

CLOSE-UPS OF JESUS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARK - Part seven

Wednesday, August 5th, 2020 - 7:00 p.m.

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KNOWING HOW SPIRITUAL GROWTH HAPPENS-AND WHY IT MATTERS

1) **Mark 4:21-23 - *Jesus has more to teach us about hearing the Word***

"And he said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? [22] For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. [23] If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

In the parable of the soil we learned that even productive soil can be rendered useless if obstacles and obstructions (like **rocks** and **thorns**) are not properly dealt with. Here the same idea is developed with different imagery. Just as surely as the whole idea of lighting a lamp is to light up a room - the whole idea of receiving God's Word is to transform a life. Jesus underscores how utterly absurd it is to **intentionally** put a burning lamp under a bed. But people do precisely something that foolish when they ignore or brush aside what God is showing them in His Word or procrastinate in organizing things so that God's way can be bright and clear in their lives.

2) **Mark 4:24-25 - *How the way you hear becomes habitual***

"And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. [25] For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'"

Jesus sets up two truths in these verses. They both deserve our attention:

a) ***We need to be careful what we hear.***

Just as a radio can't be properly tuned to two stations at once, if our lives are diverted to distractions (even good ones) we will lose the ability to discern the voice of God. This is exactly what Jesus said in **Mark 4:18-19** - "And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, [19] but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

b) ***We need to be careful about what we do with what we hear.***

I can learn a great deal from God's Word and accomplish nothing but have it bring greater wrath from the hand of God. James resonates this same truth - **James 3:1** - "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."

See also **James 1:22-24** - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."

3) **Mark 4:26-29 - *Spiritual growth is not out of our reach***

"And he said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. [27] He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. [28] The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. [29] But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'"

Having given all of these warnings about hearing, Jesus now assures us that it is not our works that produce spiritual fruitfulness. True, the **soil must be prepared** and the **seed must be put into the ground** - but given those proper responses, there is a life in the seed which grows and develops quite apart from the work of the initiator. There's a tremendous message of hope here. The Word, properly embraced and planted in the heart, is watched over and empowered by the Spirit of God Himself. That's why it's called the **"Sword of the Spirit."**

This is so important to remember as you humbly kneel during your devotional time and don't feel very blessed. Think about this as you take the time to explain God's Word to your children and wonder if it's doing any good. Remember this as you lead and teach but don't see the kind of results you expected. God will bring in the harvest.

4) **Mark 4:28 - Growth is rarely immediate nor explosive**

"The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear."

This is what makes the disciplines of faith and perseverance so necessary in the Christian walk. Crops don't develop overnight. There's a time factor involved (notice the different stages of development in verse 28). At first it's hard to tell the crop from a blade of grass or a weed. They all look alike. An impatient or thoughtless hearer will rarely nourish spiritual life long enough to reap a harvest. Jesus cautions against **aborting** the potential harvest through our own impatience.

This discipline of perseverance is absolutely essential if we are to become what God wants us to be. There will be no growth without it - **James 1:2-4** - **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."** Imagine, trials handled with perseverance are the tool God uses to make your life absolutely perfect from His perspective.

Luke says this virtue will be especially needed in the end times - **Luke 21:17-19** - **"You will be hated by all for my name's sake. [18] But not a hair of your head will perish. [19] By your endurance you will gain your lives."**

5) **Mark 4:30-32 - God does great work through small beginnings**

"And he said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? [31] It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, [32] yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'"

This is just the opposite approach to the market driven religion of our age. We measure things by **immediate impact** - even in the church. That's because quick solutions give the illusion of immediate success. Faith and perseverance aren't needed. But genuine spiritual growth, even when issued in by strong tides of revival, still needs to result in the formation of **solid spiritual disciplines**. And all of these disciplines center around the learning and applying of the Seed of God's Word in our hearts.