

Let the Word of God Dwell Richly

We sometimes wonder why it is that we hear the truth from the Bible, and others, who hear just what we heard, don't believe it or practice it. The disciples in Jesus' day wondered the same thing. So did the early Christians to whom Mark was writing. In Jesus' first major teaching recorded in Mark, he addresses this question. His answer is that while the same message (the seed) is given profiligately to everybody, different people (soils) hear and process differently. We, therefore, should not be discouraged when people do not universally embrace what we know to be true and precious. Let's read the text:

Mark 4:1-20

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. **2** And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: **3** "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. **5** Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. **6** And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. **8** And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." **9** And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. **11** And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, **12** so that

"they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven."

13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? **14** The sower sows the word. **15** And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. **16** And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. **17** And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. **18** 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. **20** But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

In addition to His concern that we not be discouraged by the diverse responses to the Word, Jesus also stresses to His disciples that they themselves should be very careful how they hear the Word. The verb "to hear" is used thirteen times in verses 1-34. This is obviously of great significance to Jesus. We have seen in our studies that Mark emphasizes the role of Jesus as teacher. The word "teach" is used more in Mark than in all the other gospel accounts. If Jesus is our teacher, and, if we are his disciples, we then must be His students. Let's observe how we must carefully hear the Word.

I. We must carefully hear intellectually (vv. 1-9)

Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to teach them in parables. OK, then, we must learn how to interpret parables. The sixty-six books of the Bible are communicated to us from different historical, cultural, and geographical contexts, so we must study those eras and places and cultures so that we can rightly apply the Word to our own time and place and culture.

These books are also written in a variety of literary genres, so we must learn how to read and understand poetry, apocalyptic literature, historical narrative, and epistles. This takes steady, hard work; and that's what is required to hear the Word carefully. (An ESV Study Bible will help a lot.)

II. We must carefully hear theologically (vv. 10-13)

Notice in verse 10 that the disciples didn't understand the parable, so they "asked him" about it. You can talk to Him, too. Just ask Him to help you. Then notice that Jesus tells them there's a key to unlocking the meaning of the Word—the secret of the Kingdom; and notice that He has given them the key (v.11). Furthermore, for those who do not have this secret, they will never understand the Word (v.12). In order to understand the Word, we must always hear the Word in the presence of Jesus and with faith in Jesus and His message of the Kingdom of God.

III. We must carefully hear spiritually (vv. 14-20)

In explaining the parable to His disciples, Jesus provides for us a very helpful description of what careful hearing really is. We learn:

A. We must listen contemplatively (14,15). If we don't, the seed of the Word will be stolen by the evil one. We must listen not only until we understand it and could repeat it, but so that we know what difference that particular teaching makes in our personal and public lives.

B. We must listen courageously (16,17). If we don't, the scorching power of tribulations will cause us to wither and fall away.

C. We must listen repentantly (18,19). If we don't, the idols of our hearts will eventually choke the faith we have. The garden of our souls must be cultivated by "pulling the weeds out" regularly.

D. We must listen obediently (20). If we don't, we'll never bear fruit. It is only when we put the Word into practice that we truly hear the Word.

The great joy for Christ's disciples is that the Word which Jesus has placed in our hearts will indeed bear fruit into eternity. Our final resurrection to eternal life is the ultimate fruit of the Word of God.

Discussion Questions

1. When have you been discouraged by the lack of positive response in others to the Word of God? How does the parable in our lesson today encourage you?

2. What do you find to be the greatest intellectual challenge in understanding the Word?

