

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Mark 4:1-34 (Key verse 9)

"Then Jesus said, whoever has ears to hear let them hear."

The greatest thing we have as believers is the word of God, the question is are we listening to the word of God in order to accept it, obey it and be dependent on it. This is what separates us from either being around Jesus with the disciples or being distant ever hearing but never understanding. Just as we heard from last week message, we learnt about who are the family of Jesus, it is those who are around Jesus and do the will of God, those who hear and obey the word of God. Through this passage Jesus illustrate the importance of correctly hearing the word of God through the use of parables. It is said that the Bible records about 46 parables of Jesus. These parables are simple spiritual truths expressed through daily practical things we are familiar with. In today's passage we will hear about four parables all related to the kingdom of God. May God have mercy on us to listen to His word to accept it, understanding it and obey it.

This passage is composed of four parables, the parable of the sower, of a lamp, of the growing seed, and of the mustard seed. And all of them are about the kingdom of God. Verse 2 tells us that Jesus taught the people many things by parables. So what is a parable such that even Jesus used parables to teach the people many things? They are spiritual truth alongside with daily or practical truth, something we can relate with daily. Let us first hear the parable of the sower, look at verse 3-8, "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." A farmer went out to sow seed, however the seed fell in four different areas, some fell along the path, some on rocky places, some on thorns, and then some on good soil. Only the seed that fell on good soil produced a crop. We shall see how Jesus explains this parable which powerfully describes the kingdom of God.

Let us all read verses 9-11, "Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." 10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables" By the use of parables Jesus offered his hearers the opportunity to either dig deep and find truth or turn a blind eye. However only the twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables, these were the ones eager to hear and understand the meaning and truth behind the parables. The disciples and those around Jesus were given the secret of the kingdom of God. However, those on the outside they would be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding [12]. However, what is the secret of the kingdom of God which those around Jesus were given? Verses 14-20, Jesus explains the secret of the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 14, "The farmer sows the word." Here lies the key to this parable, the almighty God is the farmer and the seed that is sown is the word of God. The different areas where the seed fell is the description of different kinds of people or our different heart conditions. Firstly, "15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them."

Secondly, "16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away." Thirdly, "18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful." And fourthly, "20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown." The first three kinds of people are those who seem to hear the word but never accept it, they do not understand it and thus cannot commit to obeying the word of God. However, the fourth kind of people, they hear the word and accept it. They repent, obey the word and produce much fruit. These fourth group of people are the ones who listen very carefully to the word of God. Because the word of God is divine truth. They hear the word; they believe it; they love it; they obey it; that's what distinguishes a Christian. It is not some past act or past sacrifices we did, not some prayer, not some attendance at Church, or religious title, that distinguish us as true believers. What distinguishes a true believer is how we respond to divine truth. Does it find a place in our heart.

How then can we correctly listen to the Lord? How do we listen to His Word and His commission and His calling? Look at verse 21-23, "He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear." These are obvious things, that we do not bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or bed, but in order to make its light shine. John 8:12, tells us that Jesus is the light of the world, "...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." If we follow Jesus we then have the light of life and likewise, no one places the light under a bowl or a bed. Rather they let the light shine into the darkness displacing all darkness in its path. Hearing the word of God is not just matter of listening, we are to listen obediently. Moreover, we also have the responsibility of shining the light of God to the world. Unless we obey the word of God, we will ever be hearing but never understanding. For the Christian, if you have ears to hear, then let them hear, let your ears hear. This means, if God has opened our spiritual ears, which happens when we are saved, then we are mandated to hear, to obey and put into practice the word of God. We are supposed to love the word, not to be head knowledge Christians, but to obey what the word teaches. Light is supposed to be shining, not hidden. Seed is to be sown, not stored. So, we should listen obediently. In receiving the divine truth we should reflect the divine truth to others and the world. This is how we can correctly listen to the word of God.

Look at verse 24-25, "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." We hear biblical truths each week, on Sunday services, during bible study, our daily bread devotional, testimony writing and other means, what is our attitude towards the word of God, are we careful or careless at what we hear from the word? Because the measure of care we used will be used upon us. Similarly, if we simply listen and do not obey the truth, even the little truth we had, will slowly be taken away. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. Many times we complain as Christians, we say why am I not feeling fulfilled, why am I not happy in the Lord, why am I not zealous for the lord and so on. The lord says, the measure you use in listening to his word is the same measure that will be used against you. Hearing the word of God without obedience will lead us into a joyless, dry and empty Christian life. However, as we obey the truth, as we give out the truth, we will be given more understanding, more truth,

more grace, more power, more joy, more satisfaction and more fulfillment. This is ultimately how we can experience the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 26-28, "He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. Whether we sleep or get up, the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how. We do not know how the word of God blossoms in our hearts. All that we can do is to make sure the soil has manure and well taken care of. That's all we can do, taking care that we receive and accept the word in our hearts. For according to this passage, we are not responsible on how the word of God will blossom in us. What we are guaranteed of is that, the word will not leave us the same, it will blossom and produce fruits. Likewise, we can only share the gospel with others, how the word works in them is not our responsibility. No one can make anyone believe or be saved, including yourself. It is not because you prayed a certain prayer or did this or that. No human being, no matter how persuasive, no matter how clever, can make a contribution to conversion or justification. All we can do is give the truth. We can't change hearts, and we can't produce life from dead people. That's something the Lord alone does. The bible says, "No man comes to Me except the Father draws him."

The success then of the Gospel does not depend on our power to change the heart, or our power to make the Gospel more acceptable, or our power to manipulate the will or manipulate emotions. The work of salvation is divinely God's work alone. So, we listen dependently. Our call or duty is to accept and then scatter the word in obedience to shining our light. How the seed grows is the miracle of God. In fact life is a miracle, because the seed enters the soil, dies and through that process brings life. How that happens no one knows. It is the great work of God.

Verses 30-32 reveals to us that, it does not even matter how small the seed is. It can be as small as a mustard seed. When planted it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants. Such that even the birds can perch in its shade. So, it does not matter how small the word of God is that you have received, if you heard the word in order to obey it, it becomes a wonder in how God will bring life through the word. We are here today because someone shared the word of God with us. Someone did their duty and did not let their lamb be placed under the bed or hidden, but rather listened to the word of God for obedience. We cannot explain how our hearts were renewed into loving the word of God for obedience. This is how the kingdom of God is like, we may not understand how it is established in us, but what is clear to us is that the seed must be scattered to the ground. If we genuinely seek to hear with understanding the word of God, we should obey the word for God for firstly, God's kingdom to be established in us and secondly for God's kingdom to be establish in the hearts of others.

I still remember when I met missionary Rebekha and Jacob, my first bible studies with him, my goal was to prove him wrong. For at that time I regarded myself to be an expert of the Bible. So, we had bible studies, but my intentions were misplaced. However, I was struck by one thing, one thing that I could not shake away because it was glaring in my face each time I looked at the little piece of his life that I saw through bible studies. It was something real and not some theological concept in the air. When I observed why we met, we were meeting because of his obedience to the word of God, what he heard and accepted in the Bible. He was there not to be prove me wrong, but to spread the seed of God's word to Wits campus students. The question was now, was I hearing, was I listening to obey. I can confess that at that time the measure I used to listen to the

word was weak and void/null as I had indicated. I then repented and decided to listen for understanding and obedience. Today I am at owe at how God has worked through His word in my heart, I am now a campus bible teacher shepherd, a messenger of the word, fellowship leader and appointed co-director of the Wits UBF ministry. I never could have imagined this and I cannot even explain well how it happened. Jesus came to this world to save sinners like me and gave me a hope to live like Kingdom people and bear many fruits by faith. I believe many of us here have similar testimony to the miraculous work of God in giving us meaning and purpose in this life. I can only pray that I may hear the word of God for obedience, to love God's word for obedience and to be used by God in spreading the seed to others and participate in the front lines of world evangelism. If I hold on to one word of God, I believe that God will grow me continuously like a big tree to bear abundant fruit if I hold on to His words tightly to the end. I also don't think Shd Jacob and Shds Rebekah imagined how Wits UBF will grow.

Whenever I hear of the parable of the mustard seed, it actually always reminds me of the Wits UBF Chapter. From just one small family, one small house church, when they heard the word for obedience, God could do a miracle through their family. Like the small mustard seed, when planted it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants. Such that even the birds can perch in its shade. We now have a Bible house that houses a number of brothers of which I am one of them. We are perching in the shade of this great plant from a simple mustard seed. There is also a brother who is one of the missionary family from Botswana who also comes to perch under the shade of the Bible house during His school holidays because his parents had to return to S. Korea. The ministry now has three house churches (families) with the fourth family (house church) joining in this coming December from Cape Town. Moreover, a number of students are now under good care. They are perching in the shade of this great plant, by being exposed to the study of the word of God each week. I can only pray that we truly hear the word of God for obedience and God will do His great work in our lives.

In conclusion, nothing is more important than divine truth. We have to have the truth in order to be saved, and sanctified, and to have the hope of glory, and to be instructed in righteousness. Each week all of us come to the hearing of God's word, through bibles studies, Sunday messages, testimony writing, social media and others means. Are we listening to obey? We can ask ourselves right now where we are seated, what is my attitude towards the word of God? Is it something I listen to habitually? Do I come for Sunday services because it's a habit, its something I have to do, which if I don't do I will feel guilty. There are other important things we could be doing right now, however we are here and have allocated this time to be in the hearing of the word of God. How are you and I listening to the word of God? I pray that we may at least accept one word of God, however small it may be. May we listen to obey God's word so we too may experience the fulfillment of God's word in our lives and those of others. Amen.