



Bible Study
2014-2015

Heart of a Servant

The Gospel of Mark

LESSON 4

Right in the heart of downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin, an unattractive commercial building sits on Front Street donned with the words “International Exports Ltd.” You can walk all around this seemingly ordinary office complex, examine it with a critical eye and not know that the structure is actually hiding an infamous restaurant within called “The Safe House.” Established in 1966, the founders designed the restaurant around spy and espionage themes. They took the name from the CIA’s former director Allan Dulles, who said the first safe house was Rahab the harlot’s home from Joshua chapter two. The entrance is a particular back door and once you step in, you are trapped in a tiny library-style room and must discover the hidden entrance that leads into this incredible restaurant.

In Mark chapter four, we are introduced to the parables. Jesus would sometimes use short allegorical stories regarding ordinary objects, scenery or circumstances here on earth, yet hidden within the story were divine truths, spiritual lessons and revelations about the kingdom of God. These stories are seemingly ordinary fronts to the deaf, blind and hard-hearted individual, but to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see, they can lead you into greater revelation about spiritual matters.

Even before Jesus taught with parables, the genius of the Lord knew that getting to the heart of man through a “back door” is sometimes needed because of his tendency to defend himself and cover his sin. This can be seen when Nathan the prophet was sent to David with a parable. It was a story about a rich man who would not take from his own flocks and herds to feed a traveler on his journey, but took from a poor man his one little ewe lamb which he loved. When David was angry and said that the man who had done this thing should die, Nathan answered, “Thou art the man.”

It’s the grace of God to use parables and it is our free will that determines the fruit of these in our lives. As we begin our lesson by seeing Jesus step into a fisherman’s boat to position himself to teach the people, let’s position our hearts to receive all that He has for us through prayer.

***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.” Matthew 7:7***

Read Mark 4:1-2

1. From Acts 7:22, we learn that Moses gained much wisdom and knowledge in Egypt which aided him in his leading of the children of Israel many years later. In 1 Samuel 17:34-37, we read that David’s experiences as a protective shepherd were valuable in his fight against Goliath and later in his reign as king over Israel.

Write out the wonderful promise to us from Deuteronomy 29:29 here.

4. Read verse 12, then turn to Matthew 13:15 and write down what Isaiah prophesied about three different conditions within a person that are not only observed by God, but are determining factors of His fruit produced in a person's life.

- The heart...

- The

- The

a. According to Deuteronomy 29:4, Who holds the capacity to change this condition?

b. Look up Isaiah 50:4-5. The Lord opened his ear and the response to his hearing was obedience. Look in a concordance or recall a scripture that you know that can be an exhortation in regards to the spiritual condition of the heart and/or the eye. (For example, Psalm 13:3 or 119:18 in regard to the eye being able to see.)

*“Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live...” Isaiah 55:3a*

Read Mark 4:3-9 and 13-20 “Parable of the Sower”

5. This may be a familiar passage to some, but write out the FIRST WORD Jesus spoke in verse 3 and then His exhortation in verse 9.

6. In verses 3-8, we read about a sower, his seed, and different outcomes from the seed depending upon the condition of the soil. In verses 13-20, Jesus clearly interprets the meaning of this parable for us. Notice three things: first, there is nothing negative said about the quality of the seed. It is incorruptible and able to produce life and nourishment. Second, there is no criticism or negative connotation by the Lord regarding the one who sows the seed, his style of tossing, where some of the seed landed, and so forth. Third, this is not a parable limited only to salvation. It has a lifelong application for every human being. So let’s look at how the receptivity of the soil determines its fruitfulness.
 - a. Read verse 4 and then write what happens to the type of people Jesus says are “by the wayside” from verse 15.

Look up a further application of this truth in Luke 8:12. What was the power or ability of the seed according to this verse?

- b. Read verses 5 and 6, then write (in your own words) Jesus’ interpretation from verses 16 and 17.
 - 1) Notice that “stony ground” is a mixture of good soil AND rocks. This literally means that there can be receptive places in the heart, but there are also places that are hard and resistant to the Word of God entering in. There is a depth of soil that the Word of God requires in order to bear lasting fruit for the Lord. Have you ever had the truth come to you and you’ve been tempted to deny it, rationalize your actions or resist responding to the Word in obedience? Briefly share a practical example of this from your own life or someone you’ve shared with in the past. (Please be discreet and keep other people’s identity anonymous.)

- 2) Contrast Mark 4:5-6 with Luke's account in Luke 8:13. Identify what it is that "falls away" in verse 13. SELAH as it is not just speaking of "fruit."

- 3) Look up these two passages, Ezekiel 11:19-20 and Hebrews 3:12-14. Thoughtfully write out Hebrews 3:15 here:

- c. Back in Mark 4, read verse 7 and then write out what Jesus says can choke the life that's in the Word from verses 18 and 19.
 - 1) the CARES...

 - 2) the DECEITFULNESS...

 - 3) the DESIRES...

Notice in verse 7 that the thorns GREW. The Lord is showing that our hearts also have the capacity to allow seeds that are harmful to grow! Thorns start small in the garden beds of our heart and mind, but they can be watered and nourished and grow right next to the Word of truth until they choke and kill any spiritual fruit from our life. For emphasis sake, prayerfully read over the Amplified version of verse 19 (below) and ask the Lord to search your heart for any thorns that need weeding and removal.

“Then the cares and anxieties of the world and distractions of the age, and the pleasure and delight and false glamour and deceitfulness of riches, and the craving and passionate desire for other things creep in and choke and suffocate the Word, and it becomes fruitless.”

Identify the thorns that need removal from your heart:

d. Read verse 8 then write out what Jesus says it means in verse 20.

Notice, the sower has done his job and the Word has come to the hearer. The seed will do its job and bear life and fruit. The ground does nothing in labor except receive the seed. It seems that it's our daily decisions of what is allowed to come in or go out of our heart which determines the harvest spiritually. In allowing the Lord to examine YOUR heart, what would you like to bring before Him, so that at this stage of your life, there is no hindrance to the Word?

***“In judging of others, a man labors in vain, often errs and easily sins;
but in judging and examining himself, he always labors fruitfully.”***

~ Thomas A. Kempis

Read Mark 4:21-25

7. Let's go to Luke 8:16-18 for further emphasis of this parable about the correlation between light and hearing.
 - a. There is a very important warning about our hearing from Jesus in verse 24 that is said slightly different in Luke 8:18. What are the two different, yet needful, words that come after Jesus says to "Take heed."
 - b. Jesus seems to state the obvious. Light is not to be covered up nor placed in a place of obscurity. Recall and write down from our first lesson what Jesus said of Himself in John 8:12 and 9:5.
 - c. Praise the Lord that Jesus did not stay inside His home, isolate Himself from others, and keep His identity concealed! Instead, the Father sent the Light of His Son into the darkest places and unto the darkened hearts of His people. What was the response of the people according to John 3:19?

Reflection Question: If there is an area of your life, possibly a behavior or habit, that you try to keep concealed from other people, this is a big warning sign. If there is a relationship in your life that you feel must be covered up, this is another warning sign. There are exceptions, mainly in countries or in families where there is persecution for being a Christian. But if you have to hide things you do, places you go, people you talk with, relationships on Facebook or people you chat with or text, take a moment now to talk about this with the Lord and make sure there are no "hidden works of darkness." Read John 3:20-21 and confess to the Lord anything that you are struggling with being exposed.

8. In John 12:46, Jesus again says that He is a light and belief in Him brings people out of darkness. In verse 47, He says “If anyone hears My words and does not believe...”. Notice the relationship of light and hearing. Belief and rejection. Look up Psalm 119:105, 130. Choose which verse speaks to you most and briefly explain why.

9. Now that we have seen the significance of light and hearing the Word, back in Mark 4:23-25, Jesus shows that we are responsible for our decisions of what we listen to. Just as the light of the Word will shine on our lives and expose any darkness which we are responsible for, so the voice of the Lord will speak to us and we are responsible for what we hear.

a. Look up Hebrews 12:25 and write it word for word here.

b. The NLT interprets Mark 4:25 as “To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.” Do you see the correlation between the parable of the seed and sower? What has this truth stirred in your heart and thoughts today? Briefly summarize.

Read Mark 4:26-29

10. The next parable of the growing seed is only in Mark's gospel. It is very unique in its illustration of the power of the Word of God in our hearts and lives. Verse 27 says that the man "does not know how" such a small seed methodically, systematically, and purposefully grows into food that is ready to be harvested. Reflect back over your relationship with the Lord and write down a short poem, or find a Psalm, or write your own words of gratitude for God's power that has changed your life.

Read Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19

11. If you have mustard seeds and are participating in a group study, please bring them to show others the size of this amazing seed.
 - a. What does the Lord liken mustard seeds to in Matthew 17:20?

 - b. What is such a small amount of faith able to do according to Luke 17:6?

 - c. In our parable, Jesus likens the kingdom of God to the size of a mustard seed. Write down what this herb turned into and what was enabled to LIVE in it because of its size.

- d. Many scholars liken the large growth of this herb into a spreading tree to the church and its global influence. But that is a misapplication of the whole counsel of God's Word. What are birds likened to, or characterized as, in our parable from Matthew's account in chapter 13:4, 19? (For further study, see Daniel 4:10-16.)
- e. The Lord knows what is healthy growth and nourishing fruit from seeds that are sown. He knows when a Christian becomes overgrown and puffed up in pride versus one who says like Paul "I am what I am by the grace of God." John the Baptist had a flourishing, prosperous ministry with many disciples, yet he did not touch the glory of God in any capacity. To the contrary, what did John say in John 3:30? How can you apply this principle to your life practically? Bring in other verses if needful.

"In the spiritual life, nothing stands still. If we are not constantly growing downward into humility, then we shall be steadily swelling up and running to seed under the influence of pride." ~ J.I. Packer

Read Mark 4:33-34

12. We are told He spoke many parables to them “as they were able to hear it.” Notice that Jesus spoke to them “when they were alone” which is another emphasis on our need for a devotional life.

a. What did Jesus say to His disciples in John 16:12?

b. What did Paul say to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2?

c. Have you ever thought that the Lord might want to teach, reveal, or speak to you about some things, yet because of your heart’s condition or lack of maturity, you cannot handle the truth? Take some time and pray about this possibility. Write down a short prayer to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to show you if “stunted growth” or spiritual weakness has occurred in your Christian life. Selah

Read Mark 4:35-41

13. In verse 35, we read that in one day, Jesus had gone from teaching massive crowds, to instructing only a handful, to now providing the disciples with an opportunity to apply all of the spoken truths to their practical life. Warren Wiersbe describes it as “Going from classroom lectures, into His lab of experience, in order to make His Word a part of who they were.”
- a. Based on the first thing Jesus says in verse 35, “Let us cross over,” we can see that there may be times when Jesus tells us to leave our present surroundings. He called them to leave the multitude to be with Him in another location. This can happen on the job, in the ministry, or even a call from the Lord to leave where you live. Have you ever personally experienced this or witnessed this call of God in another Christian’s life? Briefly summarize.

“Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go...” Genesis 28:15a

- b. Even though Jesus was with them, and they were acting in accordance to His will, a furious storm came and rocked their journey. These were master sailors and expert fisherman, yet write down what they did and said to Jesus in verse 38.
- c. In Luke 8:23, we read that their lives, were in fact, in real jeopardy. David often felt like this when fleeing from those who wanted to kill him (Psalm 10:1, 13:1-3). Jesus spoke the prophetic words from Psalm 22:1 when He was on the cross. What did He say to His Father in Mark 15:34?

- d. The writer of Hebrews reflects on this in chapter 5, verse 7. Complete the end of this powerful verse below.

“Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and ...

14. The will of God will include suffering and stormy trials for His children. In these times, we may be tempted to feel as though the Lord does not care and question His seeming lack of intervention.
- a. In John 11, we read about Jesus’ good friend Lazarus dying. What identical statement is said by Jesus’ close friends Mary and Martha in verses 21 and 32?
- b. When John the Baptist was in prison, about to be beheaded for speaking the truth, Jesus did not appear on the scene to deliver him physically. Instead, He proved His identity to John’s disciples and then sent words to encourage him in his stormy trial. What were they according to Matthew 11:6? (Look in the Amplified version also, if possible.)
- c. Is there anything in your life presently, or in the past, that has stumbled you or offended you because of what Jesus allowed or didn’t allow in your life, or in the life of someone you care about? Any time you have walked through where your understanding of Who Jesus is does not line up with what happened in your life? Write a personal response to the Lord of your struggle. (More will be said about this at the end).

15. After Jesus brought great calm, the disciples wondered at the power He had over nature in verse 41. But the trial was not primarily for them to understand His power. He reveals the purpose of the storm in verse 40. What two questions did He ask them?

a. Fear and unbelief are inseparable friends. They will always oppose your putting trust in Jesus. How can you apply 1 John 4:18 to a situation you are currently struggling with?

b. Turn to Romans 5:3-5. These verses prove the truth that all of our trials have purpose. Even the worst tragedies, for the Christian, have a beautifully desired end. This is why Paul would begin to glory when tribulations, or literal “pressings, pressure, affliction and oppression,” would occur.

1) What kind of fruit is produced from them?

2) What does perseverance produce in our hearts (vs 4)?

3) Character also means “experience.” No one wants to be a shallow Christian, but one which has depth. Character or experience will then produce what?

4) Hope is strong confidence. Why? Write out the remainder of verse 5 after the word “because”

- 5) The end of our particular tribulation leads us straight into a deeper love relationship with the Lord Jesus. Notice our key words “trust, hope and fear” as you write out the promises for us from Jeremiah 17:7, 8.

16. Jesus had enough peace in His storm to sleep. As we end our lesson, look at Luke 8:25.

- a. What is the first word of Jesus’ question regarding the disciples’ faith?
- b. “Where” do you place your trust when hard winds blow forcefully against your life? When your life might truly be in jeopardy? Where do you tend to run with your emotions when your “boat” is rocked and feels out of control? Pray and hear the Lord ask YOU “Where is your faith?” Then write out a response to Him here.

***“We say, then, to anyone who is under trial,
give Him time to steep the soul in His eternal truth.
Go into the open air, look up into the depths of the sky,
or out upon the wideness of the sea, or on the strength of the hills that is His also;
or, if bound in the body, go forth in the spirit; spirit is not bound.
Give Him time and, as surely as dawn follows night, there will break upon the heart
a sense of certainty that cannot be shaken.”***

~ Amy Carmichael