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Consider Carefully How You Listen to the Lord

Mark 4:21-25

I. The Key Moment in Life: Hearing the Word of God

A. Key Command

Mark 4:24 "Consider carefully what you hear"

1. Literally "See what you hear"
2. Romans 10:17 tells us "Faith comes by hearing God's Word"; and it is by faith that our sins are forgiven, and by faith that we live and move and have our spiritual being in the sight of Almighty God!!
3. So be very careful that you understand, accept, believe and obey what you hear from me... when I speak the Word to you, your soul literally hangs in the balance
4. Everything comes down to the moment of hearing God's word
5. Do you hear in such a way that you are ALIVE spiritually, in a RECONCILED RELATIONSHIP with God as a result; and then bear abundant fruit because I spoke the Word to you?
6. OR is the word having no effect on you at all???
7. Your eternal destiny hangs on how you hear God's Word; your daily spiritual health and your continual spiritual fruitfulness depend on the same... the moment of hearing the Word
8. So... in every Christian service, the most significant thing is the ministry of the Word; and the most significant moment for each

person sitting in the pews is what happens when your eardrums vibrate with the sound of God's Word...

9. If you are evaluating the church architecturally; whether or not the décor is to your liking... if you are analyzing whether or not the pew is comfortable or the parking was sufficient or the people were friendly or the coffee was hot enough or the donuts included some of your favorite flavors.... Even if you are evaluating the music offerings and whether this or that song was your favorite or if the drums were too loud or the acoustic guitar was too soft...
10. As important as many of those things are... all of them shrink into insignificance next to this one thing:

WATCH WHAT YOU HEAR...

Or Consider very carefully the Word of God

The eternal health and fruitfulness of your soul does not depend on any of those features

Frankly the same is true of details of the preaching; the sound of my voice, the cadence I use, the grammar, the illustrations, whether I use humor or not, whether you like my flow or not.

All that matters ultimately is this: DID THE PREACHER PREACH THE PURE WORD OF GOD OR NOT? And if so, DID I CONSIDER CAREFULLY THAT WORD THAT WAS PREACHED?

The eternal health and the daily fruitfulness of your soul depends entirely on that.

Consider carefully what you hear!!!

B. Context: the Parable of the Seed and the Soils

1. The seed is the Word of God
2. The soils represent different human responses to the Word of God

3. The seed hits the soil... in the first three cases, it produces no fruit, no harvest
4. In the last case, it produces an amazing and abundant harvest... of varying sizes, to be sure; but 30, 60, even 100 times what was sown
5. But the key moment is the soils reception of the seed—the heart’s response to the Word of God
6. Jesus concludes with a challenge to all who hear him:

Mark 4:9 Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

7. In private, Jesus explains his parables to his disciples:

Mark 4:10-12 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹² so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

8. The Parables, given in general without any explanation whatsoever to the teeming crowd, was a form of judgment on them
9. The parables, without explanation, seemed like gibberish... but they were actually brilliant articulations of kingdom truth IF YOU HAD EARS TO HEAR
10. Those “ears to hear” is a spiritual capacity to understand spiritual truth about Christ and his Kingdom; it is worked in the children of God by the Holy Spirit of God
11. Jesus underscored that this parable—the parable of the seed and the soils—was a gateway parable; understanding it, you could understand all of them:

Mark 4:13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"

12. He then went on to explain that parable in clear terms:

Mark 4:14-20 *The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-- thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."*

C. So... the Key Moment in Life is HOW YOU LISTEN TO THE LORD WHEN HE SPEAKS BY HIS WORD!!!

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.*

1 Thessalonians 2:13 *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*

As Jesus himself said:

John 5:24-25 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ ¶ I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.*

And again, in the Parable of the Good Shepherd:

John 10:3 *the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

John 10:4 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me

John 10:16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

Again and again, Jesus says the key issue in life is hearing Jesus' voice, following Jesus' voice, hearing Jesus your Good Shepherd speaking to your soul and going out and following him all the way to heaven

That happens when you hear the Word of God rightly preached and by the Holy Spirit you hear it as JESUS HIMSELF SPEAKING TO YOU!

So, I want to draw out elements of how to hear Jesus speaking to you based on these verses in Mark 4:21-25

If we are being commanded to be VERY CAREFUL HOW WE LISTEN to God's Word, what do these verses teach us about that?

II. Listening So We May Shine Brightly

Mark 4:21-22 He 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? ²² For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

A. Jesus' Own Teachings Are Meant to Shine

1. Jesus uses the "light on a stand" teaching in the Sermon on the Mount to speak of his disciples, and we'll extend to that in a moment

2. But in this context, it is talking about Jesus' own intentions in teaching these parables... Jesus' own purpose in his teaching ministry in general
3. True, he is concealing the truth behind the tricky language of parables unexplained
4. True, he is doing this as an act of judgment on his unbelieving nation

Mark 4:11-12 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹² so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

5. BUT ultimately, it is not his desire that the truths of the Kingdom of God remain hidden
6. He didn't come into the world to start a mystery religion of a few elites, a secret society into which a very few select people will be indoctrinated once they learn the code language
7. Jesus entered the world as the light of the world:

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 9:5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

8. Jesus did not enter the world to keep hidden... it is God's purpose that he would shine on people walking in darkness ALL OVER THE WORLD

Isaiah 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Isaiah 49:6 [God the Father said to God the Son]: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Furthermore, God's Word is also the light for the world:

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

So... while the speaking of these parables is indeed a form of judgment, he does not intend that they remain a secret

Mark 4:21-22 He 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? ²² For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

9. The secrets of the Kingdom of God are ultimately meant for EVERYONE
10. So, the Holy Spirit wrote down Jesus' explanation of the parables which he gave in private to the disciples... but now they are published for all the world to see
11. God intends for the teaching to be made clear and to shine in this present darkness, in this devilish darkness, as a clear light of truth to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth
12. NO ONE LIGHTS A LAMP AND PUTS IT UNDER A BOWL or UNDER THE BED
 - a. That makes no sense whatsoever!
 - b. Whenever someone went to the expense and the trouble back then of filling a lamp with olive oil, and trimming a wick and igniting it... they did it to give light to everyone in the house
 - c. SO they put the light up on a stand
 - d. So it is with Jesus himself and with his teachings... they were never intended to stay hidden and secret

Practically speaking, this amazing Gospel of Mark is part of the whole Bible, and Bible translators have translated at least the New Testament into 2300 languages... and the Gospel of Mark itself into over 3000 languages accessible to over 7 billion people worldwide.

Meanwhile, Bible distribution has been staggering... whether in print media or electronic media (like SIM cards on smartphones). A Google search estimates the total number of printed Bibles worldwide at 5 billion copies. And beyond that, since the whole text of the Bible is available online, access to this formerly “secret” explanation of Jesus’ parables is almost total and complete. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl or a bed... but they put it up on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house.

So, while Jesus initially hid his explanations to the insiders, his intent was to publish to the ends of the earth the truths of his words.

13. Jesus then goes on to speak of the apparent mysteries of his doctrines

Mark 4:22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

- a. Truly in other places, Jesus uses this to speak a warning against thinking you can keep your secret sins from becoming publicly known
- b. Every secret sin you have ever committed will someday be known far and wide... there can be no secrets on Judgment Day

Luke 12:1-3 "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

So your secrets will be fully exposed and brought out into the light on that great and terrible day, Judgment Day.

Romans 2:16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

- c. BUT IN THIS CONTEXT... that is not at all what Jesus is speaking of

- d. Here he is talking about his own teachings; his parables, which seem so dark and mysterious
 - e. The secrets of the Kingdom of God are meant for people ALL OVER THE EARTH!!!
 - f. The hidden words of Christ will be fully revealed, fully explained, fully understood
14. Bottom line, Jesus intends ALL HIS WORDS to be FULLY UNDERSTOOD by ALL HIS PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD
15. There is no point whatsoever for Jesus to open his mouth and teach dark, mysterious things that no one could ever understand
16. Practical application for us: We should expect to be able to understand every word that comes from the mouth of God
- a. Jesus did not speak his words so that no one could understand them
 - b. Some words are indeed hard to understand; but the light is there, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to guide us into all truth

B. We Ourselves Are the Light of the World

1. As I mentioned, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used this same analogy to speak of us, his people

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

2. Once we have come to Christ, we have been rescued from darkness and brought into light

Colossians 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves

Ephesians 5:8-9 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

3. Having understood Jesus' teachings, they LIGHT US UP and make US the light of the world
4. We are to shine that light to the people around us

Philippians 2:14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶ as you hold out the word of life

5. So... we listen to Christ's clear teachings, we look at Christ's beautiful radiant light... and then we are ourselves made glorious; our lives shine; God puts US up on a lampstand to give light to everyone in the world
6. We do this as we speak Jesus' teachings to those around us... as we SHARE THE GOSPEL OF LIGHT to those still in darkness

III. Listening with a Hungry Heart

Mark 4:24-25 "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you-- and even more. ²⁵ Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

A. Jesus Wants His Disciples HUNGRY for the Word

1. The measure we use is the measure we will receive
2. What this means is, the more of God's word that we hungrily take in and understand and live out, the more he will show to us
3. Jesus spoke of some of the good soil producing 30 fold, some 60 fold, and some 100 fold
4. Christ wants his people burning with a holy ambition... never satisfied, but always hungry for more, more, more of his word and of his truth

B. Zealous, Hungry Hearts Eager for God's Word

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Perhaps the greatest articulation of this hunger for the Word is in Psalm 119

Psalm 119:10-11 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. ¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

Psalm 119:20 My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.

Note that the Psalmist considered carefully the Word of God through DEEP, heart-felt MEDITATION!!!

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

This is the MEASURE the Psalmist used to God's Word... he meditated deeply on it and expected God to show more and more truth to him.

This is what it means to CONSIDER CAREFULLY what you hear!

Some truths come immediately; others do not come until we work and work and work on the words, meditating deeply.

The measure we use is the measure we will receive!

C. The Measure of Obedience

1. The more we hear and obey God's Word, the more he will entrust to us

John 7:17 If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.

2. If we hungrily study God's word, always eager to put into practice the things we have learned, God will reveal more and more of himself to us... the MEASURE WE USE of obedience is the MEASURE WE WILL RECEIVE of God's loving self-revelation

D. The Dire Warning of Judgment

1. BUT if anyone hears God's Word and does not put it into practice, God will progressively take away even what he thinks he has

Mark 4:25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

2. So an individual who begins with great excitement and joy to hear God's word (like the stony ground hearer... who at once receives it with joy) if he does not continue in God's Word with sacrificial obedience, even the level of understanding he thought he had, God will take away from him as a judgment
3. Years later, he will have a hard heart, unable to make much sense of the Bible

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts

E. Measure to Others

1. This same principle works in terms of our sacrificial ministry to other people, including the poor and needy
2. As we hear God's Word and evangelize the lost, feed the hungry, care for the broken-hearted... the measure of generous service to

others that we use is the measure of God and his rewards that we will receive

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

IV. Lessons

A. How Would You Characterize Your Hearing of God's Word?

Mark 4:24 "Consider carefully what you hear

1. Do you understand that the hearing of God's Word with a faith-filled, submissive, obedient heart is the key to your eternal life and your spiritual health?
2. Are you in a regular pattern of Bible intake in your daily life?
3. Do you have a quiet time? Do you feed your soul on the Word of God?
4. Do you expect that Christ will reveal his secrets to you if you seek the truth eagerly and prayerfully?
5. Do you expect that Christ's Word will shine brightly like a light shining in this present dark world?
6. Do you listen to God's Word so that you yourself may be the light of the world through Christ's Holy Spirit in you?
7. Are you holding forth the word of truth to those walking in darkness around you?
8. Do you boldly share the gospel to lost neighbors, co-workers, family members, even total strangers?
9. Do you see God's Word driving the darkness from your life more and more so that you can shine like a star in this present darkness?
10. Do you have a hungry heart toward God's Word? Jesus said "the measure you use is the measure you will receive." Do you come to church expecting to be fed God's Word? Or do you allow yourself

to be distracted by lesser issues in life and in this church... the window dressing of architecture, parking, friendly people, comfortable pews, well-regulated Air Conditioning, delicious coffee and donuts? Do you come here expecting and yearning for one thing above all else... that your soul will be fed the Word of God?

11. And in your private life, what is the measure you use when it comes to God's Word? Do you expect to receive more and more truth from God's Word or are you stale? Plateaued? Dormant? Bored? Backsliding? Beware that even what you think you have received that God doesn't take it away from you!

B. Central Lesson: Nothing is More Important than the Pure Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

C. Expect This from This Pulpit

Acts 20:20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

Acts 20:27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

And that I would fulfill this central call of a pastor:

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him,

"Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

What does it mean to FEED CHRIST'S SHEEP other than to preach the truth of his Word week after week?