

Do You Have Ears That Hear?

Mark 4:1-20

Introduction:

- It is interesting to notice how often the Bible uses some part of the human body to make an important spiritual observation or illustrate an important biblical truth.
 - 1) Feet – Romans 10:15, “And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”
 - 2) Hands and Knees – Hebrews 12:12-13, “Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.”
 - 3) Tongue – James 3:6, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”
 - 4) Eyes – Matthew 6:22, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.”
 - 5) Hair – Matthew 10:30, “But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”
 - 6) Heart – Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”
 - 7) Ears – Mark 4:9, “And he said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”
- Our text is about your ears and my ears, and how well they listen to and hear spiritual truth. It is about those who come to church, attend a Bible study, and have the gospel shared with them. Just as James 3:1-12 teaches us there is a spiritual connection between the heart and the tongue, Mark 4 teaches us there also is a spiritual connection between the heart and the ear.

- In vs. 3 Jesus says “Listen!”

In vs. 9 He says, “He who has ears, let him hear.”

In vs. 12 He speaks of those who “may indeed hear but not understand.”

And in vs. 20 He speaks of those who “hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.”

Transition: Do you have ears that hear?! What do we need to hear?

I. We Must Sow the Seed of the Gospel That People Might Hear the Word. 4:1-9

- Jesus is “again” by the sea teaching (v.1).
- Jesus is again followed by a great crowd (v.1).
- He moves into a boat and sits: 1) to have some needed space, 2) to add amplification to His voice across the water, 3) because that was the most common teaching posture of a Jewish rabbi.
- The text says He taught them “many things in parables” (v.2). Mark 4:1-34, along with Mark 13, is the longest teaching section in Mark’s gospel. It contains 4 parables.
- Parables are the most striking feature of the teaching ministry of Jesus. The popular idea that a parable is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning” is helpful, but it needs to be expanded. Several observations should be noted before we dive into this first, and perhaps, most important of all the parables.
 - 1) Parables provide insight into the nature, coming, growth and consummation of the Kingdom of God.
 - 2) Parables are by design intended to be provocative and surprising. They often sneak up on us.
 - 3) Parables are used to simulate thinking and cause the hearer to carefully contemplate what they are hearing.

- 4) Parables use everyday objects, events and circumstances to illustrate spiritual truth, usually with a new turn or twist.
 - 5) Parables reveal more truth to those with receptive ears and hides truth from those with dull ears. (This is critical to understanding vs. 10-12)
 - 6) Parables comprise 35% of all gospel teaching.
 - 7) Parables usually, but not always, focus on a single truth. Therefore, we should not allegorize them seeking a meaning for every detail.
 - 8) Ultimately, parables draw attention to Jesus as God's Messiah and call us to make a personal decision concerning Him.
- Verses 3-8 constitute what is often called the "parable of the sower." Others suggest we call it the "parable of the soils." I think this is a better designation.
 - The parable begins with a challenge to pay careful attention (v. 3, 9). A spiritually alert and hungry mind (heart) is needed.
 - The background or historical situation is broadcast sowing of seed in Israel. Important point: sowing preceded plowing. The seed is sown then plowed under.
 - The emphasize of the story falls on the act of sowing more than the 4-fold condition of the soils. The kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel will break into this world like seed being sowed by a farmer. It will fall in various places, have various results and experience a tremendous harvest.
 - Verses 4-8 note the kind of soils the seed lands on [read]:
So, we see:
 - The path (v. 4)
 - Rocky ground (vs. 5-6)

- Among thorns (v. 7)
- Good and productive soil (v. 8)
- The main point, as we will have reinforced, is clear. We must sow the seed of the gospel that others might hear and respond. Response will vary, they will be different from one person to another. However, that is not our concern. Our assignment is to sow and sow generously, promiscuously! God is responsible for the harvest (cf. 1 Cor 3:5-9)
- Exactly what this means is not all together clear! The N.T. scholar Moule paraphrases v. 9 as, “Now think that one out for yourself, if you can!” (EBC, 1st ed., 648).

II. If We Do Not Listen To The Word We Will Not Benefit From the Gospel. 4:10-12

- Verses 10-12 are something of an interlude between the telling of the parable (vs 3-9) and the explanation of it (vs 14-20).
- Both the 12 and “those around him” wanted to know more about why He spoke in parables (v.10). What was the purpose for this particular method of teaching that Jesus so clearly favored?
- His answer constitutes what some would classify as one of the “hard sayings” of Jesus. It clearly requires careful consideration and reflection. Both the terms and the greater context are necessary if we are to understand what Jesus meant by what He says.
- Jesus addresses the 12 and those who want more of Him and His teachings (v. 11) and says they will be granted access and insight to the secrets of the kingdom of God. In contrast, those on the “outside” will get no explanation but only more parables.
- Then he quotes the prophets Isaiah (6:9-10) to drive home the point and to demonstrate that the Scriptures are being fulfilled in Him! [Read v. 12]
- What is he saying? What does He mean?

- The sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay!
- The Word of the gospel hardens and blinds the resistant and the rebellious while it is enthusiastically received by the receptive.
- Those outside are not denied the possibility of belief, but if they persist in unbelief then they will not receive more. In fact, v. 25 now becomes clear and makes perfect sense, “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.” Love the Word and you will get more. Refuse the Word and even what you have you will lose.
- The secret of the Kingdom: God’s present kingdom plan is one of seed-sowing. It has come (present aspect) but will flourish later (future aspect) like seeds that are planted and then mature into fruit. His rule has come in an unexpected manner, but it has come. Do you have ears that hear?

III. The Fruitfulness of The Seed Of The Gospel Depends Upon The Receptivity Of The Hearer. 4:13-20

- Jesus will now explain the parable of the soils. He starts with a mild chiding in the form of 2 questions [read v. 13].
 - His words note the essential and foundational nature of this parable. If they do not understand this one, they will struggle to understand the others.
 - Ill. If they cannot add and subtract, it is scarcely imaginable that they will be able to multiply and divide. Geometry, Trigonometry and Calculus will be hopeless.
 - He then proceeds to explain each of the 4 soils where the seed was sown.
- 1) The soil of some hearts is hard. 4:14-15 (cf. 4:4)
- The sower is Jesus, or anyone who sows. The seed is the Word of God.

- The path represents the hard hearted or tough minded individual.
“Immediately”, as soon as they hear it, Satan (pictured as devouring birds in v. 4) snatches it away. They are ultimately bird food!
 - Their hearing is superficial and resistant. They are totally unresponsive. They suffer from “gospel deafness.” Like skeptics, they quickly dismiss the Word without giving it careful consideration.
 - They hear the Word, the book closes and the service ends, and so does their ears and heart.
 - These are hardened to the gospel for whatever reason (ex. theodicy).
- 2) The soil of some hearts is shallow. 4:16-17 (cf. 4:5-6)
- Characteristics: 1) hear it, 2) immediately receive it with joy, 3) no roots, 4) endure for a while, 5) tribulation/persecution comes over the Word, 6) Immediately they fall away.
 - Sprouts quickly and looks the most promising. However, it is shallow and has no roots so the scorching sun (v. 6) causes it to wither and die.
 - Here today and gone tomorrow. Grows fast and dies quickly. “Quickly green and quickly gone” (Dever).
 - Eager listeners, who make a quick profession of faith, pray a prayer, lift a hand, say a quick yes without considering all that it means.
 - Great start but no finish. Lightly come/lightly go. Superficial.
- 3) The soil of some hearts is distracted. 4:18-19 (cf. 4:7)
- Hear and receive the Word better than #'s 1 & 2. However, they eventually get distracted by 1) worry, 2) wealth, and 3) lust for other things. Theirs is a partial commitment which

is no commitment because they are listening to too many voices and have their eyes on too many things.

- This life is more important to them than the life to come.
- Stuff is more important to them than the Savior. There is no real surrender to Christ as Lord.
- They find pleasure in wealth more than in Jesus.
- They find pleasure in desires more than in Jesus.
- John 8:31 judges them, “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,”

This soil is easily distracted.

4) The soil of some hearts is fruitful. 4:20 (cf. 4:8)

- Characteristics: 1) hear, 2) accept, and 3) bear fruit.
- Tribulation and persecution do not deter them.
- The worries and concerns of this life, wealth, and personal desires and cravings do not distract them.
- Their hearing is active not passive. They aggressively pursue the Word, allow it to take root, and then rejoice in its abundant growth. And note, it will grow. A fruitless Christian is an oxymoron.
- John 15:5 says it all, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Conclusion: 1) Christianity is a religion of the Word and therefore of the ear. Do you have ears that hear? Do you have ears that work correctly? Do you tune the words of Scripture and the gospel in or do you tune them out?

2) Hearing God's Word is dangerous. What you do with it is critical to your soul. My challenge: Be greedy for the Word. Go after it, grab hold of it, and do not let it go. Like a starving beggar who has found bread, seize it with all your might and cherish it for the life sustaining food that it is! "He who has ears to hear, let him hear".