

Gospel of Mark 7 – Parables by the Seaside – Chapter 4, verses 1 - 25:-

In the study this week we need to recognise the way that Mark the author of this Gospel has arranged his material and his reasons for so doing. Up to this point in the Gospel, the author has mentioned the Lord Jesus teaching on a number of occasions e.g. chapters 1, verse 21; and 2, verse 13, etc. This is the first example of the content of that preaching that we are given. There are a number of short examples of the Lord's teaching, e.g. chapter 7, verses 14 – 23 and chapter 8, verses 31 – 38. The only other lengthy example is in chapter 13, verses 3 – 37.

In chapter 4 we find the hearers of the teaching of Jesus divided into two distinct categories. Those who “*know the secret of the Kingdom of God*” and “*those outside*” (chapter 4, verse 11). The reason given by the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 12) is taken from Isaiah chapter 6, verses 9 – 10. This reason is repeated in verses 33 – 34. There is here an acknowledgement of the difference between those ‘inside’ the circle of true believers and those ‘outside’. (Remember the comment last week on chapter 3, verses 32 – 35). Note the words of the Apostle Paul on this subject – see 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 6 – 13.

The Parable of the Sower – Chapter 4, verses 1 – 9:- The setting for the recounting of this parable is the Lord Jesus Christ teaching a great crowd gathered on the shore of the sea of Galilee. This parable is perhaps the best known in the New Testament. As with some of the other stories told by Jesus the context needs perhaps some clarification. Apparently many of the small farmers at the time of Jesus sowed their seed before scarifying the ground with the light plough to cover it over (Harrowing in the seed was an accepted practice in my childhood!). The sowing of the seed broadcast would of necessity include the footpaths and places with only a thin covering of soil over the underlying limestone bedrock. Some fell by the wayside, some on stony ground, shows that the sower wanted to include all the possible land available that might produce a crop. Remember that during and after WW2 all available land was used to produce food. The parable of the sower is set in a land and at a time where full use of all available means of production was necessary.

The explanation to the disciples – Chapter 4, verses 10 – 20:- In these verses Jesus gives the reason for teaching in parables. - see also Matthew chapter 13, verse 12 and Luke chapter 8, verse 10. As already noted, this is in keeping with the Biblical principle that spiritual understanding is restricted to those who have become spiritual by properly relating themselves to Christ and to his message. This is further confirmed by the free rendering in verse 12 of the quote from Isaiah chapter 6, verses 9 – 10.

In Luke chapter 8, verse 11 there is a clear statement that “*the Word*” is “*the Word of God*”. In one version of the Bible the word in this context carries a capital letter! That emphasises that the sower – be it the Lord Jesus Christ himself or those entrusted to pass on his teaching - is preaching the Gospel message. The apostle Paul recognises the importance of this when he exhorts Timothy “*what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” (2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 2). again from Paul referring to his ministry “*I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the growth*” (1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 6). With these thoughts in mind, the explanation given in verses 13 – 20 should be straightforward!

The necessity of passing on the Message – Chapter 4, verses 21 – 25:- These sayings seem to have been repeated by the Lord Jesus Christ on various occasions – see for example Matthew chapter 5, verse 15; Luke chapter 14, verse 35 and Matthew chapter 25, verse 29. On this occasion the purpose was to emphasise the responsibility incumbent upon the hearer of the parables. He who has been enlightened must in his turn enlighten others. Again there is the emphasis on the ability to ‘hear’. Not just the physical ability but the necessity of spiritual enlightenment and understanding.

A final thought, again from 1 Corinthians chapter 9, verse 16 - “*Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!*”

*Sowing in the morning,
sowing seeds of kindness,
sowing in the noontide
and the dewy eves;
Waiting for the harvest
and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing,
bringing in the sheaves.*

*Go then, though with weeping,
sowing for the Master,
Though the loss sustained
our spirit often grieves;
When our labour's over,
He will bid us welcome;
We shall come rejoicing,
bringing in the sheaves.*

From Psalm 126, verse 6 - written by Knowles Shaw 1874