

The Servant's Parable Teachings (TIJ 4:1-34) Pleasant Plains 4-19-2020 Nick Angel

- ***READ Mark 3:31-35*** If you have been a part of this series of studies, then you have heard me make mention, on a number of occasions, of Mark's Gospel focusing extensively on the preaching of Jesus. Time and time again we see the multitudes surrounding Jesus in the synagogues, in houses, in the wilderness, and on the shores of bodies of water. One would think that all of this teaching and preaching would result in tons of people becoming disciples. While there were some who have responded well to Jesus's teachings, Mark has highlighted a couple of groups of people who have flat out rejected Jesus and His teachings. The first group we just read about was the very family of Jesus. They believed their son and brother to be out of his mind and crazy (**3:21**), but the other group, the scribes and Pharisees, actually accused Jesus of being in league with the devil himself. (**3:22**)
- Again, we might think that these would be the people who would be the very first groups to jump on the Jesus bandwagon, but that simply wasn't the case. They were not belonging to the true family of Jesus who were doing the will of God. (**3:35**) So who was at fault for this being the case? Was Jesus at fault for not teaching the right thing or not teaching well enough? Did the fault lie with the hearer? You might have guessed it already, but I certainly am not going to blame Jesus.
- In fact, I am convinced that our text of consideration for this morning which is the parable teachings of the Servant Jesus will show us that there is no fault in the message or teaching ability of our Lord. The first two verses of chapter four explain that Jesus is once again teaching the multitudes and this time He is doing so by the sea. The way Jesus went about teaching these people was through the use of parables. These illustrations that would have been familiar to these Galilean hearers, and they would have understood the literal meaning of them. However, would they grasp the spiritual concepts that lay beneath the surface?
- If we answer this from the perspective of His disciples, we would have to answer...no. In **vv.10-12**, Jesus is questioned as to why He taught in this way. Why was it that He didn't just straight up teach these people without parables? Why make it more difficult to grasp His teachings? Jesus answers with a quotation from **Isaiah 6:9,10**. In response to His parables Jesus states, *"they may indeed look, and yet not perceive; they may indeed listen, and yet not understand; otherwise, they might turn back and be forgiven."* I don't about you...but that seems like a bizarre reason for Jesus to teach in parables! Does He truly not want for people to be able to easily understand?
- Let's consider this from Isaiah's perspective. This quotation is taken from the vision that Isaiah sees in **Isaiah 6**. The Lord asks who would go for Him to speak to the people. Isaiah speaks up and says he would do such a thing...*"Here I am. Send me."* (**6:8**) How does the Lord respond? We would imagine that He would speak words of great encouragement to Isaiah, but instead He replies with, *"Go! Say to these people: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed."* Again, how does this make any sense? Oh and by the way...when Isaiah asks how long this would be the message, the Lord said until the people are severely punished because of their unwillingness to hear and respond rightly to the message.
- I would suggest that this makes sense when we consider that the Lord is seeking for those who would truly be committed to Him and turn to Him when being taught a difficult message. It is the message of God spoken by His prophets and the Great Prophet that separates the faithful and trusting from the unfaithful and the untrusting. It truly comes down to the message and the heart of the one receiving such a message. Those who truly want to follow the Lord will crave more and more of His teachings. However, the posers will refuse to hear any further and turn away. Let's see how Jesus teaches these truths in these parables of **Mark 4:1-34**.

I. The Parable Of The Soils (Mark 4:1-20)

A. **The Parable:** A sower throws seed all around him, and it falls on different types of ground. The birds eat the seed on the path. The rocky ground gives no place for roots. The thorny ground chokes the plants. The good ground gave forth good fruit.

- I want us to note that this would have been a very strange way for a farmer to sow his crop seed. The farmers of Jesus's day were no fools. They had a good grasp on what types of soil would grow and not grow. Therefore, as we read this parable we need to make sure that the focus is on what is actually realistic...which is the way the differing soils respond to the seed.

B. **What It Means:** Jesus's teachings (seed) are not the issue...the hearts (soil) are. Good hearts will listen, hear, and obey while the bad hearts will reject time and time again.

1. While the sower might have been behaving strangely for a farmer, Jesus was behaving just as a teacher would have been expected to behave. He was taking every opportunity before Him to teach the people the great message of the kingdom that His Father had sent Him to teach. There were people of all sorts hearing the consistent message He was teaching, but the difference between those who heard, desired more, and eventually believed and those who heard and turned away was the condition of their hearts.
2. The four soils which represented the hearts of His hearers are as follows:
 - a) Some would hear the message spoken by Jesus and immediately find it distasteful and turn away from it. There are some people who hear the teachings of Jesus and this inspired book that we hold so dear...and they could not care less about it. This book that transforms us (**Romans 12:1,2**) because we believe it to be the divinely inspired Word of God (**II Timothy 3:16,17**) has zero affect upon others. Their hearts are so hard and barren that there is simply no chance for the teachings of Jesus to take root.
 - b) Then there are those whose hearts are more like the rocky soil. If you're like me then you might think that this means so dirt with rocks mixed in, but Weirsbe (Be Diligent, pg. 53) notes that this would have actually been more akin to soil that was very shallow and actually sitting upon solid rock. This type of soil would have been common in this area of the world. This soil would be like the heart of the person who initially has a positive response (often emotional) to Jesus's teachings, but the response is short lived because there isn't any true soil in which the seed can take root. This is the person who very quickly falls away once the emotional high of a response to the Gospel wears off. Again, this is not a fault of Jesus, but of the one whose heart simply isn't in the right condition.
 - c) Thirdly, there is the person who hears the message and teachings, they receive the message and teachings, they begin to live by the message and teachings, but they never truly repent to the point that they are willing to experience true transformation by the Gospel message. They allow the thorns to continue to be present in their soil and heart, and at some point in their journey...the thorns strangle the faith to death.
 - d) Finally, there is the good and well prepared soil that receives the seed of the Gospel message, allows it to take root, and is in the proper condition for the seed to grow into a thriving plant that bears fruits of repentance and godliness. This understanding is not something I have determined in my wisdom, but it is how Jesus explains the parable Himself.
 - e) Again, please note that the same message has been preached to all of these different people. The only variable is the condition of the heart that receives the message. So long as the message is shared faithfully and accurately, it all comes down to whether or not the hearer is ready to listen, accept, and live by it. This ought to help us to not be so hard on ourselves when people don't listen/respond well when we teach. The ball is in their court.

II. The Parable Of Light (Mark 4:21-25)

- A. **The Parable:** Jesus speaks of the purpose of a light. It is not used to put under a basket or to hide under a bed. Instead, it is used to expose that which is hidden in darkness.
- B. **What It Means:** Jesus's words (light) will reveal the true nature of the hearts of those who hear His teachings. Those who refuse to listen will leave while those who stay are desiring to hear more.
1. Jesus Himself is described as the Light of the world in **John 1:4-9**. Part of the understanding of Him being the Light is that He is going to overcome the darkness that has encircled the earth as a result of sin, rebellion, and corruption. One way in which Jesus is going to do this is by revealing the true hearts of men. For example, the people revered the Jewish leaders (the scribes and Pharisees) and regarded them as extremely holy men. However, Jesus revealed through His teachings and their response to Him that they were actually nothing more than whitewashed tombs looking good on the outside, but they were filled with deadman's bones. **(Matthew 23:27,28)**
 2. This is the point of this particular parable. The teachings of Jesus will bring to light those who think they are able to hide in the darkness. They believed that they are able to hide behind a facade of holiness, but Jesus sees exactly who they are in reality. The teachings of Jesus also reveal to us what we are truly made out of. We might think ourselves to be faithful, but what happens when we come across a particular teaching that doesn't quite suit our liking? Do we rebel against the teaching or do we humble ourselves before it?
 3. I really like how Brent Kercheville describes what takes place when the light of Jesus's teachings shines on hearts when the truth is spoke. He says it always brings to reality a spiritual battle. It is the battle between the proper and good teachings of Jesus and the efforts of the evil one to cause the heart to be hardened. The light of Jesus's teachings will either illuminate the darkness and cause the spiritual roaches to scatter, or it will draw the desiring unto Himself.

III. The Parable Of Growth (Mark 4:26-29)

- A. **The Parable:** A farmer throws some seed on the ground, and then proceeds to leave it alone. The seed goes through its growth process, apart from the man's efforts, and eventually he is able to harvest the mature crop.
- I want us to focus on a couple of specific things in this parable. First, notice how the farmer has only scattered the seed, but he doesn't know how it is growing. Jesus also states that it is the soil itself that is producing the crop together with the seed. The farmer seems to be completely out of the picture until the time when the crops are ready to be harvested.
- B. **What It Means:** The process of the Gospel taking root in the lives of men and women is just that...a process. It is the message of the Gospel and Jesus that changes hearts & lives. We have no power in & of ourselves.
1. The kingdom of God is now highlighted, however we certainly recognize that kingdom of God doesn't happen until the message of the kingdom has been preached and acted upon. And yet, such a thing doesn't happen overnight. Just as the crop doesn't mature over night, hearers are usually not changed completely overnight from people of the world into people of the kingdom. It is a work in progress, and I believe we recognize that from this parable.
 2. Let's also notice that the power in the kingdom of God isn't found in the "farmer" who are spreading the seed of the Gospel message. No, the power and real process of growth is found between the message and the heart that receives it. Yes, we play a role in sharing the message, but we have no true power to change the minds and hearts of others. Paul says it this way in **I Corinthians 3:6**, *"I planted, Apollos watered, But God gave the growth."*

3. God was able to give the growth through the fact that His Word was doing the transformation. Think of it from this perspective. Jesus, the almighty and all powerful Son of God in fleshly form, had people reject Him. Does this mean that Jesus didn't have the power to forcibly change people's hearts to believe in Him? We might be getting into some theologically deep waters, but I'm not going to deny Jesus's power to do anything. But please notice that Jesus did not choose to change people's hearts. He allowed them to make the decision for themselves. If that's how Jesus operated then why would we believe that we have the ability to do even what Jesus did not do in Himself changing people's hearts.
4. Let me state on more time that this truth ought to take some of the unnecessary weight off of our shoulders. We shouldn't be beating ourselves up when people are not be positive in their response to the Gospel if we are doing our part to simply share the pure message. Paul himself acknowledged that he wasn't the best speaker, but that didn't matter because it all came down to the message he was able to share. The power wasn't in Paul. It wasn't in Apollos. It is not in us! It is in the message of God, His kingdom, and His Gospel. If that message falls onto the right conditioned heart...then good will come from it.

IV. The Parable Of The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32)

A. The Parable: A very small mustard seed is sown, and it grows into a very large plant that is able to produce large branches in which the birds of the sky can nest.

- When we come to this parable, we often focus on the fact that the mustard seed is small and yet grows into this very large plant. And while that is true of the kingdom of God in the fact that it began with a room full of individuals in Acts 1 and quickly grew in 3,000+ in Acts 2, I believe we are not giving the proper attention to the details at the end of the parable.

B. What It Means: The words of Jesus, which are the foundation and constitution of the kingdom of God, will bring forth great blessings for those who dwell within it. Again, the power is in His words.

1. Again, recognizing that it is the message taught by Jesus that lays the foundation for the kingdom, we need to recognize that it is only those who respond positively to the message that will be able to enjoy the blessings that come from being a part of this kingdom. This seems to be the understanding of this parable in respect to its context and the quotation that Jesus is making here from **Ezekiel 17:22-24**.

2. In the context of judgment being rendered on Judah for her unfaithfulness to God, the prophet makes a prediction for a great restoration that would take place down the road. *"This is what the Lord God says: I will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it. I will pluck a tender sprig from its topmost shoots, and I will plant it on a high towering mountain. I will plant it on Israel's high mountain so that it may bear branches, produce fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind will nest under it, taking shelter in the shade of its branches. Then all the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord. I bring down the tall tree, and make the low tree tall. I cause the green tree to wither and make the withered tree thrive. I, the Lord, have spoken and I will do it."*

3. With this text in mind, we are able to see exactly what Jesus is trying to teach through this parable. Just as God predicted a small sprig would grow great on the high mountain, so will this kingdom of God grow and bring great blessings to those who would be a part of it. But again, who would be a part of this kingdom? Only those whose hearts have been receptive to the message preached. That message has the power to bless any and all who have and will receive its teachings with gladness and acceptance because the One behind the message has all of the power we can think of and even beyond comprehension.

V. Application Questions

A. Do we trust in the power of Jesus's words to be enough to save souls and transform lives?

1. I fear that we are often discouraged in our efforts to share the Gospel message with people because we feel as if we are inadequate to convince them to understand and accept. However, I hope we recognize that the responsibility to convince people to change their ways is not ours. It is their responsibility to prepare their hearts to humbly receive the message.
2. Additionally, the power to transform the humble heart isn't even ours! All of the power belongs to God and the message He has prepared to save souls. Once we realize our job is simply to share and not to produce results, we might be more inclined to share more freely.

B. Are our own hearts in the proper condition to receive the teachings of Jesus so that we ourselves might be transformed?

1. We've focused a lot of what happens when others hear the message of the teachings of Jesus, but what about ourselves? Have we given proper attention to creating within ourselves hearts that are of the proper sort that will receive the teachings of Jesus and His Word? Are there times when we hear a teaching and we allow Satan to simply deflect it away from us? Are there other times that we initially accept, but we quickly lose our interest? Are there times when we allow the things of this world to cause our hearts to be strangled? All of these dangers still exist even for those who have at some point made a real commitment to Jesus.
2. This means that we must constantly be cultivating our hearts to be soft and humble before our Lord. We must continue to make the decision that we want more and more of Jesus and His teachings. We want to continually be in His Word, so that we might come to know Him more which will lead to an even stronger faith, and in turn it will allow us to be transformed in an even greater manner. Our heart's accepting of Jesus isn't a one time thing...it is a continual process that will last the length of our lives until it is time for us to be harvested into eternity.
3. This the expectation for all of the people of God whether it is the socially accepted thing to do or not. We are blessed to live in a special time in history where Christianity isn't under severe persecution or even socially frowned upon. But I'm sure we can all see the tide beginning to shift even ever so slightly as our society becomes more humanistic. The temptation to harden our hearts when the going gets tough will be present, but may our hearts remain soft and receptive to Jesus while standing strong against the evil one.

So what type of heart would each of us recognize ourselves as having at this moment? This is an important question to consider because it will determine what we will do even with this lesson. Will we humbly consider our need for better cultivating our hearts? Maybe we recognize that our hard work in humility is paying off. Wherever we might be, I hope that each of us will move and grow closer to where Jesus would have us be. Again, these things matter, and we know they matter because of what Jesus says in **Mark 4:24,25** *"And He said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear. By the measure you use, it will be measured to you — and more will be added to you. For whoever has more will be given to him, and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away."*

The more we are willing to accept from Jesus, the more we will desire of Him, and the more He will give us of Himself. In turn, may we take that goodness and share with others. However, if we fail to accept the teachings of Jesus, then we should not be surprised when we find ourselves completely devoid of producing fruit. May God help us all to be like that soil that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times to His glory, the benefit of our souls, and the benefit of the souls of those around us.