

Teachings of Jesus.
Mark 4:21-25

Responsive Psalm 75
Romans 10:11-21
1st John 1:5-2:6

(Mark 4:10-20) Last week we started in Chapter 4 which is one of the first teachings of Christ recorded here in the book of Mark. Afterward Aaron asked a very good question and I thought I would address it here because I know there are some people who listen to the recordings who maybe had the same question.

Aaron asked what is the significance, or meaning of the verse 8 where Jesus says, “But some seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced; some 30 fold, some 60 fold and some 100 fold.” And again he repeats it when he is later explaining this parable to his close followers and he says in verse 20. “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit; some 30 fold, some 60 and some 100.”

So I think the key to understanding this goes back to the parable itself. If you remember last week my main point was that this parable is about the sower, about Christ's ministry and the further ministry and spreading of the gospel by his apostles, disciples, and all who believe. Just as any farmer would know you can do all that you can to prepare your fields in hopes for a good harvest but there are always things that are outside of your control. Some we see here in this example that Jesus gives, birds eating the seed, weeds springing up and chocking out the crop, then there is drought, insects, and the quality of the seeds themselves. But no matter how the farmer prepares he can not truly control any of these elements. The same is with the ministering the word, and this parable shows a farmer who is indiscriminate when he is planting his crop, throwing seed even on ground that is not likely to take any root.

But that does not stop him from doing so, as we see from Jesus' explanation of this parable he is telling his disciples to not be selective, or care who they witness to, but rather to witness and share the good news of the gospel to all for in reality they do not know what may or may not be good ground. God prepares the ground, and is the Lord of the harvest. Lets turn real quick over to Matthew 9:32-38. This is Matthews account of Jesus healing the demon possessed man and being accused of doing so by the power of Satan.

“As they went out, behold, they brought to him a man, mute and demon-possessed. And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke, and the multitudes marveled, saying, it was never seen like this in Israel! But the Pharisees said, he casts out demons by the ruler of demons.”

Matthew doesn't go into any detail here as Mark did with the discourse that Jesus had with these pharisee's but instead chooses to just move on, verse 35, “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” And this is the verses I want to focus on here, “ But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” I think this description of them being like lost sheep without a shepherd has both a physical and spiritual aspect.

They were more than likely weary from following Jesus around the country side, some dropping off as they went and others joining as he went, but the last 2 verses is why I think there is a spiritual aspect to this as well, about the people being lost, looking for hope, looking for an answer, looking for signs and wonders for Jesus turns to his disciples and says about these multitudes, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few, Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The point I wanted to make here in Matthew is that God is the Lord of the harvest, it is his crop, it is his harvest, and we are laborers doing that which he asks us to do...spreading the seed of his word. And it is this sovereign Lord of the Harvest who will gather the harvest to himself. So just as my point was last week about this parable, it isn't about the soils so much as it is about God's word going forth and being fruitful in the hearts that he has prepared. Now we need to keep that in mind as we go to answer this question about the size, of the harvest. I will qualify that this is my understanding, and I know there are others out there, some equating the size of the harvest as a prize, or reward for the work that is done, work harder, seeing a bigger reward and harvest right?

The problem I have with that view is that there are countless people who spend their entire lives dedicated to the teaching and preaching of the word and see very little fruit in their ministries. We have the passage in Isaiah where God says he is going to send him to a people who will not hear, who will not understand, and who will not turn and repent. That is kind of a depressing ministry, and by today's standards would be a complete failure. If you are not constantly adding people to the church, if you are not growing in numbers then you must be doing something wrong, or God is punishing you..we have heard it all, but yet God sends his prophet to share his message and says that they will not listen and they will not hear.

That is why I don't like the idea that this passage about the good ground producing 30, 60, or 100 fold being related to the worker, or the sower because one can labor their entire lives and only see 30, while on the other hand some can seem to have large measurable success in their ministry. So, why is that? Well, once again the key is God, who is the Lord of the harvest...it is he who grants the new birth, it is he who grants the understanding, and the faith so one may turn and repent. It is God who blesses with 30, 60, or 100 fold and it is for his purpose, it is for his glory. We should not look at the harvest of God's laborers and judge those laborers as being lax, or better, but instead rejoice that God has chosen to bless their ministry with fruit.

This goes the same with the support of Missionaries. To often churches are looking for that large harvest, they want the big numbers because they are investing money and they want to see a good return. Is it right for us to think this way? In doing so are we not putting a monetary value on a soul. What if 1000's or even 10's of 1000s of dollars are spent supporting a missionary over the course of years and God blesses that ministry with 10 converts. Do we rejoice, or do we become discouraged, maybe even angered feeling that our investment was wasted? This is sadly the outcome of many missionaries who end up having to leave the field because their sending churches determine that they have not been successful enough and drop their support. It should be little concern to us as to the size of the harvest but rather we should rejoice that there is a harvest!

And I think that is the point of these 2 verses, here in verse 8, and verse 20 of Mark. Be faithful, ministering the word and do not become discouraged in what you determine to be a poor harvest, and like wise do not become prideful in an abundant harvest, for in both it is God who has granted this harvest.

So I hope that answers the question about this verse, I do not believe that this is any sort of reward, or even showing the skills, or the labor of the one ministering, but rather it is God who gives the increase, it is God who has prepared the heart to receive his word and produce fruit. We will see much of this same theme running through our study today as we look at a few more parables that Jesus teaches. So, let's dive right in now shall we? Starting where we left off last week at verse 21, to verse 25

So first is this little parable about the lamp. On the surface I think it is pretty self explanatory. Lamps are used to create light, to brighten up an room so that one can see, it can not do that if hidden, but rather is elevated so that it can shine brightly illuminating all that is around it. But there is more here then just simple logic and physics, this is a parable of Jesus full of meaning and purpose and that is our goal, to try to work out what this example is teaching. In the old testament writings Lamps were commonly used as a metaphor for God, or his word. 2 Samuel verse 29 says "You are my lamp o Lord, the Lord shall enlighten my darkness, for by you I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall." And over in Psalm 119 verse 105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Jesus is likely talking about himself in this parable, he is the one who has come to shed light upon mankind in which they will be enabled to see. This imagery of a Jesus being a lamp, a light unto the world testifies that his purpose is to enlighten and reveal the way of salvation. We see this in the Gospel according to John, chapter 8, verse 12 when Jesus says. "I am the light of the world, He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life." Much like the sower indescribably throwing seed upon the ground being a picture of sharing the gospel, we can say the same here as well. IF you are Christ's then you have this light of life that John talks about, and this light that we have should not be hidden, should not be buried but should shine forth brightly.

God's word, his ministry, his work in our life and our praise and glory to him should be put on a lamp stand so that the ministry of God can shine through our lives. This is not something that we should be ashamed of, or shy about. Christ had come to be a light to the world, and he would not let the pharisee's, or even his disciples and family members hinder him in this ministry. We saw that in chapter 3 when he was being accused of having a demon. Those close to him sought to hide him, to take him aside, away from the center of attention...but he would have nothing to do with that, he is the light and he must shine into the world which brings us to verse 22

With this light shining into the world, "There is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light." Nothing hides from God, and nothing can diminish his light shining into the dark world unless God himself does so. We see this with the use of parables in Jesus' teaching. Back to verse 11 and 12 of chapter 3, "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 that may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand lest they should turn and heir sins be forgiven them." God's light of understanding shines into the world, but there are those who it has not been given to understand the mystery of the kingdom of God.

The other effect of the light of God shining into the world is that it exposes the darkness in the world. This alludes to Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 14. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." Nothing can stand before this light, nothing can stand before the glory of God.

I am reminded of Exodus 33 when Moses asked God to show him his glory, to which God replied "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face for no man shall see me and live. And the lord said here is a place by my, and you shall stand in the rock. So it shall be while my glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by, Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.

There will come a day when the glory of God will shine in its fullness, when mankind shall be judged and all things shall come to light, nothing shall be hidden, all things shall be revealed and there will be no secrets. But until that day, we can see the glory of God, shining through his son, the lamp, the light of the world. One Author said that the very humanness of Jesus had the effect of governing the glory of God from overwhelming and blinding the world, instead inviting all through his Son. Just as Jesus teaching in parables so only to those who it was given would understand, it is much the same with Jesus himself.

In many ways Jesus is hidden and we see this in the response of the pharisee's and rabbis'. To them he was just a child of a carpenter, born from a lowly family with no credentials of a rabbinic school. But to those it has been given to hear, to see, and to understand they saw him as who he was, the promised messiah, the Son of God. Which brings us to verse 24, and 25. 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 from him.

Jesus often implored his listeners to listen carefully to his teaching. And I think this really is no different here, in verse 23 after he tells the parable of the lamp he says to them if anyone has ears to hear, let them hear, imploring them to listen, and to understand. Then he says, with the same measure you use to understand, it will be measured to you. An example that comes to mind is something that we all experience. Ever been in a conversation with someone about something you care little about and it is just been going on a bit too long? Your eyes start to glaze over, you hear, but you stop listening, your mind starts to wander as you start thinking about something else. This is a natural thing that happens to each and every one of us, and Jesus says Take heed what you hear, be sure to listen, to you who hear, more will be given.

Simply, we should be purposeful in our study, in listening to God's word taught, not letting our minds wander when reading the bible or while in the worship service. If we listen, if we are intent upon learning what scripture has to say then we will be given clearer understanding. Upon the measure you use to hear, it will be measured back to you. And to you who listen, even more understanding shall be granted to you. In verse 25 he continues this thought. The more you read, study, draw near to God, listen to his word and his teaching the more you will have. This does not mean that you will be more successful in life, that you will gather more things, or have more money, but you will be richer in your understanding, and stronger in your faith. Then we see the other side of the coin, but who ever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

It would seem that verse 24 is talking about the gospel, the word of God, and verse 25 follows up with the effect of that word, or the result of faith gained by hearing and trusting in God's word.

I am reminded of Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is there your heart will also be. On the day of judgement, when all of mankind stands before it's creator God to be judged there will those who have the blood of Christ counted toward their account, and those who do not. This has nothing to do with earthly success or treasures. It is not meritted on the works you do in an attempt to gain favor, but it is the treasures that are laid up in heaven in Christ.

If you are one of those who hear his word, if you have true faith, if you are numbered as one of God's children, then he will shower you with his grace, his love, and as we have seen in the book of James, the ability and desire to do his will. So to paraphrase this verse a bit, if you have all of these things, God will grant you even more, and abundance. Not because you are such a wonderful amazing person, but because he in his sovereign grace has given it to you and through you his light may shine into this dark world bringing glory to himself. But, if you do not hear, if you do not have faith granted from our heavenly father and are seeking your own good works, your own merit and believe that you have stored up for yourselves treasures, all that you have accounts for nothing and will be taken away in the end.

It is only by the blood of Christ that we can stand justified before God, not of our doing, or of our wills and desires but of His. Those who stand before God and say, look at all things works I have done in your name and when he turns and says Depart from me you worker of iniquity, I never knew you. At that moment, they will loose all that they thought that they had. Are you relying on Christ, and Christ alone, or are you like the pharisee's who seek to work their way into justification. Who find their justification by following the mosaic law, or a modern expression would be, having your good deeds out way your bad. That is a dead end street, all that you gain will be lost. Turn instead to Christ, lay down your good deeds before him as they are soiled with your pride and arrogance and only serve to lift up your own ego.

Listen, hear the word of the lord, repent, believe, bear fruit worthy of your faith, having the light of the lamp of God shining in your life illuminating all of your dark hidden places, laying bare your sins before him and repent.