

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not review by the speaker, for personal use only)
Mark 04: 10-20

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you; this is Hwa-Chi. It's time to read the Bible again, today, we'll continue reading Mark Chapter 4, verses 10-20.

Yesterday, we read the parable of the sower, which was the first recorded sermon of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. It was not a straightforward statement but spoken in parables to the crowd. Later, privately, to those who sought understanding, including the twelve disciples, Jesus provided a detailed explanation of the parable. Jesus' explanation is found in verses 14-20. Yesterday, as we discussed the parable of the sower, we also read Jesus' explanation. Today, our focus is on verses 10-12, where Jesus speaks to the disciples after delivering the parable but before explaining it. As mentioned before, the Gospel of Mark is concise, so comparing it with other Gospels is essential to grasp its unique aspects and truly understand the richness revealed in Jesus' earthly ministry.

Same parable of the sower is also recorded in Matthew 13:1-9, Luke 8:4-8. In Luke 8, besides the parable of the sower, there are many other parables. The parable of sower plus its explanation total to less than one-fifth of the whole chapter. If compare to Matthew 13, almost the entire chapter devotes to the parable of the kingdom of heaven. That is very similar to Mark 4, which devotes most of the chapter to the parable of the kingdom of God. Therefore, we specifically compare Mark 4 to Matthew 13, especially on the records that are different.

For those who have been reading the Bible with me for some time know that I believe the Scriptures are written for believers and are meant to be understood. When the Bible uses different words or descriptions, there is significance behind it that deserves our exploration. I often share my perspectives, which may differ from traditional interpretations, but my guiding principle is that the Bible is infallible. Interpretations must align consistently throughout the entire Bible. I do not claim my interpretations are absolute; they are my best understanding at the moment. I

also believe no theological framework can completely define God or explain every detail in the Bible. So, I invite believers to temporarily set aside their theological frameworks.

Verses 10-12: "But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, 'To you, it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.'"

Here, Jesus is on a boat, speaking the parable of the sower to the crowd on the shore. The parable seems straightforward on the surface, and many assume they understand it, missing the opportunity for deeper insights. Some, however, including the twelve disciples following Jesus, seek further understanding and privately approach Him to inquire about the meaning of the parable. This is a commendable attitude for us to learn from. When faced with unclear passages or seemingly illogical interpretations, we should not easily dismiss them but keep them in our hearts, contemplating and seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit over time. These inquirers sought Jesus about the parable, and His response is somewhat surprising, even shocking. Jesus states that the mystery of the kingdom of God is revealed to those who earnestly seek. May we all be such seekers.

The second point is that for outsiders, Jesus speaks in parables, allowing them to see but not perceive and hear but not understand. This reminds us that when reading the Bible, understanding the surface meaning of the text is not enough. If you only achieve that, Jesus considers you an outsider. You must seek the spiritual meaning behind the words. Jesus says, 'Lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven.' As if Jesus didn't want them to be forgiven so He spoke to them in parable. It's not so. God desires all to be saved and not one perished, but at that time, the enemies worked through the scribes and Pharisees; they have plotted how to get rid of Jesus. With limited amount of time left on earth for Jesus, He wanted to focus on His 12 disciples' discipleship and therefore tried to avoid any confrontation with

the opposition. Of course, through parable, man can not be saved; those who heard the parable and desired to know deeper, will come seek Jesus out: once they understood, they repented and saved. So, Jesus didn't mean for them not to be forgiven; but wanted them to move one step further after they heard the parable; they can seek Him out. So, the use of the term "Lest" in CUV may be better understood as "Once" - once they turn, they will be forgiven. Resolving this minor issue, let's address a more significant question.

Here, Jesus states that He speaks in parables to reveal the mystery of the kingdom of God. The crowd following Him sees but does not perceive, hears but does not understand. Since it is a mystery, something beyond human wisdom, understanding it requires divine revelation. If Jesus uses parables to reveal the mystery of the kingdom of God, the result is that people see but do not perceive, hear but do not understand. This is the account in the Gospel of Mark.

Now, let's compare it with Matthew's account. It is after Jesus spoke the parable but before He explained it to the disciples. In Matthew 13:10, the disciples ask Jesus why He speaks to the people in parables. Jesus answers, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them, it has not been given." Here, Jesus uses the term "kingdom of heaven," not "kingdom of God." The mystery of the Kingdom of heaven is spoken in parable, the outsiders cannot see, they cannot hear; but the mystery of the kingdom of God is spoken in parable also; the outsiders can see but not perceive, can hear but not understand. These two are different. If you compare these two paragraphs, the kingdom of heaven is more mysterious.

Now, let's contemplate the primary question: what is the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven? I want to emphasize that most theologians equate the kingdom of God with the kingdom of heaven. However, comparing Matthew 13 and Mark 4, it's apparent they are different. I must clarify that the following is not my invention; it was noticed by Watchman Nee over seventy years ago. In the Bible, the kingdom of God is a general term, representing a place where God rules, where His will is respected, and His Spirit can freely move.

From the beginning of creation, God's kingdom existed, spanning continuously through time until eternity. After the fall in the Garden of Eden, a significant change occurred. Romans 5:12-14 explains that sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin. Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the same way Adam did. Thus, sin and death became the rulers on Earth. Satan became the ruler of the world by deceiving humanity, leading to the distortion of God's kingdom.

In God's grace, another life line emerged from the beginning of creation, extending to Jesus Christ's return to Earth. This life line is documented in Luke 3:23-38, the genealogy of Jesus. This genealogy traces back seventy-four generations to Adam. This life line represents the practical aspect of the kingdom of God throughout the Old Testament, involving certain Old Testament saints as the embodiment of God's kingdom. In the New Testament, starting with Jesus and the twelve apostles, the life line expands to form the church, continuing until our present time. Afterward, Jesus will return, establishing the Millennium kingdom, and finally, the new heaven and new earth will signify the complete realization of God's kingdom. Currently, the church is the practical manifestation of the kingdom of God.

In Mark 4, the emphasis on the kingdom of God, which is a kingdom of life. Jesus, as the sower, sows the seed of life, the Word, and when sown on good soil, it bears fruit, producing a testimony of God's kingdom. In verses 21-23, the focus is on the proclamation of the kingdom of God, while verses 24-25 emphasize the growth of the kingdom, both normal and abnormal. The key theme in Mark 4 is the produce of life, the results of life, the testimony of life, the proclamation, and growth of life. Therefore, in this parable, you see but may not perceive; you hear but may not understand.

A comparison was made with Matthew's Gospel, where the emphasis is on the kingdom of heaven, distinct from the kingdom of God. Matthew traces the lineage from Abraham, highlighting the development of the earthly kingdom until Jesus, who initiates the kingdom of heaven. The discussion extended to the present reality

of the kingdom within the Church and its future manifestation in the Millennium kingdom.

The difficulty of the Jewish people in understanding and accepting Jesus' teachings was explained through references to Isaiah's prophecy, illustrating their hardened hearts. This situation was paralleled in the Acts of the Apostles when Paul, in Rome, encountered resistance despite quoting Moses and the prophets. The conversation delved into the seven parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13, drawing connections with the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. This parallel provides insights into the development of the Church and the mysteries of the kingdom.

Similarly, the book of Isaiah is quoted by Paul in Acts 28:26-27. At that time, Paul, wearing chains, arrived in Rome, bringing the Gospel to the Romans and spreading it among the Gentiles. The leaders of the Jews came to see Paul, and after a day of discussion, quoting the books of Moses and the prophets repeatedly, they disagreed and left. Before their departure, Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, and this concludes the book of Acts.

Although the book of Acts ends, the work of the Holy Spirit continues, yet among the Jews, it remained ineffective. Therefore, the account in Matthew 13 is significant, as Matthew specifically uses seven parables spoken by Jesus to describe the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, during this period, the Kingdom of Heaven is replacing earthly kingdoms. Of course, the actuality of this Kingdom exists within the Church. Regarding the seven parables of the Kingdom, they can be seen as representing seven aspects of the Church's development.

This marks the beginning of Jesus sowing the seeds of life, anticipating the future development of the Church. When we reach Revelation 2-3, John was taken to heaven, and God revealed to him the things concerning this age. John uses seven churches, representing the development of the Church over the past two thousand years. If we have spiritual insight, we can see that the seven parables in Matthew 13, describing the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, correspond remarkably well with the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. Saints who are interested can listen to

the daily bread of Matthew 13 about the seven parables, as well as the daily bread in Revelation 2-3. Particularly in Revelation, it explicitly mentions how the seven parables in Matthew 13 correspond to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. I will provide the links to these daily readings in the comments, and those saints who are willing to continue seeking can listen to them.

We have already read most of verses 13-20 yesterday, and now let's go through them once again, along with some simple explanations.

Verse 13: "And He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?'"

The parable of the sower is foundational among all parables. Everything starts with the seed of life being sown; then, the Word can continue to develop and grow. Jesus provides a clear explanation to those who seek understanding regarding this parable.

Verse 14: "The sower sows the word."

The sower is, of course, Christ Himself. The sown seed is the seed of life, which is essentially Jesus Christ Himself, the Word of life from the very beginning. Following this, Jesus explains the four different types of soil, essentially representing four different types of hearts.

Verse 15: "And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts."

If a person's heart is like the wayside, frequented by traffic, coming and going, that person's mindset becomes busy to the point of hardening, leading to spiritual death.

In such a condition, the seed of life cannot take root. The birds represent Satan, who takes away the word sown in their hearts.

Verse 16-17: "These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble."

The seed sown on rocky ground represents those who hear the word and immediately receive it with joy. Yet, they have no root in themselves, endure only for a while; when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. This type of heart is shallow and stony, symbolizing a person who initially receives the Word with joy but lacks depth. When faced with trials or difficulties, their faith is shallow, and they fall away. The outcome is uncertain, and whether there is true life in them depends on subsequent spiritual developments.

Verse 18-19: "Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. This refers to hearts like a thorny bush, where the Word takes root but is eventually choked by worldly concerns, materialism, and various desires. The believer may be saved, but their spiritual growth is hindered, and they bear no lasting fruit.

Verse 20: "But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

The good soil represents a receptive heart that not only hears the Word but also accepts and bears fruit. In the good soil, there are 3 different results: the least can bear fruit thirtyfold: this person enjoying the grace God provided to him; even though there are things in him that he can not remove yet, he stayed in the grace of God so he can bear fruit thirtyfold. The 2nd kind, sixtyfold: that is the person is fully cooperated with the Lord, he can obey the will of God in him so his gifts are fully developed but he still remains in his limitation; so he can bear fruit sixtyfold. And the ones who can bear fruit hundredfold, that is this man overcame his own limitation; he's broken by God and reconstituted by God; he could fully lay down himself and be filled with the Lord. So he can bear fruit for hundredfold. Here we see, our heart is very important; the heart's reaction to God's words determined how much growth we can reach.

Let's pray: Lord, keep our hearts more than anything else. Every time we come before Your words, may our hearts be the good soil: to receive Your word and let it rooted in our heart and bear abundant fruit. May You richly bless my daily bible study time. Help me to understand Your word according to Your heart's desire and may Your word truly change my living so I can bear good testimony for You. Bless my living, pray in Jesus' holy name.