaching toolbelt: spiritual multiplication and parables.

**Teaching tools: Spiritual multiplication**

Jesus will not ignore the crowds, but he now begins to focus on investing in a smaller group of followers who will in turn multiply what he has invested in them as they invest in others. Paul echoes the power of spiritual multiplication when he tells Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2) **Who are some people in your life that have “passed on” to you the message of Jesus and lived out an authentic faith in front of you? Do you see yourself as one who is ready to provide the same kind of encouragement in the lives of others? If not, where do you need to grow or what roadblocks do you need to remove in order to have this kind of spiritual impact in the lives of others?**

We are given a little bit of a job description for the first disciples in Mark 3:14, “…that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and have authority to drive out demons.”

**If you were given this job description, what would be your follow up questions about the job? How different would you say is the job description of these first disciples and the job description of followers of Jesus today? What is the significant about the fact that the first responsibility Mark mentions is “that they might be with him”?**

**Teaching tools: Parables**

A parable is an everyday example that illustrates a spiritual truth. Jesus has been using small illustrative examples already, but chapter 4 is the first time Jesus begins to tell the slightly longer stories that most people associate with parables.

**Read Mark 4:1-20.** This parable is interesting in that:

1. It is the first story parable Jesus tells in Mark’s gospel.

2. In the middle of the parable Jesus teaches some things about the nature of parables.

3. It is one of the few parables that he explains line by line.

This parable is often called “The Parable of the Sower”, but perhaps it is better referred to as “The Parable of the Soils” because the central message of the parable is that the condition of the soil is the great determining factor in the yield of the seed. Our receptiveness to God’s word and the condition of our hearts matters greatly. We should tend our hearts to be good soil.

In contrast to the good soil, Jesus introduces three kinds of unfruitful soil. The path, because it has been hardened over time by much foot traffic, is equated with “busyness” in the eyes of many commentators. “These people beat the ground of their own lives asphalt-hard with their frenetic feet.” (Hughes) The problematic causes of the other two unfruitful soils are more directly described and the clarity of their meaning are a little easier to grasp.

**At times when you have been less receptive to God’s word, which of the three unfruitful soils would most typify the reasons why your heart resisted what God wanted to do in you with the word?**

- **The path – hardened ground where constant activity prevents reflection and depth, so Satan easily and quickly snatches seed away**

- **Rocky ground – there is no room for roots, so discouragement easily defeats them “when trouble or persecution comes”**

- **Thorny ground – where “worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things” choke out the possibilities of fruitfulness**

It is worth noting that in the parable the sower generously sows to all soils. Because of this, we see in Jesus’ explanation of the parable that all four soils have something in common – each person represented by each soil hears the word. God does not disqualify us from hearing because of the nature of our hearts, but if we let God soften our hearts and we continue to stoke our faith to trust him and respond with obedience when his word reaches our hearts we prepare ourselves to have open channels to continue to hear.

It is interesting to observe just how many times that hearing is highlighted in the chapter:

- He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (4:9)

- A difficult “hearing” reference (4:12 – see “Notes” section for treatment of this verse)

- What happens as each of the soils hears the word (4:15-20)

- Again – “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” (4:23)

- Consider carefully what you hear… (4:24)

**Do you consider yourself a good listener or is that an area of struggle? If you do consider yourself a good listener, does it come naturally or does it take constant attention and work? If you don’t consider yourself a good listener, what are some of the roadblocks that disrupt the process of listening for you? Do you think listening to God requires the same skill set as listening to people – why or why not?**

With all of the “hearing” references in Mark 4, Jesus drives home that we should take seriously what we hear from God. We should meet him with focused attention and a heart ready to deeply listen. There is an old saying, “Listening is so much like loving that it is hard to tell the difference.” Often, the applied lesson here is that people can feel greatly loved when they feel greatly listened to. This is a shadow of our most important relationship – we often best show our love relationship with God by listening and responding to what he says to us.

Challenge for this week – Take a Scripture verse from tonight (or another verse that has gotten your attention this week) and meditate on it throughout each day this week. As you do that, keep praying that God would help you to hear it well and apply it well.

Notes

Mark 3:11-12 can be problematic to many because it sounds like Jesus is saying that he intentionally hides truth, otherwise more people would turn to be forgiven. This is far from the intent of what Jesus is emphasizing.

Two thoughts here that may be helpful in a clearer understanding of the passage

1. A good student of Scripture allows Scripture to help interpret Scripture. In other words, the consistency of what God reveals about Himself can help us understand when an individual passage is unclear. Here we can turn to 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” This reminds us of God’s heart to see people repent and come to forgiveness, steering us away from an interpretation that assumes God is stingy with forgiveness.

2. Hughes suggests that a parallel account (Matthew 13:12-13) can help shed light. “For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have in abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” This is a simple reinforcement of the truth of the passage that those who harden their hearts to God’s truth can have a compounding effect of hardness which can make them miss more and more truth. “In essence, Jesus was enigmatically saying that the condition of one’s heart determines its receptivity to truth. The scribes had originally been given straightforward teaching that they rejected and thus they could ultimately lose the truth – it would be taken away from them.” (Hughes)