

[fruits and guts]

:: mark 4 ::

Mark chapter 4 is our text. Here it is:

Mark 4.-41 -And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” And He said to them, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.’ ”

And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

Also He said to them, “Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself

does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Then He said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.”

And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

So far in Mark everything has been pretty Jesus specific. Jesus coming, Jesus speaking, Jesus healing, Jesus calling, Jesus interacting. But this chapter turns the focus outward in message, directing the attention on how individuals, including us as readers, are going to *respond* to the Word of God and what our lives are actually going to be about.

What happens here is that we start getting these parables that Jesus would share with people who came to hear from Him. Now, while parables have intrinsic value, relating a spiritual truth through a simple story, they were specifically used by Christ to illicit a response from people who actually wanted to know more and receive understanding. Because, already Jesus is pointing out that a life of discipleship isn’t just a life of *hearing* things, it’s a life of *responding* to what God is calling us to do. The whole multitude heard Jesus teach and saw what He did, but that didn’t make them disciples. Following up and following after made you a disciple.

In the same way, we hear the Word of God, but if that word doesn’t take root in our lives, if we don’t accept it and respond to it, then there is no fruit and that seed is spoiled.

Jesus explains this in the first part of the passage, the Parable of the Sower, where He says in verse 20:

Mark 4.20 - But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.

In Jesus’ mind, the purpose of life was to hear the word, accept the word and then bear fruit. That’s God’s plan. That’s the work of the Kingdom. He reiterates it several times using different

analogies. Like in verses 21 through 25 He talks about our lives being like a lamp and that the *purpose* of a lamp is to be used and to shine light and to be exposed, not hidden away.

And so what we discover here is that Jesus Christ thought and taught that it was completely expected that a believer would hear God's word, accept it and bear fruit. If our lives aren't in that pattern, then either we're turning away like many in the multitude, hearing but not accepting what God is saying to us, or the soil of our hearts has been polluted in some way or another.

The pattern set before us is one of hearing, accepting and bearing fruit.

Hearing is easy. Everyone hears. But then the accepting is up to us. And we need to understand that God's word is continually being sown into our hearts. It's not just a one time thing that happens for conversion, but instead God intends a continual sowing, a continual growing, a continual harvesting for our lives. The process of sanctification and of bearing fruit should be evident to us and to those around us. After all, the *purpose* of God's work in our lives is to be a lamp which shines brightly. He wants to bring revelation of Himself through our relationship with Him. That's what Christ considered to be the normal, natural byproduct of Christianity.

But many who *heard* God's word weren't interested in actually *accepting* God's word. And that can happen to us as well. If we come to the Bible or come to church and hear what God is speaking to us but then fail to see it as an opportunity to gain understanding or insight for life, then we're failing to accept what we're hearing and we've broken the pattern that God intends for the Christian life. Hear, accept, bear fruit.

So Jesus comes to us and brings wisdom and understanding and spiritual knowledge, but He waits to reveal those things for those who are actually interested in them. People who actually believe that spiritual fruit is important.

But then, we get to the end of the chapter and we see that while we're talking about these spiritual things, they're also meant to be extremely practical. Jesus demonstrates for us that the spiritual life *IS* the most important thing. That all the things He's been talking about aren't just for some philosophical or intellectual discussion in a church somewhere. His relationship with us is meant to be an encompassing, permeating thing.

The guys are there on the boat, the storm arises, they panic and Jesus says to them, "where is your faith?" Because God's word is not just a bunch of spiritual platitudes. It's not just a metaphysical thing that we refer to when we're wondering about eternity and stuff like that. Jesus felt that the life of discipleship was meant to work out in the physical world as God's people were receptive of the Word, then bore fruit and lived out a life of faith, fully confident in what the Lord was doing.

So we see all of this condensed into this one chapter and it really boils down to this for us this morning this way: We've heard the word. In fact we continually hear the word as we read it and as we gather together and as the Spirit ministers to us. So what are we going to do with what we've heard? The difference between the disciples and the multitude was that the disciples followed up on what God had said. They understood that there was more going on than Jesus just telling a story. They accepted it and that seed of Scripture started bearing fruit in their lives.

And as they heard again, they received it again and more fruit started being born in their lives. God took care of the growth. They just had to be faithful to receive the word and keep their hearts in a pattern that was undefiled and unpolluted by those things which choke out the word of God.

But then they were to take what God was doing in their spiritual lives and actually apply it and live it out. That's what Jesus wanted to define them. That fruit. That work He was doing. Their lives were meant to be defined by faith and confidence in the work of God. In the Kingdom. That's what was going on here.

So the question is, will we respond to the Word? Will we accept it and bear spiritual fruit? And then will we live a life of faith as God reveals Himself through us?

That's what the normal Christian life is meant to be. But so often what we perceive as normal is the multitude. People who gathered together, they heard Jesus, but then just went about their lives. Maybe talking about what they heard at some point, but it didn't make a difference in their lives because they didn't accept it and receive the real wisdom and understanding and application that God was trying to get across. It's not *normal* to be a fruitless Christian. In fact, that is a defective life. The Christian life without spiritual fruit is like a candle under a basket. It's a seed that doesn't grow. It's not normal. It's broken.

Mark has turned this ministry of Jesus on us in this chapter and challenges us to not only be people who take initiative and go to God's word for understanding and wisdom, but then to be people who live with real faith in what God's plan is. The plan is clear. The roles are clear. The opportunities are there. What we must do is take up this call to faith and fruitfulness, allow the Lord to overcome those pollutants in our hearts, to overcome the fear we may have, and actually bring a harvest in our lives.