

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 7 March 2021

Sermon Title : The Heart of the Matter

Speaker : Rev Chan Mei Ming

Text : Mark 4:1-20

INTRODUCTION

Mark's gospel is fast paced and action packed. In the first 3 chapters, Jesus was seen going about doing many healings and driving out demons. Lora Copley suggests that there was a tact team of religious elite who were Jesus' "resistors" that censured Jesus as satanic. Then there was Judas, a disciple of Jesus who was announced as Jesus' betrayer. Even Jesus' own family, including his mother, wanted to prevent what they perceived as the madness of Jesus. In Mark 2:2, Jesus preached the word to the people but only some people believed whilst others seemed to dismiss or reject the preaching. One may ask, "Is there something defective with the message?" or "Is there something wrong with the messenger?"

As we study Mark 4:1-20, we join Jesus who has surveyed the crowd on the beach. He knows that they are pressing in on Him for different reasons and they hear Him with "different kinds of ears". Jesus categorises them by exposing their hearts. He calls attention to the heart of the matter by telling them a parable which is a short story that explains spiritual truths.

1. Listening well is vital (Mark 4:3, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20)

- Importance of listening – starts and ends this parable with call to listen. (v3, 9)
- "Listen" – *akouo* (Gk.root), appears 8 times in these 20 verses.
- *akouo* meaning "listen" and "hear" is found in Active, Present, Imperative form.

Jesus was calling the people to listen up, listen carefully, pay attention, and listen continuously. The Chinese font of the word "listen" calls us to listen by giving to the person who is speaking, our ears, our eyes, our undivided attention and our open heart. Indeed, how you listen to God matters!

2. Why Jesus speaks in parables?

Jesus taught the people many things by parables. When His disciples asked about the parables, Jesus said, "*The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!*" (Mark 4:11-12, NIV c.f. Isaiah 6:9-10)

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- Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 where God was trying to speak to the people in Israel but they would not listen because all along they had not been listening to Him. Since they would not listen, their window into God's Kingdom was closing and it became harder for them to understand what God was saying.
- It gets harder for us to understand God's word when God speaks and we harden our hearts and refuse to listen to Him. If we repeatedly harden our hearts and refuse to listen, there will come a time when we will not be able to understand or accept what God is saying.

Hence, some will not be able to understand when they hear and some will not perceive when they see because they will not accept Jesus. Because of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus, they are now going to be denied further insights into the Kingdom of God.

3. Parable of the Sower - Heart Diagnostic

This parable of sowing seeds is not only intended as an evangelism text for pre-believers but also an essential teaching for all believers as it exposes the hearts of all believers. It takes us to the heart of the matter as it diagnoses the matter of the heart (i.e. the condition of the "soil" of our heart).

- Unless the seed (which is God's word in its entirety) is sown into one's life, not onto or just around one's life, nothing significant will come out of it. (Lora Copley)
- Besides listening well, the "soil" condition of our heart is also important.

4 types of "soil" conditions of our heart:

In this parable, Jesus shared about 4 types of soil but actually there are only 2 kinds of soil; bad or good soil. The first 3 types are bad and only the last type is good.

Whenever God's word (seed) is sown, all 4 types of soil are present because when the word is taught or preached, there is no neutral response.

- (i) Hard and hardening soil - seed never penetrates in at all, may bounce off
- Jesus' "resistors" in Mark 3 are an obvious example. They hear Jesus, looking for ways to accuse and discredit Jesus so as to solidify their position.

Some attend church just to hear good preaching. The message and sermon do not penetrate into them beyond the church service. They can take notes about the "seed", admire, analyse and sing about it, but unless God's word is sown into their lives, nothing will come out of it and the opportunity of change will be taken away.

- (ii) Rocky and Shallow soil - plant sprang up quickly but withered, no roots.
- These people hear the word with joy and excitement. However, when trial or trouble comes, they bail out and shy away from God.

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- Peter when faced with trouble bailed out and denied Jesus but he came back. Judas bailed out but did not return. Both of them heard the word with joy, but when the heat came, they fell away.

People with this soil condition want the blessing but not necessarily the “Blesser”. We can shallowly open to Jesus, as long as He give us what we are really after; a comfortable, less trouble or trouble-free life. We may even get excited about the word, but when tested with heat, when trials come, we show where our trust lies.

(iii) Thorny and corrupted soil - plant choked by the thorns, bear no grain.

- These people hear the word and the word penetrates deep into their life but the word has competition and loses out to the other concerns of the heart.
- Jesus’ family illustrates this in some way (Mark 3). They loved Jesus but were more concerned about the opinion of people around them and wanted to get Jesus to “stop His madness”. These concerns choked out their faith in Jesus.

Many people genuinely want God’s word to grow in them. So, the seed does get sown into their lives. However, at the same time, their lives’ concerns (careers, health, to-do list, their reputation, etc) are as needy and take most of their attention. These concerns may be important but when they take such a high priority, way above the word, we rarely experience any actual change or fruit because the sown word from God gets strangled and corrupted by all the distractions and competition.

(iv) Soft and open soil - seed grew into plant that produced a crop, multiplied.

- Fruits come as we hear and heed God’s word, above and over all other words and concerns clamouring in our life.

Only when our heart “soil” becomes soft and open to God’s word will God’s correction and guidance penetrate into us. Confession is necessary because it acknowledges the conditions of our heart. Full germination can only happen when action is taken on God’s word in the classic combination of “doer not hearer” and “trust and obey” framework; only then does spiritual fruit result.

CONCLUSION

These 3 types of bad soil may be exhibited in our life on a day-to-day basis and our heart condition can be different every day or moment. Let us go back to the basics of listening well to the totality of God’s word and act on it; to confess, repent and ask for God’s grace and strength to soften our heart, and keep our hearts open to Him by allowing God to till the soil of our hearts. To change, to purify our heart and make it true. When the soil of our heart is good, we will discover the truth, apply the truth and reap the benefits and then pass it on. That’s the legacy we see in the spiritual multiplication of lives – The legacy of truth passes from one generation to the next. Together, we can build this legacy that’s built to last.

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As a group, spend some time to share your success and struggle in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do at the previous meeting.

A. Review Sermon Content

Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.

Appoint someone to read Mark 4:1-20 twice, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, ‘This is the Word of the Lord.’

All to respond, “Thanks be to God.” Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now.”

- a. As God's word was read, which verse speaks to you the most?

- b.
 - (i) What is the key takeaway for you from the sermon “The Heart of the Matter”?
 - (ii) How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 2a. (i) Why does Jesus call for the people to “listen up, listen carefully, pay attention and listen continuously” to Him?
- (ii) How can you give “your ears, eyes, undivided attention and open heart” to what Jesus is saying?
- 2b. How does knowing that the 3 types of bad soil conditions can be found in the hearts of believers of Christ challenge:
 - (i) you to diagnose your heart condition daily?
 - (ii) you to respond to each heart condition revealed?
- 3a. Which type of soil represents the condition of your heart today?
- 3b. What is one thing you need to do/change for God’s tilling of the soil of your heart so His word may better penetrate, take root and bear fruit in your life?
- 3c. How can your group members encourage or help you achieve 3b in the following week(s) until your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies and Prayer

Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.

4. Share your personal testimony on how God's word sown into your life grew into a plant that produced a crop and multiplied.

OR

Give thanks to God for helping you to “*discover the truth, apply the truth and reap the benefit and pass it on*” (Edmund Chan).

5. With a prayer partner, bring all that have been shared in 3a, 3b and 3c to God asking for the Holy Spirit's enablement to encourage each other to listen well to God's word and act on it by confessing and repenting. Invite God's grace and strength to soften the soil of your hearts by allowing God to till it for His correction and guidance to penetrate into you so you may bear much fruit.

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