*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 18 - 23

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, January 18 Mark 4:1-9, 13-20**

*“The parable of the sower”*

Jesus’ credibility as a teacher is a vital aspect of Mark’s gospel. As the vehicle for his teaching, Jesus often chooses the parable. A parable is a comparison between a simple, earthly picture and an important, spiritual truth.

Two principles of growth in the Kingdom of God are implied in the parable: (1) sowing is universal; and (2) growing is individual. Jesus’ explanation of the parable reinforces his simple point that the growth of the Kingdom of God is directly related to the quality of the individual response. For the disciples’ understanding, he builds a four-point scale of spiritual growth: (1) no-growth – they hear the words of the Kingdom but make no response; (2) shallow-growth – there is an initial response to the gospel, but it has no lasting effect; (3) stunted-growth – there is response and growth, but before that growth can produce the fruit of a life fully dedicated to God worldly concerns interfere; and (4) full growth – the initial response grows into a follower of Jesus who is producing the fruit of a relationship with him.

*As I grow in you, Lord, may I continue to bear fruit in your Kingdom. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 19 Mark 4:10-12**

*“The purpose of teaching in parables”*

To Jesus’ disciples, the parable is intended to unveil truth; but to those who oppose him, the hearing of the parable will not bring about understanding. Thus, despite its outward innocence, a parable is a teaching tool that divides believers and unbelievers. The more important point, however, is the fact that the mystery of the Kingdom of God has been revealed. Mystery, in this sense, is not a puzzle that can be solved by human reasoning; it is a lifting of the curtain by divine revelation.

A parable, then, is a teaching method which serves specific aims of Jesus, the master teacher. First, it is a familiar story which finds people where they live and gets their attention. Second, a parable has enough mystery to attract earnest seekers after truth. Third, the same sense of mystery confounds the enemies of truth. Fourth, a parable awakens discovery of truth as a basis for continued personal learning.

*Guide me by your Spirit, Lord, so I can continue to learn from you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 20 Mark 4:21-25**

*“Pay close attention to what you hear”*

The teaching-learning process of Jesus, the master teacher, continues to unfold. The advanced course now begins with three more parables, the first being the parable of the lamp which teaches that what has been hidden is being revealed. God has chosen to lift the veil on the mystery of salvation through his Son so that we might see and be saved. In the parable, Jesus teaches that he, the Light, has come. He is like the lamp which is at the center of a Galilean home, illuminating every corner when placed on the lampstand.

In the same way, Jesus is the light that illuminates the truth of God. While other lights may also shine upon truth – reason, intuition, experience – they are but dim reflections of the brilliance of the Son of God. Thus, he is the standard by which all other revelations are judged. For example, if any religion places a different revelation equal with or superior to the revelation of Jesus Christ, that revelation is not from God. Jesus concludes the parable by declaring that spiritual understanding expands when applied and is lost when its application is ignored.

*By your light, Lord, the truth of God has been revealed. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 18 - 23

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, January 21 Mark 4:26-29**

*“Mysterious growth”*

In the parable of the sower, Jesus emphasizes the part of the hearer in receiving the seed of the Gospel. Lest we should assume, however, that we are the moving force behind spiritual growth, Jesus adds the parable of the growing seed. We may be the hearers whose response to the Gospel bears upon its growth and results, but the growth itself is God’s supernatural work. When Jesus says of the sower that he himself does not know how the seed sprouts and grows, he is declaring that the mystery of spiritual growth is outside our knowledge. We, like the sower, can observe spiritual growth, in ourselves and in others, but we can neither initiate nor control it.

Into our instant gratification culture Jesus brings a teaching meant to slow us down when it comes to our expectation for spiritual growth, describing a process that takes time and cannot be either speeded up or short-circuited: “First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.” Jesus is making it clear that the sprouting, growing and ripening of the Kingdom of God within us is a supernatural process beyond our prediction and control.

*Grow your kingdom in me, Lord, according to your good will and pleasure. Amen.*

**Friday, January 22 Mark 4:30-34**

*“Small becomes great”*

In the final example of Jesus’ teaching, Mark records the parable of the mustard seed. Taking a mustard seed, which symbolizes insignificance in the minds of the people, Jesus reminds them that it grows to the greatest of bushes, so large that its branches serve as favorite nesting and shading places for the birds of the air. Thus, Jesus is saying that in the Kingdom of God, that which begins in seeming insignificance will grow greatly, and its greatness will be measured by its ability to effectively serve the needs of the world.

Mark has shown us the full scope of Jesus’ method of teaching: (1) a parable is told; (2) its purpose is stated; (3) its meaning is explained; and (4) its principles are advanced. Now, in verses 33-34, Mark tells us that Jesus used parables to teach the people, “as much as they could understand.” Jesus was patient, taking his followers a step at a time, and when alone with his disciples, he continued to explain the parables in detail. He let the truth mature like the parable of the growing seed: “ . . . first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain . . .” (v. 28).

*You teach me your truth, Lord, and it is slowly maturing in me. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 23 Mark 4:35-41**

*“Be still!”*

Jesus has just completed a full day of teaching. Needing freedom from the crowd and solitude for his soul, he proposes to his disciples that they sail to the eastern side of the lake. Once out at sea, nature turns loose all of the forces of violence with a storm that has even the seasoned fishermen among them panicking. How can Jesus sleep through a life-threatening storm? Is it his exhaustion or his peace? In panic, they cry out, “Teacher, do you not care that we are going to drown?”

God is at home with his creation, even when it goes wild. The contrast between the disciples’ panic and Jesus’ peace attests the deity of the man asleep on a pillow at the stern of the boat. For the disciples, however, fear wipes out faith. If they had not been paralyzed by the fear of death, they might have remembered who it was they were waking from his sleep. Jesus looks around to survey the situation, and with a calmness of spirit that puts our worst fears and nature’s worst activities to rest, he speaks: “Be still!”

*When I exercise my trust in you, Lord, you put my fears to rest. Amen.*