

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Mark: Jesus The Perfect Servant Of God

Part II: The Perfect Service Of Jesus, The Perfect Servant Of God, Mark 1:1-10:52

N. Christ's Work To Warn Of Believers' Future Waning Priority On Bible Exposition (Mark 4:30-34)

I. Introduction

- A. We learned in our first lesson in this series that Mark's Gospel presents the perfect service of God's Perfect Servant, Jesus, with Mark's focus of having rebounded unto upright Christian service from personal failure.
- B. In Mark 3:20-35 with 4:1-20, we found that such failure rises out of one's heart being unproductive soil to heed God's Word, and Mark 4:21-29 revealed ways believers can become more productive soil for the Word.
- C. However, a huge *threat* exists to the production of spiritual growth, and Jesus exposed it and warned about it in the Parable of the Mustard Seed in Mark 4:30-34, so we view it for our insight and edification (as follows):

II. Christ's Work To Warn Of Believers' Future Waning Priority On Bible Exposition.

- A. To understand the Mark 4:30-32 Parable of the Mustard Seed, we view its previous context (as follows):
 1. Jesus had encountered people of varying degrees of faith or its lack in Mark 3:20-35, ranging from the hardened unbelief of the unsaved scribes (Mark 3:22-30) to the weak faith of His earthly family members (Mark 3:20-21, 31) to the richly productive faith of His ardent followers (Mark 3:32-35).
 2. Christ then explained this variation by the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20), better termed the Parable of the Soils, teaching that the receptivity of man's heart to God's Word determined its spiritual production.
 3. Thus, in Jesus' Mark 4:21-29 parables of the Candle, of the Measure and of the Seed Growing Slowly, He had taught His disciples **how** to *improve* the soil of their hearts toward spiritually growing in Him.
- B. However, the Parable of the Mustard Seed shifts the **FOCUS away from** the **dietary production** of the seed sown that existed in the earlier Mark 4:2-29 parables **to** a **FOCUS** on the **tiny physical size** of the seed sown and the remarkably **large physical size** of the **plant** that it **produces**, Mark 3:30-32:
 1. This parable likens the Kingdom of God to a grain of mustard seed, a very tiny seed, that is sown only to produce a plant of up to fifteen feet in height that contains a thick main stem and branches strong enough to hold even the weight of birds, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, v. Four, p. 324.
 2. This was likely the black mustard, *Brassica nigra*, used in Jesus' day possibly for its oil content, *Ibid*.
 3. Clearly, the focus of this parable is **not** on the **edible food** the plant produces, but on the **plant itself**.
- C. Other factors reveal this **FOCUS** is a **spiritually UNEDIFYING** one (as follows):
 1. The birds (*ta peteina*) that come to lodge under the mustard plant's branches recall the birds (*ta peteina*) in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:32b with 4:4) that are identified as Satan in Mark 4:15; *U. B. S. Grk. N. T.*, 1966, p. 133, 136; Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 659-660. Those birds, picturing Satan, destructively eat up the seed lest it germinate to produce an edible crop for the sower.
 2. With the growth of the mustard plant, there is no reference to yielding any edible food for a sower, but only to its sending out large branches good only to shelter birds that eat up the seed sown, Mark 4:32c.
 3. There is thus an implied **unedifying FOCUS** on the **physical expansion** of the seed from its tiny origin to a huge plant that with **no** concern expressed for the **production of edible food** as in the earlier parables.
- D. Accordingly, the Parable of the Mustard Seed was a **warning** from Jesus about a future harmful waning of priority on Bible exposition, the seed sown (Mark 4:14) toward the production of real spiritual growth to an infatuation with externalism where explosive external, organizational growth would be the focus! This change in focus not only ceases to produce spiritual growth, but since such massive physical growth shields Satan's activities, it is used by him to harm true discipleship, cf. Mark 4:4, 15!
- E. Christ gave many more parables not named here, but He explained them to His disciples in private, signaling the apostasy to come even in Christendom that would make it like apostate Israel in His era, Mark 4:33-34.

Lesson: *Jesus warned His disciples in the Parable of the Mustard seed about the coming harmful waning priority on Bible exposition in favor of organizational development that would impact Christendom, a priority shift that would both stifle real spiritual growth and also be used of Satan to oppose true discipleship in Christendom.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Jesus to be saved, Mark 1:1, 15. (2) As believers, may we keep focused on heeding Scripture that we might grow in Christ versus favoring external organizational growth at the cost of Bible exposition, that we might stay spiritually productive versus harming real discipleship in our lives and the Church.*