

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL - CHAPTER FIVE

Once again Jesus made good use of His fishermen-friends' boat as a pulpit from which a big crowd could readily hear Him across a few metres of sea. He began to use a form of teaching which He knew was immensely effective when giving a message to those who were not yet ready to take Him seriously. His first parable is known as that of 'the sower' although it is really about the soil into which the seed of truth falls. Jesus described four possible attitudes of the human heart - the road, the rocky ground, the thorns and the good soil. Only the good soil yields a significant crop.(4:1-9)

Before explaining the parable to His followers, Jesus showed them why stories are a good way of teaching. He quoted Isaiah 6:9 where God prepared Isaiah for the way preaching would not always immediately be received with faith and understanding. The Lord showed him that it would be an effective way of putting a message into people's minds which, while not yet producing a response, would be remembered until such a time as a seed of an idea could germinate. The Bible does not really make sense until we have grasped the 'mystery of the kingdom', which Paul explained in Col.1:25-27 to be the knowledge that Christ is in us. Once Jesus is being allowed to speak to us or better still live in us as the Holy Spirit, the word of God comes alive and there can be a response of repentance and faith.(4:10-12)

He now used the four soils to illustrate four possible responses to the word. The road made hard by many feet is like the heart which, perhaps because of past hurts, is switched off to truth for the moment. Satan removes the message before it has sunk in. But the road can be ploughed and more seed sown. The rocky ground had been ploughed but only on the surface. There is an appearance of interest but still a resistance underneath. A superficial response to the word does not last once adversity comes. The thorny ground had been well prepared but the word of God is not the only message which has been planted. The message of the secular world which emphasises possession, position and pleasure has been more enthusiastically received, so truth is choked out. Only the well prepared heart which listens to God alone will produce life which can multiply over and over in the hearts of others as well as being the fruit of Christ's character in us.(Gal.5:22,23) The four soils may not necessarily be four groups of people but our own hearts on four different occasions.(4:13-20)

The next parable asks the question as to why would we have a light in the house if we then covered it with a bucket and put it out, or stuck it under the bed where no-one could see it. The light of Christ in us is there to be seen, not extinguished or wasted. Jesus returned to the theme of seed in good soil and considered the next stage in the growth of wheat. The ultimate purpose of planting seed is to reap a harvest so, as we plant truth, we should be looking for the opportunity to bring people to faith in Christ.(4:21-29)

Another parable uses the picture of soil and seed but this time the seed is mustard. Mustard is sown for an annual crop but if it is not harvested it can grow into a tree. The tree can be a hiding place for the birds of the air which back in the parable of the sower were the agents of Satan. Neglecting to work to bring people to Christ can allow religious organisations to grow which harbour false teaching. Jesus continued planting seed in the form of parables into the hearts of the crowd but to His followers, hungry for understanding, He explained.(4:30-34)

As on so many occasions Jesus took his disciples from teaching theory to having an opportunity to test truth out in real life. The pulpit became a potential shipwreck. Knowing perfectly well that there was a storm coming He asked to go sailing. As fishermen they thought they could handle the sea and so they assumed they did not need Him. Jesus lay down and went to sleep. The storm took them by surprise and threatened to sink the boat. They woke Him, asking if he cared about their imminent risk of drowning. He calmed the sea and then questioned their faith. They had forgotten who he was. The seed for the moment was sitting in rocky ground. The crisis brought them back to the heart of His message. He was the Son of God who loved them.(4:35-41)

Once again, begin by reviewing your titles for the sections of chapter 3 considering how you might want to improve them having spent more time on each part. I hope you are finding that the exercise of choosing your own titles makes you really think about what you are reading. My suggestions of titles for the sections of chapter 3 are as follows:- 1-6 criticism in the synagogue; 7-12 healing by the lake; 13-19 appointment on the mountain; 20-30 rejection in the home; 31-35 acceptance in the family. Now give titles to the sections of chapter 5:1-20, 21-24, 25-34 and 35-43. Let us consider them in more detail.

5.1-20

Q.1 Gerasa was 35 miles south-east of the south end of the sea of Galilee, roughly in the middle of the area called Decapolis. While originally part of the allotment of the tribe of Gad it was sometimes part of Israel and sometimes not,

so its population was a mixture of Jew and non-Jew in the times of Jesus. What does this tell us about Jesus' concern for those who were not Jews? And what clue does it give us as to why they were keeping pigs?(Leviticus 11:7)

Q.2 What if he is allowed to, does the Devil do to our relationship with our own bodies and those around us? How strong is the Devil? What lesson should we learn from this?(I Peter 5:8) Does following the Devil make anyone happy?(John 8:44) How did Jesus react when the man ran towards Him? Does this explain why we are often not much help to people like this? Why was Jesus not afraid of him? How does verse 6 show us that the man really wanted to change? How do verses 7-13 illustrate I John 4:4?

Q.3 Why did Jesus allow the demons to enter the pigs? If there had been sheep around would He have let them go there instead? How did He solve two problems in one? The Devil's titles Abaddon and Apollyon in Revelation 9;11 mean 'destroyer'. How does this story illustrate his objective with all who are in his power?

Q.4 When the people from the city came out to check what had happened they found good news and bad news - what was it? What was their response to each? Which mattered most to them - pigs or people? Why? How can we react in the same way today? When people entreated Jesus to go away, what did He do? If people tell us they do not want to hear the gospel, what should we do?(Matthew 7:6; 10:14; Acts 13:46) How did the man who had been demon possessed react differently to Jesus? Why? What did he want to do? What instead did the Lord instruct him to do? Where in other words was he to be a missionary first? What was his message to be? How are we to be missionaries to our families first?

5:21-24

Q.5 Jesus returned now to Jewish territory. Someone else fell at His feet and entreated Him. How was this man about as opposite as you could imagine to the last one? What was so remarkable about the fact that this man came to Jesus at all? What brought him? What was Jesus' immediate response? Why did He allow Himself to be interrupted by something that was not apparently nearly as urgent? What can we learn from this about letting Jesus plan our day?

5:25-34

Q.6 Long term bleeding would produce severe anaemia with symptoms of tiredness, breathlessness and possibly swollen feet. Assuming the cause was gynaecological, what was likely to have been the effect on her marriage and child bearing?(Leviticus 15:19-27) What would normally have been the result of her touching Jesus? Why then did He allow it? What had been the effect of her condition on her financial state? Altogether how do you suppose she felt about God, life, herself and doctors? Why then was her need urgent? For what did Jesus commend her? How can we also respond every time we feel unclean? What did He say would be the result of her touch of faith? She told Him all about her condition and how she felt about it. What important lesson is there for us in her example?

5:35-43

Q.7 Jesus delay for the woman who had been sick for 12 years allowed the situation with Jairus' daughter to deteriorate from serious to impossible. Why do you think Jesus allowed this to happen? What did Jesus now call on the father to do? What choice did He give him? What would now need to be the basis of his faith in Jesus? How does the Lord sometimes allow this kind of thing to happen in our lives? Why does He do it?

Q.8 Twice Jesus cut down the number of people who would witness the girl coming to life. Why did he do it? Didn't He want as many people as possible to see the miracle and advertise for Him? What glimpse do verses 38 and 40 give us into the sincerity or otherwise of the crowd of mourners? How should we handle what we sense is insincerity in some who sympathise with us in such times?

Q.9 Jesus put life back into a dead child. How does this picture what He does when we become Christians?(I John 5:12) What did she immediately do which we too should do when we come alive in Jesus?(II Corinthians 5:7) What did Jesus command should be given her which we also need soon after we are born again? (Matthew 4:4) Why did Jesus tell the parents that no-one should know about what had happened? How could they keep it a secret? Does He ever tell us to keep secret what He has done in our lives?(Matthew 6:4,6)