

Mark 4:21-34

“The Work Of God’s Word”

The work of the word of God with in the human heart has been the subject matter at hand thus far in this parabolic portion of the gospel of Mark. The overall emphasis of the gospel of Mark is upon the *works* of Jesus more so than the *words* of Jesus however this happens to be one of the few places where Mark pauses to give us not only the works that Christ *wrought* but some of the words that He *taught*.

and He notes for us a transition in the teaching style of Jesus at this point. Prior to this Jesus taught (we might say) *plainly*, meaning if He had something to say, something to share He simply said it. Oh it was powerful, it was profound and definitely packed a life changing punch if it were to be received and acted upon. But if He wanted to speak about the urgency with which we’re to obey the word He’d just tell them, “The one who hears these sayings of Mind and *does* them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. and When the storms came and beat on that house it stood firm because it was founded on the rock. But whoever hears what I’m saying and *doesn’t* do it will be like the fool who built his house on the sand. The storms came, beat on the house and it fell, and great was its fall.” Well, that’s pretty clear, if you want to be rooted in life, solid and stable, able to “weather life’s storms” then you’ll listen and place into practice what Jesus says. If you want to be uncertain, unstable, on shaky ground, poised and primed to stumble and fall when times get tough, then just go ahead and sit there, listen to what Jesus says but then go on about life and don’t worry about acting on it or putting it into play in your life. When the storms of life come you’ll be annihilated and left devastated. I mean Jesus just put it out there and left the choice to us to act on it, to receive it or to reject it. But by the time we reach this point in Jesus’ ministry a transition has been made, He’s no longer speaking *plainly*, now He’s speaking “parabolically” or in parables. Now if you’re not familiar with what exactly a parable is I’d recommend you grab our last study where we took the time to explain what a parable is and what is its point.

But you remember the scene, there Jesus was teaching the multitudes on the beach of the shore of the Sea of Galilee and the crowd got so overwhelming, so overbearing that He literally got into a boat, shoved off into the waters and began to teach them from the boat so that He might teach them more effectively Vs being overwhelmed and crushed by them inadvertently.

and It was at that point that He taught them that powerful parable of the sower, and how the word of God works in the human heart. and How that when it comes to the word of God it’s not so much the way it’s rendered that makes the difference as it is the way it’s received. There is life changing, soul saving power in the word of God. Paul told us in the book of Romans that the power of God unto salvation is inherent, it’s intrinsic with in the gospel message. There is life giving power in God’s power. Jesus said, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*” John 6:63 The word of God can give life, the power is there intrinsically, inherently. What then makes the difference in some people? Is it the way it’s rendered *to* them, no, it’s the way it’s received *by* them. The ability to bud forth is in every seed, but how exactly it’s going to turn out is based upon the soil

in which it lands. That's the parable of the sower; it's really the parable of the soils because it highlights the various conditions of the human heart and how the word of God can be disregarded through distractions or not placing any real priority on it.

How it can be accepted initially but then rejected ultimately because times got tough, and people were bringing the heat on me because of what I was trying to do and I just decided it's not worth it. How the work of God's word can be overrun and crowded out, choked out by the weeds of this world; the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things can enter in and choke out the word so that it becomes unfruitful. But there *are those* who will receive God's word, allow it to work deeply down into them, bring forth fruit in and through them perhaps 30, 60, or even 100 fold to the glory of God. and That's the Lord's desire for our lives. He's appointed us that we should bear fruit; that we should be much fruit and in that glorify His Father and show ourselves as His disciples.

Now, not everything that happens in Mark's gospel is chronological, we know that this parable was explained to them a little later when they all got alone, but as for now we get back to the boat in Vs 21.

Vs21-23

Of course we realize that when Jesus speaks of having ears to hear He's referencing more than simply taking in the audio. He's talking about listening *to* it, and acting *on* it; He's saying, "Listen carefully, seek understanding diligently and make use of it practically." Meditate on it, allow it to permeate you, assimilate into you and become a part of who you are. If you have an ear that's tuned in to the things of the Spirit, here's something you don't want to miss. That's what He's saying.

and He asks the question, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket, or under a bed?" The obvious answer is "No." "Is it not to be set on a lampstand?" The answer is "Yes." Now the lamp He's talking about would be a little clay tray like thing that would have olive oil poured into it and then a wick placed in it and lit. In order to give off light it'd have to be "filled" with the oil, it use of the resource poured into it and then it would have to be replenished in order to carry out it's objective of giving off light.

and The essence of what Jesus is saying there is that we've been "poured into" by the Spirit of God, the word of God has taken root *in* us and it's to bring forth fruit *from* us. You don't pour into a lamp, invest into it, and take the time to prepare it so that you can cover it up and effectively gain nothing from it at all. If you bring a lamp into a dark room it's that it (the room) might receive what? Light, and the point here is that the things we've taken in we're to let shine forth. We read in Matthew's gospels where Jesus said, "*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" Matt 5:14-16 God doesn't spill into you, invest in you various gifts of the Spirit so that you can cage it up, close it off and do nothing with it. You and I are to be about blessing and benefiting the body by that which Jesus has so graciously given to us. Freely you've received, freely you're to give. Paul told the Corinthians, "*...the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.*" 1 Cor 12:7 God gifts you by His Spirit individually, but the objective is to build up and edify the body collectively/corporately.

and When it comes to the *word of God* we have a responsibility to let shine forth that which we take in. Once it's been poured *into* you you're to let it flow forth *from* you; you see, when you receive from the Lord and then you don't take that into the work world, or into the classroom or wherever what you're doing is in essence taking that light and putting it under a basket. It's not blessing, it's not benefiting, it's not shining forth for *anyone*. If you would speak to someone here of how God has blessed your life, than why wouldn't you share that same blessing with a work associate?

"They might laugh at me." Well, there's enough sorrow in the world, if the worst thing you do is spread a few laughs you'll be alright. Let your light shine.

Vs22

Now if you've been around here any length of time you've probably heard me say that when it comes to the scriptures there's only 1 interpretation, that's it, there's not more than 1 interpretation of a particular passage of scripture. It either means what you've interpreted it to mean or it doesn't. However there's manifold *application* to a particular passage of scripture. This person may apply it in this way, another person may glean a different application, and that's all good and well.

The *interpretation* regarding this Vs with in its context seems to me to lend itself to what Jesus has been saying to us and sharing with us. That the word He's giving, the revelation He's imparting isn't something that's to be a secret, it's to be opened up and exposed to everyone. Everyone needs to come into the light of the truth of the word of God, and we're to be instrumental in bringing that light to them, showing/sharing that light with them.

However there's an application here that's appropriate as well and that is God's ability to bring into the light the things done in darkness, to reveal those things that we thought were hidden. In Luke's gospel we read where Jesus said, "*For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.*" Luke 12:2-3 Solomon said it like this, "*Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.*" Eccl 10:20 In the 139th Ps David declared the fact that there's just no hiding from God, we turn the lights out and think that because of that no one knows, we whisper so we think no one hears. God knows, and God hears, before the Lord the night shines as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to Him there's no escaping His presence. and I've seen it time and time and time again, people thinking they're getting away with sin only to have it come back and bite them, they're exposed in it, God brings things to light and deals with them regarding it. We're to receive the warning; lead chaste and holy lives; God help us.

Vs24-25

Now again context is key here, because on the sermon on the Mt Jesus issued this same type exhortation with in the context of judgment. Being careful of the degree by which we judge someone. and He said, "*For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*" Matt 7:2 and He was never saying to turn a blind eye to sin, or not being careful to distinguish right from wrong and calling things out for what they were. But He was saying that we need to be careful to not hold someone to a

level of scrutiny that we're not willing to be held by ourselves. Putting a standard on someone else that we're not willing to uphold ourselves, blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy, and of course mercy triumphs over judgment. But here the exhortation isn't concerning judgment; it's concerning paying attention and taking heed to the word of God. "Take heed what you hear." "For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." The idea being that if you're ear is turned toward and tuned in to the Word of God, you have a heart that's hungry to learn, a teachable spirit and you're wanting all that God has for you. He's going to be teaching you, imparting insight and understanding to you, rooting and grounding you. But if you're here pretty much because someone made you come, you're not really interested; you don't have a heart (really) for the things of God. You're not going to get much out of your time here. God's not going to make a pointless investment, He'll impart those things to the one who's hungry, who's paying attention, who's eager to learn and be led of Him.

Notice (vs24) "To you who hear, more will be given." and I don't want to leave this Vs with out drawing your attention to the 1st sentence that Jesus issued here in Vs 24. We've talked about the exhortation concerning *how* we hear, with open and eager hearts, dialed in and ready to receive in humility that we might act upon it practically. But here Jesus says, "Take heed *what* you hear." Not only is it important that our attitude be in its proper place concerning *how* we hear, but it's incredibly important to take heed (that is be careful) *what* we hear. We have a responsibility incumbent upon us to find a place that teaches the word of God in its totality with in its proper context. That gives us solid balanced and biblical doctrine. Most people like junk food, but we readily admit we can't live on it. It's not good for us, and yet how many people subject themselves to "junk" in the name of going to church or receiving something from the word? They sit under someone who's not teaching the word, or who doesn't equip the saints for the work of the ministry but because they're entertained they'll take in what they have to say. Jesus said, "Take heed what you hear." Be careful regarding what you're willing to subject yourself to, what you're filling your mind with, even outside the realm of the church. Don't think you can take in and absorb all kinds of worldly debris and not be polluted, take heed; be careful.

and Vs 25 basically states, "Use it or lose it." God is all about a return on His investments, He's shrewd business Man, and if His investment isn't paying off He won't keep pouring into it. We're to put into practice the insight and understanding He grants us.

Vs26-29

Again the mysterious yet miraculous work of the word of God in the human heart and life. and Now that we're familiar with the parable of the sower and the key Jesus gave us to unlocking other parables we can glean and gain further understanding from this one as well. He says, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground." What's the seed? The word of God. What's the ground, or the soil? The human heart. So what's happening here is that the word of God is being sown, being scattered into a particular person or group of people's hearts/lives. and Notice He says that a man sows it, goes to sleep at night, gets up in the morning and the seed is sprouting and growing, but he doesn't know how.

What's the point here? That man has absolutely nothing to do with the work of salvation, the power of life is intrinsic with in the seed itself, and something takes place between the seed and the soil, but the man who sowed it has nothing to do with that. It's mysterious, it's

miraculous, but it's the marvelous way God's word works with in the human heart. Peter said, *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,"* 1 Peter 1:22-23 God has chosen to partner with man in the sowing of the seed, but that's where our contract comes to an end. The work of salvation, the "born again" process is something completely mysterious to man; we don't know how it works. (John 3:8) It's like planting a seed in the ground, I just seeded my yard a couple weeks ago, and with the help of my children and a couple friends I just went at it. Turned the sprinklers loose on it, and I'm a bit...I don't know if "obsessed" is the right word but every morning I'm out there looking over the ground, waiting, watching for a sprout, a blade of grass. and It's coming along, I have no idea how that seed sent down a root, sent up a shoot and became a blade of grass but it's so cool to watch happen. and That's the way God's word works in people's hearts. God let's us get in there and sow it, and water it, but He's the One who gives the increase. and How it happens...I don't know, but it's so cool to watch. Not even the angels of heaven fully understand this mystery of the transition that takes place from sinner to saved. From the seed of God's word, the gospel given, and salvation takes place.

Again Peter said, *"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into."* 1 Peter 1:10-12 It's mysterious, it's miraculous and it's marvelous to behold.

Now here's something else I want you to consider and be encouraged by, I've applied this parable to the work of salvation, the word of God sinking deep into the human heart and bringing forth the fruit of salvation, saving faith that's come by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But this parable is as equally applicable to the work of *sanctification*. Believe me when I tell you that the work of God's word is in no way limited in your life to the work of salvation, it's also active about the work of sanctification.

Setting you apart to Jesus Christ, chipping those little (or sometimes big) elements of you away and making you more like Him. Teaching you to walk in a manner that's worthy of Him. and Again it's mysterious, we don't really understand it, we can't really comprehend it. But something happens to you and to me when we come to church or are in an environment whereby the word of God is being sown in our hearts. and It goes beyond getting a better grasp on the bible intellectually, though that's a wonderful thing. But God has promised us that when it comes to His word being sent out into the hearts of the hearers that it will not return to Him void but that it will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it forth. You may walk out of here and to my own personal disappointment due to the all the time seeking to be prepared for our time together in God's word today, you might forget every word I've said. But be that as it may believe me when I tell you that you will have benefited from being here spiritually, even if you can't remember what's been said specifically.

Because God's word has an affect on our lives that we don't even recognize or know anything about until the fruit is made manifest. The bible teaches us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. You'll leave here today with more faith than what you walked in here with. The bible tells us that we're washed by the water of the word, as you sit here under the waterfall of God's word; it's getting down in to the cracks and crevasses of your soul and scrubbing away, washing you, cleansing you, freeing you from the debris and pollution of the world around you. The bible tells us that the word of God strengthens us, feeds and nourishes us, guides us, you see there's a much deeper, invisible yet very real work that God's word does in us that goes well beyond an intellectual stimulus. It's s spiritual work of growth and development. and You're just living life as usual, going to work, going to bed at night, but while you sleep God's word is working in you, permeating down deep with in your heart, and it's developing you, sanctifying you, setting you apart to lead a holy life. and Perhaps you had a struggle with your temper, and you didn't realize it until hindsight and you found yourself in a situation that ordinarily would've set you off but suddenly it seems like, "Oh well, God's in control I'm sure it'll work out for His glory and my good somehow." and It's like something goes off in you and you think, "Did I just say that, I should be flaming mad right now." and You praise the Lord, that's the work of His word by the power of His Spirit in your life. You can't explain it, but you're growing, there's fruit, evidence of the word of God at work in your life. That's another reason it's so important to be in a place whereby we're being subjected to the word of God with regularity and consistency. Because it's working in you in a mysterious, miraculous and marvelous way...and as time goes by that work is made manifest for all to see and enjoy.

Vs30-32

Now I don't know what you know about mustard plants but suffice it to say that when a mustard plant is full grown it's not normal for it to be of the stature whereby birds come by and nest in them. and So though many people seem to believe this is pointing to a marvelous moving the work and word of God such to the extent that God's kingdom will go "super sized" on the earth and there will be a "nesting" a "refuge" for people from every tribe tongue and nation to be found therein... I suppose that's possible however I'm personally of the persuasion that Jesus is talking about something just a little bit darker than that. Something that on the surface may appear to be grand and glorious but in reality isn't all that it's cracked up to be.

Remember again back to the parable of the sower; what did Jesus say that the birds of the air represented in His parables? Satan and his emissaries, "Wait a minute Jeff, are you suggesting that the 'church' will experience growth in a way that appears to be grand and glorious but in reality it's providing an avenue for Satan to get in there and set up shop?" That's exactly what I'm suggesting, Satan goes to church. All you have to do is take a brief look at church history, and even some of the "doctrines" that are floating around presently to realize that some of what's taking place isn't "normal" nor is it good. Not all church growth is necessarily good. Now don't misunderstand me we want the work of God to go forth and be as large as He wants it to be. If we had the choice of seeing 10 saved or 10,000 we're going to take 10,000 hands down. We want God's kingdom to increase. I don't think the church can be too big numerically, but it can grow in ways that God never intended it to grow. As a political party, or a ruling party; over much of the middle ages in Europe the church had an unnatural

dominance over society. The church had armies, the church had governments, ambassadors, huge treasuries and political influence. The church was a political and military empire, God never intended the church to be a political or military empire, He intended us to be a *spiritual* empire. What was happening was unnatural, it was abnormal, like a mustard seed growing in such a way that it went beyond the bounds of its original intent. People were tortured and murdered in the name of Christ, convert or be killed, today we have people barking like dogs, laughing uncontrollably, doing all sorts of strange and corrupt activity in the name of Christ. Satan goes to church, he gets in there is stirs contention, creates division, seeks to nest in its branches. I think that Jesus is issuing here a dose of reality, a warning that we watch and be wise...don't check your brain at the door when you walk into church, or when someone does something in the name of Christ. Make sure that the activity, or the doctrine is in line with the counsel of the word of God.

Vs33-34

2 Things and we're done. #1 Jesus spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. Jesus is willing to meet you where you're at. He's not looking to impress anyone with His eloquence or His intelligence, He wants to meet you where you're at and cultivate growth in your life from that point. and #2 When He got alone with His disciples He explained all things to them. Do you really want understanding of God's word? Consider alone time with Jesus, seeking Him, asking Him, spending time thinking things through, asking for illumination, application, and understanding. Now I don't want to burst your bubble but God won't always explain everything to us in the way we'd like Him to. Consider Job, but God will be faithful in His time, to speak to Your heart, in His way. and It may be as simple as "Trust me on this one, I've got it under control." and We'll be good with that, but get alone with Jesus and let Him minister to your heart. Let God's word, do a deep and abiding work in your heart, it's spilled *into* you, let it shine forth *from* you to the glory of His name.

Prayer Points:

Jesus we thank You for the deep and inward work of Your word as it's sown into the soil of our hearts. That we can trust that somehow and in some way You're doing a miraculous and marvelous thing in deep recesses of our hearts. Cleansing us, strengthening us, guiding and sanctifying us. May we be open to all that You desire to do in us and may You be glorified through the fruit bore through us. and Father may our light so shine that people see what You're doing in our lives and are drawn to magnify Your name. We've received Lord, now may we give, may we be a blessing to the body of Christ and a witness to the world around us...

If you're here and you've not given your heart to Christ, the word of God doing an inner work in your heart today as well. I can't explain it, I don't understand it, but I know that God wants to bring forth life in you today as the result of it. The seed has been sown, what kind of soil has it landed in? You need to know that God has loved you with an everlasting love. and That Jesus Christ has laid down His life and shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sin. and If you're ready, Jesus is willing; new life can be yours. Come to Christ, He'll receive you as you are and you'll never be the same.