

## ON THE SEA SHORE (Mk. 4:1,2)

<sup>1</sup> And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. <sup>2</sup> And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine.

The Gospel of Mark is action-packed. Generally, it sweeps through the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus without spending too much time on detailed teaching. Doctrines in greater depth are taught more in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and especially John ... but Mark tends to emphasise the more notable day-to-day aspects of the ministry of the Saviour. Having said that, though, there are two exceptions, - here, in chapter four concerning the soils and in chapter thirteen relating to Christ's second coming. So, there is particular significance when Mark invests so much in a passage, as he does here in this parable.

Actually, it gives us an overview from the perspective of evangelism ... Why do some people turn to Christ and be saved, and others won't? ... This is a parable that defines how the listener responds to the Gospel. Now, we are a small fellowship and yet we are expected by the Lord to be obedient to the great commission, Mk. 16:15 *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*. That is what we are saved for, and called to do. ... We are not saved to *sit*, we are saved to be *sent*! People are on the wide road to destruction and we have the only message that can point them to Christ. Therefore, it is our responsibility before God to make that message known, as the opportunities are granted to us.

It is difficult though. Today, people aren't interested ... and if you press them you will turn them off completely, and you will not get them to listen to you. In Jesus' day it was a different problem, though, because the people were *too* interested. They were *too* interested because the prevalent feature of their 'faith' was the expectation of a Messiah who would come and liberate them from the Roman invader, and set up his kingdom.

They had sifted their way through the Old Testament prophets, picking out certain aspects they liked so as to produce the concept of a super-human that would heal all their woes ... someone who would *at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6)*. 'Messianic fever' was running high in Israel ... and that is why so many had previously headed down to the River Jordan to hear John the Baptist's message ... and it was also why Jesus received such overwhelming adulation when He entered Jerusalem on the donkey.

And the great problem was that many of these ordinary people were being attracted to Jesus because they were selfishly hoping their aspirations concerning a Messiah would be fulfilled in Him. All they could see was a Messiah who would come to sort out their dilemmas ... Put very simply, He was to 'make everything in their garden rosy' with the least amount of commitment or effort from them.

But that is not such an ancient concept for that is how many people see Christianity today. Even those who never 'darken a church door' see 'a use' for Jesus when they have nowhere else to turn ... That is when they tell you they pray. When all other avenues are exhausted, they 'turn to God'. They 'pray' more out of hope than expectation ... for they don't really have the capacity to believe, - it is merely the final 'card up their sleeve'. When all else fails ... run to God! However, the sad thing is they run to their own expression of who they believe He is for they are strangers to Him, His ways, and His grace. They don't know Him.

Similarly, by the shores of the Sea of Galilee it was blatantly obvious these people were using Jesus simply as a miracle worker and as a religious 'tool' to exploit. Of course, the religious leaders, - the Pharisees, - tried to convince the people that far from Jesus being a Messiah, He was actually a blasphemer acting on Satan's behalf (Mk. 3:22ff) to delude the population.

Nevertheless, they couldn't stop the crowds from exuberant fixation ... going to see Jesus for as far as the multitudes were concerned He was the 'greatest show in town'! *Never* had the likes of Him been seen before! Men and women and children were healed, demons screamed as they were cast out of people. Jesus was an unparalleled phenomenon! However, the crowds who were fascinated with Him, and attracted to Him, and pressing up against Him were at the same time totally blind as to Who He *really* was and why He came.

His ministry, though, was all the more assertive by the doctrines He taught. They were like nothing the Pharisees presented in the synagogues, and yet He spoke with such *authority* He arrested the imagination of His hearers and they professed to become 'believers'. For example, [Jn. 2:23](#) when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But even though they professed to become 'believers' they had no firm understanding of what He was actually saying, and hence, [24](#) Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, [25](#) And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man. ...

He knew their faith was not sufficient for *saving* faith. Similarly, when He was presenting Himself as the bread of life (using the Old Testament analogy of the manna in the wilderness), many of the people became disturbed at what He was teaching Jn. 6:41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. <sup>42</sup> And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? <sup>43</sup> Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day ... <sup>47</sup> Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. <sup>48</sup> I am that bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. <sup>52</sup> The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *his* flesh to eat? <sup>53</sup> Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. <sup>56</sup> He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. <sup>58</sup> This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. <sup>59</sup> These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. <sup>60</sup> Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard /σκληρός, offensive, intolerable] saying; who can hear it? <sup>61</sup> When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ... <sup>66</sup> From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. They could not understand and they were not prepared to understand or accept His doctrine so they abandoned Him. Mind you, they hadn't been following Him long ... so their period of being disciples was very brief! Their faith in Him was nothing more than superficial.

So, with this kind of a background, - with all these spiritual 'cling-ons' and temporary 'happy-go-lucky' disciples, - Mark takes time to explain the context of what Jesus was about to teach. ... The countryside is familiar, and Jesus was by the side of the Sea of Galilee with people who spoke with the same accent as He did. They understood the intonation in His voice, and the pictures He drew for them. He used ordinary language for ordinary people ... *and he began again to teach by the sea side.* There was no 'entrance fee' they had to pay, - He met them 'on their own ground'. He didn't announce or advertise a special campaign. He didn't have to 'herd them' in to come and listen ... No, there was gathered unto him a great multitude.

What was drawing them? *He* was drawing them for John tells us, Jn. 1:11 He came unto his own. He was the Light in a dark place (Jn. 1:5 the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not). He came with the purpose to save His own people, the sons and daughters of Abraham, - that is why He was called 'Jesus'. He spoke with such tenderness that drew them to His side. They recognised in Him a passion that was absent in the Pharisees. Even the little children who were normally bored with adult activities and conversations came to meet Jesus! ... Imagine crowds *flocking* to hear a preacher preach, a teacher teach ... that is how it was by the side of the Sea of Galilee ... and many of them who came had seen Him there before, cf. 2:13; 3:7.

And they did not come to be amused for that is never part of Christ's agenda. He did not feed their appetite for the spectacular, but instead, *he began again to teach by the sea side*. He had done it before, - we've got to say, - without any great success, as far as salvation was concerned, i.e. we don't read about multitudes being saved ... but nevertheless, He kept to the same agenda as He had done previously for *he began again to teach by the sea side*. What He had taught before, He continued to teach *again* ... He did not change His message! He had not made it lighter or any easier to accept ... it remained the same! Indeed, *he began again*. And also, *he began again to teach*. This was no 'airy-fairy' 'ear-tickling' nonsense for the word translated 'to teach' is the word διδάσκω, and it means exactly that, 'to teach', to instruct in sound doctrine and to impart true knowledge. *That* was what He presented ... that was what He taught.

Here is the Master-Teacher, the One Who knows all things ... and in front of Him was a multitude who needed to learn the truth He was teaching them. In fact, there was so many of them He decided He could serve His purpose better by commandeering a boat and casting off a little from the shore. His voice would carry. He would be less inhibited. He would masterfully proclaim the message He came from Heaven to declare.

And what was His message? Paul wrote, *we preach ... Christ Jesus the Lord (II Cor. 4:5)* ... and that was the same message the Saviour preached for it was the message He preached to the two despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus, Lk. 24:27 *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*. ... That is the only message Jesus ever preached, and it is the only message *we* are to preach! When someone stands in a pulpit and preaches anything else, they have no right to be there!

The pulpit is not a place to preach politics, social issues, or anything other than Christ, and Him crucified! ... That is what Jesus was teaching as He sat in the boat, just a few feet out into the Sea of Galilee ... That is what He had preached since the commencement of His ministry, *Mk. 1:14 Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.*

There is a beautiful and simple illustration here in the words, *there was gathered unto him*, συναγωω. In the opening verse of chapter three Jesus entered the synagogue, συναγωγη, which means a ‘bringing together’. As far as most of the people were concerned, they had to go to the *synagogue* to meet with God, - that was what their tradition taught. However, the synagogue was merely a building ... whereas at the seashore they actually did with God in Christ ... In fact, *He* met with them! It is not the building that is the Church but the Church is saved and redeemed people of God gathering together.

... And so, Jesus took this multitude away from the trappings they associated with religion and He brought them down to the shore, from which he entered the boat and He began to teach them *His doctrine* ... That is all we need to know, and those of us who occupy the pulpit ... that is all we are called to teach and preach ... and the place where you find His doctrine is in His Word, and His Word is truth, so that is what we must preach! Once again, we have no remit to teach anything else, only His Word.

The crowd had been *starved* of the Word of God by the Pharisees. Previously the comment had been made concerning the people and how they listened to Jesus, *2:12 they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.* That’s because the Pharisees had been teaching them error from out of the writings of men ... but Christ taught His doctrine that would set them free. And that is what we are to teach also ... nothing but the Word of God!

And Jesus, on this occasion, used a specific mode of teaching, *he taught them many things by parables.* The word ‘parable’ is a combination of two Greek words that means “a placing of one thing by the side of another” ... for the sake of comparison and illustration. It was using something familiar to explain a deeper truth. Altogether, there are over sixty parables in the New Testament, mostly in Matthew and Luke, a few in Mark, and none in John. In fact, the people would have been used to parables from the Old Testament, e.g. II Sam. 12:1-14 where Nathan tells the parable concerning the ewe lamb the rich man stole ... relating it to how David committed adultery with Bathsheba and took her from her husband.

However, there were some occasions when Jesus spoke to the multitudes and they did *not* understand, and in those cases it was actually an act of judgment upon them as He withheld the application of the truth He was teaching. ... It is like when we as believers study the Word of God and we see the perfect sense it makes ... but when an unbeliever reads it, they can see nothing like what we can see. It's not that we are clever or hyper-intelligent but the difference is that the mind of the believer in Christ has been opened by the Holy Spirit to the things of God, whereas the mind of the unsaved has not, as Paul describes, [II Cor 4:4](#) *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

So, that is what was happening as Jesus began to teach the multitudes by the sea side. Instead of driving people away, He drew them to Himself. He taught them ... He didn't entertain them. He didn't give them 'sweets', He gave them 'meat'. ... Paul instructed Timothy, [II Tim. 4:2](#) *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season.* Men's words do not save a soul, and that is why we must point our listeners to God's Word, [Ps. 119:130](#) *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.* ... It *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart ([Heb. 4:12](#)). It was the weapon the Saviour used. It was preached by Peter to the multitudes on the Day of Pentecost. It was the same message opened up by Philip in the wilderness as he spoke to that one solitary traveller from Ethiopia ... to whom he explained the Gospel truth from Isaiah 53.

That is why God's people need to want to learn more of what He says in His Word. It *grips* us for He is the Master, - the Teacher, - and we are His pupils, His disciples, and disciples want to *learn*. While here on earth we shall not come to the full knowledge of all that is contained in God's Word, and that is why sometimes we see certain aspects of it differently ... but concerning the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is only one message we must all agree upon and testify to, and it is this, [Rom. 5:8](#) *God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* ... That is the doctrine of God's free, sovereign, and electing grace. That is the message that is centred round Christ, and the same message He proclaimed. May we love it as we ought, share it as we are commanded, so that the Holy Spirit would reward the faithfulness of His servants in the salvation of precious souls for whom Christ died. Amen.