**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**How to Listen to the Lord**
Scripture: Mark 4:21-34
Code: 41-20

Well, let's open our Bibles to Mark chapter 4...Mark chapter 4 and this morning we're going to take a prolonged portion of Scripture. We're going to cover verses 21 to 34. And we could spend more time on these but as you remember, I'm trying to keep us moving through the gospel of Mark and I think it's appropriate for us this morning to take this as one unit so you're going to have to stick with me as we fly a little bit through this section...Mark chapter 4, verses 21 to 34.

Now just prior to this passage, our Lord had given the parable of the soils. Remember that? And He had distinguished two kinds of soils, basically, the kind of soil that produces nothing, that was the first three, hard soil, rocky soil, thorny or weedy soil produces nothing. That is they don't hear the truth of the gospel and respond.

And then He talked about three kinds of good soil that produce 30 fold, 60 fold and a hundred fold in terms of fruitfulness. And then He went on to say the difference between the soils that produce nothing and the soils that are productive is hearing the truth...hearing it, hearing it in the sense that you embrace it and you believe it, and that, of course, is what sets believers apart from non-believers. Non-believers cannot understand the things of God, they do not hear the gospel with believing submissive ears, those who are Christ's do.

So we could sum it up by saying this, the greatest grace gift given to us, of course, is salvation. But we would know nothing about that salvation were it not for Scripture. So in reality, the greatest grace gift is divine revelation. The greatest grace gift is divine revelation. Nothing is ore important than divine truth. You have to have the truth in order to be saved and sanctified and t o have the hope of glory and to be instructed in righteousness. So the greatest thing we have is the Word of God. This is the divine revelation.

Alongside that, the distinguishing characteristic of true Christians is that they listen to the Word of God. They hear it. They believe it. They love it. They obey it. That's what distinguishes a Christian. Not some past act, not some prayer, not some attendance at church. What distinguishes a true believer is responsiveness to divine truth. It finds a place in their hearts. They get it. They understand it. Paul says, "The natural man understands not the things of God, they are foolishness to him, but on the other hand, we who are spiritual have the mind of Christ. We embrace divine truth. We understand it. We love it. We absorb it. We believe it. We proclaim it.

So the distinguishing mark of true Christians is that they hear and believe the truth. And our Lord makes this abundantly clear in a lot of places, but let me just give you one illustration of this from John chapter 10. In that great tenth chapter of John, our Lord is calling Himself the Good Shepherd and identifying His relationship to His sheep. And what is the distinguishing mark that defines that relationship? John 10. It says this, “The sheep...verse 3...hear His voice.” The sheep hear His voice. Verse 4, the end of the verse. “The sheep follow Him because they know His voice.” A stranger they simply will not follow but will flee from Him because they do not know the voice of strangers. True believers are never led away by false teachers. They know the sound of their own master very well.

Down in verse 16 He says, “I have other sheep, meaning Gentiles, “along with the Jews, not of this fold, I must bring them also, they will hear My voice.” Down in verse 26 He says, “You do not believe because you’re not of My sheep, My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me.” The distinguishing quality of a true believer is receptivity to the voice of God which is conveyed to us through the pages of Scripture. This is where He speaks.

This is really the theme of the parable of the soils. There are three kinds of soil that don’t hear. They don’t hear in the believing sense. Superficially, you remember, the rocky soil has an emotional response and the weedy soil has an initial response. But eventually both of them prove to be superficial and shallow and non-fruitful.

But then there is the good soil and the distinguishing of those good kinds of soil is that they hear the Word and they embrace the Word. They become fruitful, 30 fold, 60 fold, a hundred fold. And by the way, that’s talking about fruitfulness in an evangelistic sense. It’s not talking about the fruit of the Spirit, although that’s also true. They are part and parcel of the expansion of the Kingdom. All of us who are believers, basically, according to Ephesians 2:10, have been ordained unto good works. And at the top of the parade, if you will, of those good works is having an impact on people’s lives for the gospel. Some sow, some water, we all have a part to play and we play it collectively and not just individually, even though there are times when God uses someone in a kind of solo effort to bring someone to Christ that’s usually the result of many people giving a testimony over a period of time, or living a godly life that makes the gospel acceptable to them. So we all participate. But the distinguishing mark of fruitful believers who are used to bring others to Christ is that they hear the Word of God. So you find that as the unifying theme, the sun in which the solar system of this particular section moves around.

Go to verse 23...verse 23, we’ll start there. “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” Now He said that back in verse 9. That’s a distinguishing element, not everybody has ears to hear, not everybody understands divine truth, not everybody gets it, not everybody believes it, embraces it, loves it, obeys it, of course. True believers do. So it’s as if He’s saying, “All right, I’m now going to talk to true believers. And what distinguishes you? You have ears to hear.

What happened at your salvation was the Lord opened your spiritual ears, right? And all of a sudden the Word of God took on a new meaning and you began to hunger for it and long for it like a baby desires milk, as Peter puts it. You hear, you get it, you understand it. So, if you're among those who can hear, our Lord says, "Then listen."

Then comes this very important statement in verse 24, "And He was saying to them," to them meaning the disciples and the Apostles who are distinguished from the crowd. If you go back to verse 13, "He said to them." If you go back to verse 11, "He said...was saying to them." And you ask, "Who is them?" Go back to verse 10, "As soon as He was alone, His followers are identified."

So we are the ones who have the ears to hear. And these things are being explained to us. And here's the key statement in verse 24, "Take care...says the NAS...take care what you listen to. You are the ones who have ears to hear, be careful how you hear." That is a very, very important statement.

Let me tell you what it is in the Greek, it's a real simple phrase. In fact, this is a little bit misleading in this English translation. The actual Greek is *blepeta tee akouata* (???), two verbs and a simple particle on between...*blepeta* means to see, first of all in the normal sense of physical sight, secondarily in the sense of perception. In fact, it is used to refer to mental function, to understanding, to consideration. So what *blepeta tee akouata* really says is be understanding what...*tee* can be who or what...be understanding what you hear. In other words, listen carefully to the Word of God. Get it...that's the idea. Be seeing what you are hearing, that's the literal Greek, be seeing what you are hearing, perceive the Word of God thoughtfully, carefully.

It's a simple phrase. And what it calls for is mental perception of what the Lord is saying to us. Now that's kind of the heart and soul of this passage, so around that He has some things to say and He wants us to understand them. We're about to be instructed as to exactly we are to listen. Be seeing with your mind clearly what you are hearing from Him. Get it. Understand it in its fullness, its richness and its depth. You have been privileged to receive the revelation of God, you have been privileged to receive divine truth. To you has been given the mysteries of the Kingdom of God and what is hidden from the world, what they will never understand you fully understand. This is an immense privilege and you are to listen with real understanding.

Now how can we be good listeners? How should we listen to the Word of God, particularly the Word of God in this context which is instruction on our evangelism, on our lives in terms of being witnesses for that's the primary objective as to why we're left in the world, right? We understand that, okay? So how should we be listening to the Lord to make the most out of our evangelistic calling and commission? Here's four characteristics of a good spiritual listener...four characteristics of a good spiritual listener. Number one, we listen obediently. Number two, we listen appreciatively. Number

three, we listen dependently. And number four, we listen confidently. Those words lay out how we are to listen.

Now in Luke 8:18 you have the parallel passage to this and there it is translated “Take care how you listen.” So that’s what our Lord is saying. You need to be a good spiritual listener. How do you listen to the Lord? How do you listen to His Word and His commission and His calling?

First of all, we are to listen obediently...we are to listen obediently. And this because it is an innate obligation bound up with the reception of the truth that we are to apply it. In other words, it is innate to the truth that we are to respond obediently to it, and He makes this clear with a couple of very brief parables in verse 21 and 22. “And He was saying to them, ‘A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it? Or under a bed, is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret but that it would come to light.’” These are just simple, basic truisms, reasonable things.

In other words, what our Lord is saying is if you’ve been given the light, you’re supposed to let it shine, right? Or if you want to go back to the earlier metaphor, if you’ve been given the seed, you’re supposed to sow it. This is innate, this is integral to the very giving of the light. And so, in talking to His disciples, in talking to His Apostles, He is still talking to them. And by the way, there are many commentators who think verses 21 to 34 is just a random assortment of disconnected parables and ideas that came from Jesus that Mark just sort of threw together to kind of getting them all in, they don’t hang together. I find that impossible to believe anywhere, frankly, in the gospels. I think they’re...the Holy Spirit led the writer to a clear, crystal-clear intention and nothing is random whatsoever, and certainly not this. We are to listen obediently, that is with the coming of the light and the coming of the truth, we have the responsibility inherent in that of shining it back out to the world. A lamp, this is a word referring to a terra-cotta lamp, a little clay lamp they used in those days, it could be a saucer with a handle on it, it could be like a little pitcher with a handle on it, put oil in it, put a floating wick in it, light the wick and that’s how you light the house. And you would put that on a lampstand, either a lampstand sitting on the floor or a lampstand which was a shelf that protruded from the wall where those lamps were placed. That was the only means of light. And you had light in order to give light. Nobody would take a lamp and put it under a basket. That’s the Greek word *modion* which means a peck measure which is a little less than nine liters. That was the measure basket that was kept in the kitchen part of the house to contain the grain. You don’t dump the grain out and put it over the lamp, that would not make a whole lot of sense, that would distinguish the lamp or start a fire and it would certainly eliminate the light.

You don’t put it under a bed. Now the typical Jewish bed would have been a pallet rolled up and stuck in a corner, so that might not be what’s in view. But they were also familiar with the Roman style bed which was elevated off the floor. You don’t put a light under the bed, you don’t put a light under a basket, that is obviously ridiculous.

Here's an absurd idea. If you have the light, the light is then supposed to shine and so the implication is that if you've been given the light, you need to let the light shine, you need to put it on the lampstand. They would know, the disciples and Apostles, that the lamp and the light is a metaphor in the Old Testament for the truth of God. Psalm 119:105, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, light unto my path." And there were other references to that in the Old Testament as well. So inherent in receiving the light is letting it shine inherent in being given the true seed planted in your own life is to take that seed and as it grows, harvest seed and scatter it far and wide. In other words, you have an obligation to let the light of the gospel shine brightly.

We can think of many New Testament indications of this as well, particularly 2 Corinthians where Paul says, "The light of the glory of the gospel has come to shine on us and through us even though we're earthen vessels." So inherent in the receiving of divine truth is the reflecting of that divine truth. This is kind of a pre-Great Commission commission. The Great Commission hasn't come yet, it won't come till after the resurrection. Luke 24 has perhaps the second most familiar one in Matthew 28 has the most familiar record of the Great Commission. But the Great Commission in its fullness comes then and then is repeated in Acts 1 where He tells them they're going to receive power from the Holy Spirit and go in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth, proclaim the gospel. And that's going to come. But this is a kind of a pre-Great Commission commission and it's very important that Jesus is telling them this...very, very important.

You remember in the Sermon on the Mount He indicated that this is the way it should go. He said there, "Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven and don't put your light under something, don't hide your light, let it shine." So it's been something that He said all along, that you're going to receive the light so that the light can shine from you to others.

But something had kind of intruded into that. They may have assumed that. And after all, at the beginning of His ministry in Galilee, Jesus went everywhere and preached the gospel and they were going along with Him and they heard it and they believed it and they came to follow Jesus, these true disciples and the Apostles. So there was a time when Jesus was proclaiming the truth and they had heard and believed the truth. But there's been a very interesting turn in the tide of things.

If you've been with us through the recent sections of Mark, you know that that's no longer Jesus' plan. In fact, if you go back to verse 11, Jesus says to the disciples and the Apostles, "It's been given to you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing they may see and not perceive, while hearing they may hear and not understand otherwise they might return and be forgiven." They're past grace. They're past forgiveness. They're past believing. What's happened is in all these months of ministry in Galilee day after day after day after day, the final verdict of many of the people and the leaders in Galilee is they

reject Jesus Christ. Not only do they reject Him, but according to chapter 3 verse 22, they say He's possessed by Beelzebul and cast out demons by the ruler of the demons. And that's when it says He began speaking to them in parables.

They made their final verdict and they rejected Jesus. And now in an act of divine judgment, He cuts them off from any further truth. And so, in regard to the disciples, He speaks to them explaining the parables. When the crowd gathers, He speaks to the crowd in parables without explanation. From now on in His ministry in Galilee, He doesn't explain anything, because they have made their final decision. Our Lord's judgment then is to withhold the light from that generation of Jews in Galilee who had finally rejected Him and were beyond hope.

Now the disciples and the Apostles might say, "Well wait a minute, is that the new plan? Is the final plan that You're just going to give the truth to us and it's just going to be this little tiny group and this is as far as the Kingdom of God is going to go? And should we, you know, should we...should we just go around pronouncing judgment on them?" And this may be the reason why, you remember, James and John came to a village the village rejected Jesus and James and John said to Jesus, "Shall we just call fire down from heaven and burn them to a crisp?" Jesus said, "No, no, no, no...no, no, no."

So that's what's in their minds. They...they have seen Jesus go from preaching the gospel which they heard from Him and believed and entered into the Kingdom, to now not saying anything that they can understand and they want to know what's their responsibility. Are they supposed to carry on the judgment and hide everything? Or are they supposed to preach it? And our Lord is beginning to give them their commission. No, the light is intended to shine. The light is intended to shine, not to be put under a basket, not to be under a bed.

They were not really ready yet for this because they weren't trained yet. Jesus put restraints on the preaching of the gospel. You remember, told the demons not to do it. And you remember in chapter 1 verses 40 to 45 He healed a man, He told the man, "Please don't spread this around. Don't spread it around who I am and what I've done." And the man did it any way, disobeyed Him and it made it impossible for Him to minister in any city and He had to go out in the country. So there were reasons in the early months that Jesus put restraint on the proclamation. In the case of the Apostles and the disciples, they weren't yet ready to preach. And it was not time to preach. At least not then in Galilee.

It didn't take long, if you go to chapter 6, however, and verse 7, "He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out." There were people now who hadn't made their final decision against Him. So He sent out the Twelve in pairs, gave them authority over the unclean spirits. It tells us what they did, verse 12, "They went out and preached." They preached, preached the Kingdom, preached that men should repent, and to demonstrate that their message was divine, they showed the power of God in casting out demons and healing sick people.

So in chapter 6 they get their first missionary enterprise. It's what we would call short-term missions. They just go out and they come back. It's not their final commission. Their final commission doesn't come till after the Cross and the Resurrection because that's when they get the full message, right? They can go and preach repentance to enter the Kingdom. They can preach Christ as the Messiah. But they can't yet preach the Cross and Resurrection. They're not quite ready. But He gives them the opportunity to go and to get used to the kind of reception they're going to have.

So the point is this, the plan is the light will shine, the seed will be sown. For the moment, a judgment has been rendered on those people in Galilee who made their final decision. But just a few chapters later there are other folks in other places, even in Galilee as well as later on in Judea to whom they are to go. But the assumption when He sends them out in chapter 6 verses 7 to 13 is that they're going to be rejected. He tells them if they...if they reject you, just shake the dust off your feet and get out of there. But that was a kind of a training mission for what would finally be their full commission.

Now this is in accord with the divine intention. If you go to verse 22 you see that in the next little parable, "Nothing is hidden except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret but that it would come to light." This is a simple, simple little concept. People hide things because there's a certain time that they need to be revealed. You're in the business of doing that if you have kids right now. You know, you've been Christmas shopping and you've got all kinds of stuff and you're sticking it somewhere where they can't find it, right? Because there's an appropriate time to reveal it, this is not the appropriate time. And depending upon how clever your kids are, and how aggressive your kids are, you're creative about that because you know there's an appropriate for that.

You also understand what He says in the second part of verse 22 that things are kept secret because there's a time when they can be brought to light and a time when they ought not to be brought to light. We understand. These are axiomatic principles. But the assumption is, if you have something of value, if you have a truth that needs to be known, there's a time and a place for the disclosure of those things, and that's what our Lord is saying. Sure, it's being hid now but there's going to be a time when it needs to be revealed. Sure, it's being kept secret now but there's going to be a time to open the thing up and disclose the secret to everybody, and that time is going to come in its fullness after His death and resurrection in the Great Commission.

Temporarily hidden to be permanently revealed...temporarily kept secret to be permanently uncovered and disclosed, that's the whole point. By the way, that same statement is made in Matthew 10:26, the purpose in keeping certain things hidden is because there's a perfect time to make them known. The reason for not telling something is that there is a perfect time and an appropriate time to disclose it. Another way of saying the day of worldwide evangelism is coming, we're going to get a little test as to what you can expect coming up. In a couple of months you're going to be sent out. And He did that and then began to expand that operation a little bit, the chapter 6 sending out is not even

sort of their full commissioning and sending out which is indicated to us in Matthew 10 and Luke 9. But in those cases even before the cross, there were only sort of short-term operations that there is coming a day of worldwide evangelization and Mark by writing this gospel is contributing to our ability to tell this story. The day is going to come when they shout the glory of Christ from the housetops.

So we listen to the Word of God as they did with a built-in inherent responsibility to take the message to the world. So I say we listen obediently. It is assumed that if you have the seed you throw it, if you have the light, you shine it, right? That's inherent in the very nature of seed and inherent in the nature of light. Light is to be shining, not hidden. Seed is to be sown, not stored. So we listen obediently.

Secondly, we listen appreciatively. We listen obediently because it's innate, it's an innate obligation in having the seed and having the light. We listen appreciatively because of the individual opportunity that is involved. Look at verses 24 and 25, we've already looked at 23, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." A phrase repeated eight times in the New Testament. And then we've looked at, "Take care how you listen," but let's go to the back half of verse 24 and learn about listening appreciatively.

"By your standard of measure it will be measured to you, and more will be given you besides." He's still in this agricultural mode, isn't He? He...this is all part of understanding the work of the Kingdom and much of it has to do with an agricultural perspective. Remember what it said, I commented on it back in verse 13, "Do you not understand this parable?"...the parable of the soils. And they didn't. And then He said, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?"

On the other hand, once He explained that first parable, then all the rest became clear. And once He gave them the paradigm in the parable of the soils, all the other parables become clear. That's why He doesn't explain the parable in verse 21, the simple one. He doesn't explain the one in verse 22. Doesn't explain the parable in verses 26 to 29, or the parable in verses 30 to 32, because they don't need an explanation. Once you get the picture in the soils parable, everything else just falls into place. But notice in this one, again with this kind of sowing and reaping imagery, "By your standard of measure it will be measured to you." That is to say, God will give you back a return on what you sow, right? That's the point. Galatians 6:7, "Whatever a man sows, he...he reaps." "Sow sparingly reap sparingly, so bountifully reap bountifully," that's the basic principle. This is another truism that everybody would understand. The promise is the Lord will bless the seed you sow. The Lord will return to you blessing. It doesn't mean that all the seed you sow will bring about salvation, but what it does mean is that as you're faithful to sow the seed, God will be faithful to give you in return. And not just equally, because at the end of verse 24 it says, "And more will be given to you besides," and at the beginning of verse 25, "For whoever has to him, more shall be given."

If you're one of those who has, that is you have eternal life, you have the truth, you have the seed, you will receive not only in measure what you've done, but far more. This is Luke 6:38, Jesus said, "Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together and running over." And it will

come from men in this life and from God in spiritual blessing, and in the future, eternal blessing.

So, I say we listen obediently and appreciatively because of the promise of reward the Lord has given to us as faithful listeners who let what we hear be known to others. Whoever has, verse 25, to him more shall be given. It's repeated twice, once at the end of 24, and once at the beginning of 25. Matthew 13 gives a parallel account and in verse 12 it says, "And he will have an abundance...he will have an abundance."

Of what? Divine blessing. As you give out the truth, you will be given more understanding, more truth, more grace, more power, more joy, more satisfaction, more fulfillment, more abundant life and more eternal reward. You can't out give God. "I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly." It's an unqualified, unlimited promise.

And then the contrast, which really sets it off, end of verse 25, And whoever doesn't have, those are the people who hang around but aren't real believers, even what he has, or if I can borrow the language from the parallel verse in Luke 8 verse 18, what he thinks he has. That's even a better way to understand it. Whoever doesn't have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him. False disciples deceived people who associate with believers. Maybe the unconverted husband who is, as 1 Corinthians 7 says, sanctified in some ways by the believing wife. The splash effect hits him. God pours out blessing on a believing wife and it splatters on her husband temporarily. Or the splatter of blessing that came, for example, to the non-believing Jews who were associated with the believing Jews in the church to whom Hebrews was written, he says, "You know, you've tasted the heavenly gift, you've tasted the powers of the age to come, you've become enlightened about all these things, but it's all short of salvation." These are the folks who would be described in Matthew 7:21, "Lord, Lord, we did this, we did that. And He says, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'"

The people who think they have it but don't have it will find out that what they think they have, they will lose. For the true followers of Christ, however, on the other hand, there will be blessing and blessing and blessing and more blessing and more blessing poured out to them, measured out by how much they invest in the work of evangelism and even much, much more.

So we throw the seed and shine the light obediently because of the innate obligation and appreciatively because of the individual opportunity. Each one of us will receive personally a blessing of God on our faithfulness and much, much, much more than we deserve.

Thirdly, we listen obediently, we listen appreciatively, and we listen dependently...dependently. In this great enterprise of evangelism as we hear the Word of God, take it in and proclaim it, we have to understand our limitations.

Now we come to the last two parables in this section and for the first time they don't say, "And He said to them." Verse 26, "And He was saying," you notice "to them" isn't there. Verse 30, "And He said..." So these parables likely were spoken to the crowd. They weren't explained to the crowd, they might have been explained to the disciples, the explanation isn't given because it really isn't necessary. They now understand the big picture. They got the paradigm in mind and it becomes obvious what these parables mean.

And so He is saying, verse 26, "The Kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the earth, or the soil. He goes to bed at night and gets up by day and the seed sprouts and grows. How he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself. First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle because the harvest has come."

By the way, there's nothing eschatological about that. It's not talking about Jesus coming in eschatological judgment. I'll tell you why. Because that wouldn't work in this parable because the farmer has been sleeping up until that point, and I promise you, when Jesus comes in judgment, He won't be waking up from along sleep. That is not what this story is about. It's simple, simple parable, nobody would miss the meaning. The farmer plants and then he goes to bed and given the conditions of the soil and the preparation of water, etc., etc., he really can't do anything but wait till harvest. He plays no role in the growth of the crop, that's the point. The sphere of salvation, the reign of God over the hearts of those who believe and our role in that is like a farmer who plants the seed and then goes home and goes to bed. I like that...I really like that. You don't need to live your life in a panic. You don't need to stay awake 24 hours a day. Go to bed. Plant the seed, shine the light and go to bed. You're not responsible for what happens. That's the wonder of it all.

It's so paradoxical. A seed goes into the ground and dies and as it dies, out of it comes life. How does that happen? Nobody knows that. The farmer doesn't know that. The farmer can't make that happen. Nobody can make that happen. The best horticulturist in the world don't know how that happens. They know it happens but they can't define how it happens or why it happens. Out of this dying seed comes life, a huge crop...that's the wonder of the gospel hidden in those simple gospel truths is the power of life and it breaks out while we sleep.

Look, all I can do is tell the truth. All I can do is speak the truth. I can't take care of the results. I can't give life. It's mysterious, just like to the farmer to us. The only human act is to plant the seed and wait...and wait, go to sleep, it's all God's work. First Corinthians 3 says, "God gives the increase." Life and growth is a divine operation. You must be born from above, John 3. Not of the will of a man...of men, not of the will of flesh, John 1:12, but of God. Listen to it this way, no human being contributes to the regeneration, conversion, justification, salvation process. All we can do is tell the truth. The seed is potent, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, Romans 1, the soil when prepared by God will receive it and once God makes it grow, I love this part of the little parable, when it begins to

grow, it does not stop until it is harvested...first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head and then the harvest. What God begins He completes, right? Philippians 1:6, “Whoever begins a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ.”

This is a critical lesson, by the way, to all evangelical manipulators and clever marketers who think they can make people believe. No human being no matter how persuasive, no matter how clever, makes a contribution to regeneration, 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. “No man comes to me except the Father draws him.” And once He begins to draw him, then it’s the blade, then it’s the ear, then it’s the full grain. It needs to be drummed into the heads and hearts of all Christians who have been seduced by the contemporary lies, that if we just get better at marketing the gospel, we can be more convincing and we can convince people to be saved. Just tell the truth.

I hate to tell you this, music doesn’t have anything to do with it in terms of style. The content of what is said and sung in music may bring the gospel, convey the gospel. But it’s not about mood, it’s not about music, it’s not about invitations, it’s not about any human effort. We don’t do God’s work with human means.

I love this, verse 28, “The soil produces crops by itself.” It’s the Greek word *automate* from which we get the English word automatically. It’s divinely automatic. How encouraging is that? Regeneration, transformation, spiritual transition conversion, new birth can’t be produced by anyone, or any human means, the whole process is divinely automatic. You can’t start it and you can’t stop it. And once it starts, it goes to the full. All you can do is be there to enjoy the harvest, like in 2 Timothy 2:6, the hard working farmer does what he does so that he can enjoy the harvest. We have no role in the actual work of salvation. But we get in on the harvest.

What do you mean the harvest? Well one way we enjoy the harvest is fellowship, don’t we? This is fellowship. Another way in eternity in the future, friends for eternity that we don’t even know now that we’ll meet then. So forever and ever, we will enjoy the harvest. We’ll taste the harvest.

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. We talked about that. The work of salvation is divinely automatic. So we listen dependently, right? Dependently. Or maybe you like the word humbly better.

Well finally, there’s one more last parable, we listen confidently..confidently. And, you know, these disciples, were they thinking to themselves, “Okay, we’re with You to this point, we’ll be obedient, we’ll be appreciative and we’ll be dependent and humble, but what’s the end going to be? Where is this thing going, it looks so small, so fragile, so frail. Where is it going?”

Well He reminds us to listen confidently because of the inevitable outcome, because of the inevitable outcome. Verse 30, He said, “How shall we picture the Kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?” Now looking at the end of it, what’s it going to be like? How do we describe the final outcome? What should these disciples and Apostles there in Galilee struggling with the issues that were...they were facing, how should they understand? How should they look into the future and get a picture of what may happen? It all seems so frail, so small.

And He gives a simple illustration. “Well, it’s like a mustard seed which when sown on the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.” Everybody would understand that. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that turns into a mustard tree.

Now mustard seed was the smallest seed that they used in their farming. It wasn’t the actual smallest seed on the planet but it was proverbial for something small to them because it was the one they were familiar with. Matthew 17:20 Jesus said, “If you had the faith of a grain of mustard seed...” so forth, so that was their proverbial expression for something very small and it was the size of a grain of sand. But proportionately, there was nothing that they planted that started that small and became so large. A mustard bush would be up to 15 feet high and six feet in diameter, a massive thing to come out of a seed the size of a grain of sand. And what our Lord is saying to them is obvious, there’s no explanation here. The small beginnings, guys, do not give you any indication of where this is going. How many...how many multiples of the size of the seed, the grain of sand, would be contained in the fifteen feet and the six feet and the circumference even vast? How many little grains of sand?

There would be millions and millions of them and so the proportions are stunning and staggering and so we listen to the Word of God obediently, we listen appreciatively, we listen humbly, folks, we listen confidently. They didn’t see what we’ve seen. We’ve seen the Kingdom expand, haven’t we? We’ve seen it go to the ends of the earth. This is marvelous. The whole thing to them seems so tiny, so microscopic. Where was it ever going to go? And they knew that the leaders of Israel and the people, for the most part, had rejected Jesus, it just wasn’t really very hopeful. They might have been much more comfortable if Jesus had said to them, “Just go everywhere and pronounce damnation on everybody.” But You’re just telling us we don’t do that and You’re telling us that we’re going to have to let the light shine and sow the seed and this thing is going to go and this is going to be our calling and our commission. Just exactly what are the results going to be? And He said, “This is going to massive, massively out of proportion to the size of its beginnings. This is a prophecy of the triumphant growth, growth as the gospel and the church has grown through the history of the world and will ultimately culminate in the Millennial Kingdom where Christ will rule the whole world.

Notice the reference to the birds nesting in its shade. This is taken out of Ezekiel chapter 17 and in Ezekiel 17 you have a messianic prophecy that says, “Under the rule of Messiah, nations will come to salvation,” and the nations are pictured as birds coming to lodge in the tree of blessing. So that’s borrowed right out of that imagery. And so the birds are representative of the nations. In other words, this is going to expand and not only Israel will be a part of this coming Kingdom, but the nations of the world will be a part of it as well. You have a very similar use of birds in Daniel 4 verses 10 and 21, Nebuchadnezzar views his kingdom and the birds that are in his tree, as it were, represent peoples and nations under his rule.

That’s pretty staggering stuff. These few guys are being told that the nations of the world are going to be brought into this. And if you go to the book of Revelation, you’re going to find that gathered around the throne of God in heaven are people from every tongue and tribe and nation and people, right? It’s stunning and staggering.

So we are listeners. We hear with understanding. We are the privileged. He ends it in verses 33 and 34 with a reminder. With many such parables He was speaking the Word to them, more of the parables that He gave on those occasions in Galilee are located in Matthew chapter 13, if you want to read them. But with many such parables, He was speaking the Word to them so far as they were able to hear it...that’s to the crowd...He didn’t speak to them without a parable but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples. And there we are back where we started, right?

What’s the greatest privilege of a Christian? To know the truth, right? What is the distinguishing mark of a Christian? To know the truth, obey the truth, love the truth, to be listeners. And how do we listen? Obediently and appreciatively, and dependently, and humbly and confidently. What amazing privilege has been granted to us, hasn’t it?

Think of it this way. If you’re a believer, you speak God’s language. When He speaks, you perfectly understand it. It’s a foreign language to everybody else.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, we thank You for its depth and its breadth and height, thank You for its richness. And we thank You that You have made us hearers, listeners. What an immense privilege, we’re just overwhelmed by it. What grace. We confess our unworthiness. We confess that we are sinful and undeserving. What a privilege to be given divine truth in a world that is so lost and so confused and so desperate, in a world that cannot find the truth about almost anything. We know the truth about everything. What a profound gift, what a privilege. May we respond to this privilege by being good listeners, the kind of listeners we should be so that we can maximize our capacity as 30, 60 and 100 fold kinds of Christians and be useful to You. You are worthy of our best and we commit ourselves again this morning to give it with all our hearts. We thank You for the privilege in Your Son’s name. Amen.

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