

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

MARK 4: 23 -29
EARS FOR HEARING & EARS FOR HARVEST

“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” Then He said to them, “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 away from him.”

And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.

For the earth yields crops by itself:

first the blade [leaf],

then the head [ear],

after that the full grain [full kernel] in the head [ear].

But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Are you “all ears” today? I hope so--the Lord wants you to be—ears, for listening and learning. AND_ears, like ears of corn, for His harvest!

In Mark chapter 4, Jesus is teaching in parables. Prior to our text, *He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables (Mark 4:1-2)* Mark also writes after our text, *And with many such parables He spoke the Word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples (Mark 4:33-34).* Parables. A parable is a story from events of every-day life, which Jesus used to teach truths about God and God’s workings. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The things that Jesus taught, and the things that Jesus taught in parables, encourage burdened souls. We are all souls burdened with sin. Jesus teaches that sinners, that you, are lovingly rescued, lovingly healed, lovingly sustained by God in this life and for this life, and in and for the life to come. The wicked and self-righteous are out. Jesus Himself said, *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance* Mark 2:17. Jesus’s teaching brings glorious news for us all!

But why did Jesus use parables? Concepts and truths are easier to understand when explained using something simpler and familiar. Here’s an example. Question: How does an automatic transmission in a car get power from the engine to the wheels when there’s no direct mechanical hook up? Answer: It’s like two fans. One fan is on and blowing. The other fan is off and facing the first. The air being blown by the first fan turns the second fan as well. The example makes it simpler to grasp.

There’s another reason Jesus spoke in parables. Some of His listeners didn’t want to make any connection between Jesus and the kingdom of God. They had their ears shut. They didn’t want to understand. They refused to dig deeper, to inquire, to learn. And thus, His stories didn’t make sense to them. I suppose it’s like hearing a carpenter say, “The plans call for a “three-oh” door on the front of the house. The roof pitch will be 4:12.” For someone not interested enough to inquire further, the words mean nothing. Likewise, at Jesus’ time, those who had closed minds to Jesus felt justified in ignoring Him. They could learn nothing, even from His parables.

Jesus says to His listeners, to us, *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.* God gave Adam ears to hear God! Also to hear Eve and the children. Jesus says, use your ears! Just as a lamp is meant for illuminating, ears are meant for hearing. In our text Jesus says, *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 away from him.* In other words, to those who use their ears, the message of God begins to make sense, and then more sense, and more sense. If you don’t use your ears, what you have already heard will be lost to you! Consider a winter day with a fresh sticky snow. Rolling a little snowball on the ground, makes it bigger and bigger. And the bigger it gets, the more snow it picks up! until you can’t push it any more. It will stand a long time even when the temps move into the 40’s. On the other hand, the little snowball that is not rolled, stays little. When the temps hit 40, it soon melts away. Jesus wants you to stand before His Word with all ears, and to dig into the truths and parables taught, so that you grow in your knowledge of God’s workings in this world at large, and His kind and gracious forgiveness and eternal life provided for you in His Son, Jesus.

Ears for listening. Now let's talk about the other kind of ears—as in “ears” of corn for harvest. Mark records There are three parables in Mark chapter 4, all of which have to do with agriculture. Ours this morning is the second one. *“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. The Kingdom of God, what is it exactly? The Kingdom of God can be thought of in three different ways, yet there is only one. The Kingdom of God is certainly heaven. Heaven: the eternal kingdom where there shall be no evil, no sin, only blessings, happiness, and **GLORY!** Let's go there! The Kingdom of God can also be thought of in terms of His reign, His rule over this entire world and universe right now. In His **POWER** He made it, He rules it, and He will end it. We live in that Kingdom right now. But the Kingdom of God also can be considered in terms of the salvation, the rescue, the forgiveness, that is provided for you in His dear Son who counted as nothing the scorn and shame of the cross, so that He could free you from your sins' punishment forever. God's precious kingdom in **GRACE**. You're in that right now too. So, the Kingdom of God: The world which in His Power He has created and rules. The Kingdom of God: His love and forgiveness purely by His Grace, through faith in His Son, which gives good standing before God. And the Kingdom of God: The everlasting bliss and Glory of heaven. All three blend and work together.*

Jesus says, *“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself. Just like any farmer, or gardener, or green thumb-er can tell you, we only plant the seeds. We can work the soil, add water, pull weeds, even artificially provide warmth for the soil, but we can't make the seed grow. God does that. On the third day of creation Genesis 1 tells us, *God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth; and it was so (Genesis 1:11).* God makes seeds grow. The same is true in the Kingdom of God. Whether you're a pastor, or layman, or Sunday School teacher, or father, or mother, all you do is present and plant the Seed of the Word of God into hearts. You can't make it grow or produce faith. God the Holy Spirit does that. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. . . . The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:6-8).* You and I are just planters and waterers. And God does expect us to do that! *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).* He does the rest.*

For the earth yields crops by itself: 1) first the blade [leaf], 2) then the head [ear], 3) after that the full grain [full kernel] in the head [ear]. Seeds sprout and grow and reach harvest in due time—whether wheat, or corn (maize), etc.—the leaf or blade; then the seed-spike, or ear or head; finally the individual grains or kernels on the ear or head—for wheat, 30-50 kernels per head; for corn, 500-1200 kernels per ear. The gradual stages to maturity, do not take place in one day. So it is in the Kingdom of God. Faith in Christ does not reach maturity on the first day it sprouts in the heart. In fact sometimes the Word doesn't sprout for many years, just like physical seeds can remain in the ground many years before sprouting (some 100 years). God Himself leads the growth in Christ to maturity. Physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually, we grow and mature by stages and plateaus. Is your faith and your grasp on salvation in Christ stronger now than 10 years ago? That's God's plan as He leads you through the thick and thin of life. *Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).*

The text goes on, *But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.* The goal is the harvest! The farmer's intent is not to have a nice green field of wheat in September or nice green field of corn in October. He's not raising a lawn. He's raising a crop. He awaits the harvest! That is the goal in the Kingdom of God too. Harvesting souls. Really, He is not interested in the fanciness of the church building. He is not interested in a congregation having only thriving membership at all costs, without any weeds or weak members. God wants to bring you to maturity, and to bring to maturity all the other souls that are here. Remember the parable of The Tares (Weeds) and the Wheat? The weeds also grew until the end, and then God dealt with them in His wrath. God did not want to disrupt souls being brought to maturity in Him. *God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:3-4).* *Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

Finally, *When the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.* Immediately! God ends life when the time is just right. He will not end your life a minute before or a minute after your time of harvest—whether it's at age 95, or 65, or 15, or a babe in arms. He sees the harvest time for each Christian, when faith is ripe, and acts then. His actions from beginning to end are so that you will be an “ear” of corn or wheat in His granary of heaven. This He wants for others as well. Jesus told the twelve, *Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! (John 4:35).*

God is interested in your “ears” for hearing today. God is interested in you as an “ear” for harvest forever!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---