

The people have flocked to see Jesus and be healed, while the leaders traveled from "headquarters" in Jerusalem to witness first hand what had been reported. Instead of receiving Him gladly as the Christ, they offered increasing resistance and outright opposition. Therefore, though Jesus continues to preach, He resorts to the seaside and speaks in parables. The meanings are freely available to those who desire to know, but not plainly evident to the casual listener or those who were becoming His enemies.

Mark relates a number of short parables here, some presented more formally and told in greater detail with others in Matthew. There the King presents His Kingdom, here the Faithful Prophet/Servant simply bears witness to the Kingdom. His next statement reminds them that despite speaking in parables He is still preaching openly. He is as a candle in a house, brought in to give light. It is set on a candlestick and from there exposes all that there is in the room. Nothing in the room is hid from the eye. If the room is a cluttered mess it's seen by all who enter. If filthy dirty they see it all. If it is swept sparkling clean visitors feel welcome. So the Lord Jesus is exposing the secret thoughts and ambitions of the nation's leaders and their unrighteous acts done in secret. He wasn't welcomed. He exposes them. They sought to hide the light under a bushel or under a bed. Their businesses (the bushel) in the land were threatened by His presence, as was their life of ease (the bed). The priesthood was bedfellows with the Roman occupying forces. So even today God does not allow His people's un-judged sinful thoughts to be harbored indefinitely, or secret sins to be hidden un-judged indefinitely. Aren't we appalled from time to time (too often), at the public disgrace of a respected Christian leader caught in some scandalous activity. Christ's name is dishonored. And men are disillusioned about the real value of the gospel preached to them. Satan laughs.

We who have ears are to listen. We who hear are to heed. Those who act upon what they hear will be rewarded in measure with their response. Not only that, if one responds with action he will be given more. As we continue to receive His word and act upon it we will be given more and more over a lifetime. As for those who hear but don't respond, their service is unproductive and they suffer loss. Loss of what they have. Loss of what? Salvation? Reward? Eternal life? **No.** Loss of usefulness as a servant to the Lord. Loss of responsibilities once entrusted. How like the Spirit to use His servant Mark to present this norm for discipleship. Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas in the middle of their journey to foreign lands. He lost that opportunity to serve his Lord with those two apostles. Later, by the grace of God, he became useful, even to the point of writing this gospel. But the time and service lost could never be recovered.

Jesus then described the manner in which the Kingdom of God will come about on the earth. It's a story familiar

to anyone who works the ground for a living. We who know nothing but mega-stores may not be able to identify with this simile. A farmer plants seed in the ground. Over time the seed sprouts and grows. This, whether the farmer is awake or asleep, night or day, is attentive to its progress or not. Finally, when it is ready to harvest, the farmer puts in the sickle and reaps the crop. Here the simple point is God's role in the growth and maturity of the Kingdom until the last Judgement. Men plant it, even water it, but only God gives the increase. The servant remains only a servant, not the initiator / advancer of life.

But there is another example of growth, a grain of mustard seed. A small insignificant seed which when ground makes a spice to complement the flavor of savory dishes, hot dogs, and hamburgers, etc. The plant isn't nurtured either as an ornamental or as a staple food, but is more often found as a weed, sapping nutrients and water from food crops. The mustard seed depicted by the Lord displays abnormal growth becoming an outsize monstrosity. A tree but not just a shrub or small ornamental tree but a great tree, greater than all herbs, with far-reaching branches. Under its branches it harbors the birds of the air that busily snatch away the newly sown seed from the wayside hearts. There is something sinister pictured here, but he doesn't enlarge upon it. But it must picture a Weed surpassing all weeds, that would grow pretentiously in the world. Satan's mimic of the Kingdom of God. And grow and flourish it has.

More details and variants of these parables are presented by the Lord in other gospels. There the presence and fate of weeds in a crop is discussed, the discriminating judgement of fish taken in a net, a lost coin found, leaven intentionally put in some meal, the field with the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price purchased. But these told in Mark are sufficient for the Spirit's purposes here.

From His first public debut Jesus showed His authoritative power in many different ways, but now the authority of the Lord over the most powerful elements of "nature" is vividly demonstrated. Never tamed or controlled by man, storms and other weather events are in God's province, remaining outside even the realm of reliable predictability by men. A violent storm suddenly erupts. Though sailing upon familiar waters these seasoned fishermen genuinely feared for their lives. But He, greatly fatigued, was asleep in the stern. Did Satan think he could destroy Jesus with a storm? See His deep human faith no matter what circumstances might arise. He rises interrupted from much needed sleep and speaks. The sea is calm. His disciples wonder, fear, marvel and bow. No, nothing that happens to us is out from His control. Yet He may allow Satan to test our faith so we will display extent of the salvation He wrought in our souls when He wrested us from his control. Peace be still! Be still indeed!

By Ron Canner, January 3, 2007.