AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY

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truths to those *outside* (4:11, 12), while revealing them to the disciples (4:10, 11, 34).

Today, however, we attempt to make the message of the word as plain as is humanly possible, rather than concealing it. Our Lord concealed the message at that point because the time was not ripe for the general populace to receive the truth that he was the Messiah.

4:1-20 Parable of the sower

After hearing the parable of the sower (**4:3-8**), the disciples had to seek help in interpreting it (**4:10**). In response, Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 explaining that the reason he was using parables was to conceal kingdom truth from outsiders, but not from the disciples (**4:11-12**). Jesus explained that the point of the parable is that differences in the condition of people's hearts result in differences in their receptivity to the message of the kingdom of God (**4:14-20**). He also emphasizes that God expects that all those who truly hear the message and respond will produce many seeds as a result, even though it can be expected that some will produce more than others.

4:21-23 Parable of the lamp

A lamp is obviously meant to give light in darkness, and thereby reveal what is otherwise hidden. Jesus is the true lamp, whose coming reveals the darkness in human hearts. He is making the point that, despite what was said in 4:11-12, his aim is actually to reveal and not to conceal the truth concerning the kingdom of God. It is the heart condition of humans that prevents *those on the outside* from understanding what he says (4:11). This is why Jesus exhorted, *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear* (**4:23**). Spiritual ears (sensitivity) are needed to 'hear' (understand) kingdom truths.

4:24-25 Parable of the measure

Following on the admonition in 4:23, Jesus cautioned his audience to *consider carefully what you hear* (**4:24**), that is, pay serious attention to what they hear. Then he unexpectedly compares the activity of hearing to measuring something out. It would seem that the kind of 'hearing device' or *the measure you use*, determines the dividends received in one form or another, presumably on the judgment day. In the divine economy, a person who *has* (that is, someone who is spiritually receptive) receives more, while someone who *does not have* (that is, someone who is not receptive) suffers loss. It all depends on the 'measure' one chooses to use (**4:25**).

4:26-29 Parable of the growing seed

The earlier parable of the sower emphasized different types of soil and the different growth of seeds. This parable emphasizes the different stages in the growth of that seed from the time it is first sown until harvest time. The inner workings of the message of the kingdom remain a mystery. It operates regardless of any activity by the sower. Thus the seed sprouts, whether the sower wakes up or sleeps, *though he does not know how* (**4:27**). God is the one who is in control. Human agents sow the seed, but they do not make it grow and so should not become impatient when it does not seem to produce results as soon as they would wish. God's sovereign purpose is still at work.

4:30-32 Parable of the mustard seed

This parable illustrates a vital truth about the kingdom of God – it was not yet fully manifest. Jesus compares it to a mustard seed, a proverbially tiny and insignificant seed, although not necessarily the smallest of all seeds. The kingdom appeared small and insignificant at the time Jesus was speaking. But just as the tiny mustard seed grows into a large shrub, so his kingdom will grow. Its full glory will eventually be revealed.

4:33-34 Concluding remarks

Mark obviously selected these particular parables from many others, because he tells us that Jesus used *many similar parables*, teaching *as much as they could understand* (**4:33**) on each occasion. He gave fuller explanations of the meaning of the parables when he had time alone with his disciples (**4:34**).

4:35-5:43 Jesus Demonstrates His Sovereign Authority

Mark follows the parables about the kingdom of God with accounts of a series of incidents that demonstrate Jesus' kingly authority over nature, demons, diseases and death.

4:35-41 Calming the storm

That evening, after what seems to have been a busy day of teaching in parables of the kind just narrated, Jesus suggested that they cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (**4:35**). He knew that an important meeting would take place there (see notes on 5:7). The boat they used was probably the one mentioned in 4:1 as a convenient place from which he could teach (**4:36**) Some of the disciples piloted the boat, while Jesus rested. Given the day's schedule, it is not surprising that he was soon *sleeping on a cushion*, even though a storm was raging (**4:37, 38**). The storm was severe enough to be a real threat to Jesus and his disciples. Their rebuke *Teacher, don't you care if we drown?* is the natural reaction of panic-stricken men. In stormy times we tend to overreact and experience fear, panic and even anger. Too often, we turn on the leader as a scapegoat when things turn nasty. We may even charge Jesus with not caring for us! Yet this type of reaction does nothing to calm the storm.

In this crisis, Jesus gets up and speaks to the storm as if it were a person, the first of a series of forces he would engage in this segment of Mark's gospel. He rebuked (a

personification) the wind and commanded (another personification) the waves, *Quiet! Be still!* (**4:39**). The wind and the storm immediately obeyed his command! Then, turning to the disciples, he drove home the lesson, *Do you still have no faith?* (**4:40**). His point was clear: fear hinders faith; though dangers are real, when Jesus is with us, we can have perfect tranquillity amidst the storms.

5:1-20 Casting out demons at Gerasa

Gerasa, or Gadara as some translations have it, is a region, not a specific village (**5:1**). The fact that pigs were kept there (see 5:11) indicates that it was inhabited by Gentiles. As soon as they landed, the reason why Jesus had asked to cross the lake that evening became clear. A demon-possessed man met them and gave Jesus a hostile reception when he reached the shore (**5:2**). The poor man was a danger to other people and to himself because of the influence of his masters, the indwelling evil spirits. He had been driven away from among people to live in isolation among the tombs, for he could no longer be restrained – not with chains or any iron shackles, for he broke them all. He had been led down a road of self-destruction, as he cut himself with flint knives and cried out all day (**5:3-5**). He was a maniac whom everyone feared. Such is the work of the devil, who specializes in destruction and killing, and continues to do so today.

The ensuing dialogue must have been between Jesus and a leading spirit among the legion (see **5:9**). The evil spirits indwelling the man challenged Jesus for having come to invade their territory: *What do you want with me?* (**5:7**) Jesus had come to this territory by design, in spite of the hostility of the sea. He knew of the impending power encounter. The demons stubbornly resisted coming out of this man, for Mark tells us that Jesus kept on saying, *Come out of this man, you evil spirit!* (**5:8**). But in the end, the demons succumbed and repeatedly begged Jesus *not to send them out of the area* (**5:10**). Apparently this area was an abode of evil spirits. Rather than leave the area, the evil spirits wanted to inhabit the huge herd of some two thousand pigs that was grazing nearby. These evil spirits seem to have specialized in wreaking havoc, and when Jesus granted their request they succeeded in doing to the pigs what they had nearly done to the man (**5:12-13**). Jesus clearly placed greater value on a human soul than on livestock, although it is unclear why he granted the evil spirits' request.

The man previously possessed was now totally healed and was *dressed and in his right mind* (**5:15**). However, when the Gerasenes heard what had happened (**5:14, 16**), they were clearly more concerned about their economic loss than about the deliverance of this poor man, and so would have nothing more to do with Jesus (**5:17**).

In sharp contrast, the healed man begged to be allowed to accompany Jesus when he was leaving the area (**5:18**). But Jesus charged him to go back to his family and tell them the good news of his deliverance as a result of the Lord's mercy (**5:19**). The man went on to proclaim this good news in the predominantly Gentile region of the Decapolis or the Ten Cities (**5:20**). Spreading the good news begins with telling the story of what the Lord has done in one's life. Until someone has a personal story to tell, he or she has no good news to share.

5:21-43 Exercising authority over diseases and death

Mark is obviously not particularly concerned with the chronology of events, so we do not know the time gap between the events at Gerasa and the two incidents recorded here in which Jesus demonstrated his authority over disease and death.

Jesus had disembarked from a boat when a synagogue ruler named Jairus met him and begged him to come and save his twelve-year-old daughter from dying (**5:21-23**). Jesus consented and set out for Jairus' house (**5:24**).

While on the way there, they encountered a woman, whose story is most pitiable. She had been afflicted with an incurable haemorrhage for twelve years. As if that was not bad enough, she had suffered at the hands of *many doctors and had spent all she had* to no avail, instead her condition worsened (**5:25-26**). Unfortunately, even today sufferers battling with chronic conditions of this nature often fall prey to 'many doctors' and traditional healers. Her problem was compounded by the constant state of ceremonial uncleanness that she had been in for the last twelve years. This would have meant that she could not attend the synagogue and would have been shunned even by members of her own family, who would have become unclean if they had touched anything she sat on or lay on. In faith she sought secretly to just *touch his clothes* (**5:28**). Her faith was instantly rewarded (**5:29**). Right there and then (or *at once*) Jesus realized that *power had gone out from him,* that is, divine power to heal. He asked, *Who touched my clothes?* (**5:30**). The disciples found the question strange, because many people surrounded him. But he was conscious of a particular touch! At his insistence, the woman came forward and *told him the whole truth* (**5:33**). Jesus commended her faith and affirmed her healing (**5:34**).

While this woman was receiving hope and reassurance, word reached Jairus that all hope was lost (**5:35**). He may well have interpreted the delay while Jesus attended to the woman with the haemorrhage as a most costly interruption. But Jesus reassured him, telling him to shun fear and embrace faith instead (**5:36**). Fear is the foe of faith. When one turns to God, he gives hope where humans are utterly hopeless and helpless.

Jesus minimized publicity by continuing on to Jairus' house with only three disciples in tow – Peter, James and John (**5:37**). Arriving there, he found that the traditional mourning ritual had begun, most probably with professional mourners. The entire scene was a *commotion* (**5:38**). His