**EARS TO HEAR**

 February 17, 2013

Mark 4:21-34 / Key Verse: 4:23, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Last week we learned the parable of the sower. This parable is called the parable of the parables. This means that understanding the meaning of the parable of the sower is the prerequisite in order to understand all other parables. So what was the point of the parable of the sower? Our heart soil determines the crop of the seed of God’s word. To produce abundant crop of the seed of God’s word, we must cultivate our heart soil removing hardened and thorny hearts through genuine repentance. It requires daily steady spiritual struggles. Today we will learn two more parables as the continuing series of Jesus’ teaching in parables about the kingdom of God. Before starting theses two more parables, Jesus again emphasizes the importance of our attitude toward the word of God. So, today’s passage has three parts. First, consider carefully what you hear. Second, the word of God grows all by itself. Third, the kingdom of God begins in a small way but grows to become the largest garden plant.

**I. Consider carefully what you hear (21-25)**

Look at verse 21. Jesus 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? As we know well, nobody brings in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed. Instead everybody brings in a lamp to put it on its stand. Why? To let the light of the lamp shine into the darkness. That’s the purpose of the existence of a lamp. Then why does Jesus say this obvious fact? It is to teach us Jesus’ purpose in telling the truth in parables and more generally in teaching the word of God. Jesus taught the word to reveal the truth to us and at this time specifically in parables. But some people could think that since parables did not teach the truth directly and thus the meaning of the parables was hidden, Jesus wanted to keep the truth from them. But this is ridiculous thinking. It is as ridiculous as lighting a lamp and hiding it under a bed. Jesus’ intention of using parables is not to keep the truth from us but to reveal the truth more effectively to us.

Let’s look at verse 21 again. Here a lamp refers to Jesus himself and his teaching. In John 8:12, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Jesus came into this dark world as the light to shine his light to the people who are living in the darkness. In the darkness people don’t know God and his kingdom. In the darkness people don’t know who they are. In the darkness people don’t know what they are doing. But Jesus as the light of the world makes us know about God and his kingdom and about ourselves; who we are. Anyone who encounters Jesus personally knows God and his kingdom and himself or herself because Jesus shines the light to make us know all of them.

When we accept Jesus personally we too become the light like Jesus. In Matthew 5:14a and 16, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Becoming the light of the world is the true purpose of our life and it is only possible when we reflect Jesus’ image in our lives through sincere obedience. Since Jesus came to us to shine his light and restore us as children of lights, there is no reason for Jesus to hide his teaching.

Look at verse 22. “For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.” This verse also teaches the same purpose of Jesus’ teaching in parables. The kingdom of God taught by Jesus in parables is hidden at first but it is not meant to hide it eventually. Rather, it is to help us to understand spiritual truth more effectively by understanding an easy and simple earthly story. But for this more effective understanding, there is one requirement. It is our right attitude toward the word of Jesus.

Look at verse 23. “If anyone has ears to hear, let him here.” This is the second time that Jesus is mentioning about the ears to hear. In Mark’s gospel, until now there are no other words that were repeated by Jesus except this word. It means that Jesus really wants to emphasize the importance of the ears to hear. Everybody has ears. But why does Jesus say, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him here.” This verse implies that not everybody has ears to hear about what Jesus teaches. Jesus knew that someone would not listen although Jesus taught about the kingdom of God so eagerly. Here we realize that Jesus was not actually mentioning physical ears but the ears of hearts; the willingness of heart; the right attitude toward the word of Jesus. Then what is the right attitude toward the word of Jesus?

Look at verses 24-25. “‘Consider carefully what you hear’, he continued. ‘With the measure you use, it will be measured to you- and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.’” Here we learn that the right attitude toward Jesus’ word is to consider carefully what we hear. Careful consideration is most basic attitude in learning in every area of our lives. It is common that good students consider carefully what they are learning. This common principle applies to the spiritual world too. The kingdom of God will be measured with the measure you use. If you study the word of God superficially without heart’s commitment, the kingdom of God will be understood superficially to you. If you study the word of God struggling wholeheartedly, the kingdom of God will be revealed to the fullness of understanding. Careful consideration of the word of God leads us not only to observe and interpret the word we are hearing but also to apply them to us and evaluate them in us. If you carefully observe the word of God, you will notice that all words of God were meant not to be just read or heard but to be kept and obeyed. Shepherdess Sheila realized this truth. So every week she struggles with words of God sincerely to reach to the point of true obedience and even though she always says my reflection is long, still it is very graceful as long as she struggle sincerely before the word of God. These days our small group members also began to realize the importance of careful deep bible study and started to share their reflection of words of God. This is very encouraging progress. I pray that God may richly bless their small reflection meeting every week so that they may grow all the more in understanding and sharing the kingdom of God.

**II. The parable of the growing seed (26-29)**

In the parable of sower, we learned that our heart soil determines the crop of the seed of God’s word. If we have path-like or rocky or thorny heart soil, we cannot produce abundant crop. Only when we have good heart soil, we can produce abundant crop. This parable teaches about our listener’s responsibility to be good heart soil. But in this parable, Jesus teaches about God’s responsibility in growing his kingdom. Let’s read these verses together.

“He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain-first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.’” In this parable what do you think is the key word? The key word is “All by itself”. When the seed is planted in the ground, we don’t know how the seed sprouts and grows. When you watch the soil, it looks like there is no progress. However, in fact, night and day, whether you sleep or get up, the seed is growing. How does it grow? All by itself! There is process step by step; first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. And then finally there is the harvest.

The word of God has life in it. Therefore once it is planted in people’s heart, the sower’s work is done. Growing the word is not sower’s job. It is God’s job. God grows the word independently by its own power. This truth gives us freedom from unnecessary worry about growing the word planted in people’ heart. In this parable we learn there is sower’ job and God’s job. The sower’s job is to scatter the word of God into people’s heart. Then once the word is planted in people’s heart, we should believe that the word will grow by its own power. Twelve disciples’ life demonstrated this clearly. In the gospel book we see that Jesus spent a tremendous amount of time and energy teaching the word of God to his disciples. But they did not really grasp what Jesus was teaching until he died on the cross and rose again. But after Jesus’ death and resurrection, when they received the Holy Spirit, the words of Jesus planted in their heart began to show their sprout. When the words began to show their sprouts, they became different. The first sign was that their inner fear was gone. They became courageous to preach the gospel, even to the religious leaders who crucified Jesus. There is such harvest when we truly accept Jesus’ word on earth and there is ultimate harvest. It is the final harvest at the end of the age. All believers will participate in heavenly kingdom with Jesus to enjoy his kingdom forever. There all believers will shine like the sun and shiny stars. True believers all hope this final harvest.

**III. The parable of the mustard seed (30-32)**

In verses 30-32, Jesus tells another parable; the parable of the mustard seed. Let’s read these verses. “Again he said, ‘What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.’” In this parable we learn two main points.

In the first place, the kingdom of God begins in a small way. Here a mustard seed is the word used in Jesus’ time as an idiomatic expression to express very tiny thing. When people wanted to emphasize the smallness of certain thing, they used this word-mustard seed. And it is interesting that the kingdom of God begins in a small way like tiny mustard seed. Usually people don’t notice something when it is very small. However, Jesus says that the kingdom of God is also like that. People easily ignore the kingdom of God since it starts in a small way. When Jesus came into this world, Jesus came as a tiny baby in a manger. Almost all the people in his time didn’t recognize him except a few people. However it was God’s way to reveal his humbleness and love. From our worldly point of view, this Jesus didn’t look great at all. But such humble Jesus was the solution for all proud sinners. The fact that the kingdom of God starts in a small way teaches us that in order to see the kingdom of God we need to be very humble and consider what we see carefully. The kingdom of God comes in people’ heart and most of it is unseen outwardly in the beginning. Abraham Joon has spent every day morning time to meditate on the word of God with missionary Peter Cho. Outwardly it looks very small. But if we understand the parable of the mustard seed, we have to believe that the kingdom of God will grow in his heart as long as he continues to devote himself to the word of God.

In the second place, the kingdom of God grows to become the largest garden plant. Jesus Christ came as a tiny baby and most of people in his time didn’t recognize him at the beginning. But Jesus Christ brought the kingdom of God on earth through his death and resurrection. In the first century Jesus started his messianic ministry in a small land Israel but in the 4th century the gospel of Jesus conquered the entire Roman world and throughout the history the Christian faith has become the largest growing power in the world. As Jesus tells the parable of the mustard seed, he must have had this vision already in his heart. We believers also need to have such vision that Jesus had. Our growing young leaders look like mustard seed right now but we have to believe that when they continue to hold on the word of God sincerely, they will grow like a big tree in the future. Many people around them will come to them to find true rest as they reflect Jesus’ image in their lives.

Today we learned mainly two things. There is our job and God’s job in the kingdom of God. Our job is to carefully consider the word of God and sow it to the people’s heart. God’s job is to grow the word in people’s heart. It starts in a small way but we can be sure that the word will grow by its own power and become the big tree. May God bless you to have ears to hear with willingness of your heart considering carefully the word of God!