

## FOCUS ON JESUS

- A. Introduction: When Jesus was on earth He used parables to explain certain aspects of what life would be like after He went to the Cross, raised from the dead, and then returned to Heaven. Mark 4:14-20
1. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus explained that as His followers go out to preach the Word of God, it will produce varying results depending on the responses of the hearers.
    - a. Jesus spoke of those who hear, but don't understand, the Word of God and Satan immediately comes to steal it (v15). He mentioned those who are emotionally stirred by what they hear and believe for a time, but when persecution, affliction, or tribulation arises, they fall away (v16,17). Then Jesus talked about those who allow the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and lust for other things choke the Word of God (v18,19).
      1. There are many lessons for other days in Jesus' parable, but consider one point. There are constant challenges to God's Word which can affect our faith, trust, confidence in Him, as well as affect our behavior. We must be mindful of this threat and know how to deal with it.
      2. These challenges include circumstances, thoughts, and emotions that make it look and feel as if what God says is not so.
        - A. Because we live in a sin damaged world that is presided over by an adversary (the devil) and populated with people under his sway, life can be very challenging—even if you're doing everything right.
        - B. The difficulties of life in a fallen world can move us from the Word of God, move us from a place of trust and confidence in God to a place of worry, fear, and doubt.
    - b. I Cor 15:58--Christians are admonished to be unmoved by life's challenges. So, we're taking some time to talk about how to reach the place where we are not moved by life's hardships.
  2. Paul is an example of a man who was unmoved by life's challenges. In the face of impending imprisonment, suffering, and possible death, he said: None of these things move me. Acts 20:22-24
    - a. In his writings New Testament writings, he instructed Christians to keep their focus on Jesus so that they would not be moved by life's trials.
      1. Paul exhorted believers who were experiencing increasing persecution to run with endurance the race set before us, "Looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith (Heb 12:1,2, Amp).
      2. We keep our focus on Jesus, the Living Word, through the written Word, the Bible. This means, among other things, that we get our perception of reality from the Bible, we learn to recognize distractions that take our attention off of what God says, and we deal with the distractions accordingly.
    - b. In Heb 12:3 Paul told Christians who were under pressure to move away from Jesus to consider Him so that they would not grow weary in their minds.
      1. There's an entire lesson in that statement, but consider this one thought: Becoming unmovable is directly related to what you do with your mind, where you focus your attention, how you see reality. Looking at Jesus will give you a faith (persuasion or confidence) that will hold you steady in the face of life's challenges.
      2. II Cor 4:17,18--Paul was a master at this. He was able to call the many difficulties he faces "momentary and light" because he looked (mentally considered) not at what he could see but at what he couldn't see.
      3. He knew that everything he saw was temporary and subject to change by the power of God. And he knew that the race he was running would take him to the unchanging realities of God and His kingdom. So it was worth it to endure and hold his ground.
  3. In this lesson we're going to further consider the importance of learning how to look at your circumstances in terms of what God says and how to control your mind in order to become unmovable

in the face of life's battles. It's not what you see. It's how you see it.

- B. Back to Paul and his epistle to the Hebrews. In Heb 13:5 he told his readers to be content with such things as they have for God said that He will never leave or forsake us (the idea in the Greek is: never, ever, ever).
1. We hear the word "content" as: be happy with your cheap shirt from Walmart rather than longing for an expensive one from Neiman-Marcus. But this passage has nothing to do with monetary issues or provision in that sense.
    - a. The word content in v5 means to be sufficient, to be possessed of sufficient strength, to be strong, to be enough. It's not an emotion. It's a view of reality.
      1. To be content means to recognize that you have what you need to deal with whatever comes your way because God is with you.
      2. It's another way of saying: Nothing can come against you that's bigger than God. Therefore (in the context of this letter) don't be moved by anything that comes your way.
    - b. In v5 Paul quoted a statement the Lord made in Deut 31:6,8. God told Israel, when they were at the border of Canaan preparing to cross over, that He would not abandon them when they encountered the many obstacles ahead. He would bring them safely into the land.
      1. Notice the connection between Heb 13:5 and Heb 13:6. In v5 Paul wrote that God has said some things so that we may confidently (boldly) says some things. Notice that what we say is not a direct, word for word quote of what God says. It is "in our own words" so to speak.
      2. What's the point? God's Word has been internalized by the one doing the speaking and has affected his view of reality to the point where he can boldly proclaim: God is my helper (my sufficiency, my all-in-all), therefore I don't have to fear what men may do to me. Remember, Paul is writing to Christians who were being increasingly persecuted for their faith.
    - d. How did Deut 31:6,8 go from being a religious cliché people quote in church when they feel good to a perception of reality that makes them unafraid in the face of persecution and possible death?
      1. It happens by considering Jesus, the Living Word, through the written Word. Paul knew that the people he wrote to were familiar with what happened when Israel entered Canaan. The Lord helped His people settle the land and achieve victory over the obstacles they faced.
      2. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). When we read Joshua 5:13-15 we find that it was Jesus (before He took on flesh, Pre-Incarnate Jesus) who met with Joshua and gave him battle plans for taking the first city they encountered (Jericho). (Lessons for another day.)
      3. The point is: Paul was encouraging his readers to look at Jesus and draw courage from the written record of His past help to His people and His promise of present help for His people.
  2. Not only does the Bible show us how God helps His people, it shows us how Jesus lived when He was on this earth. Two thousand years ago Jesus took on a full human nature in the womb of Mary and was born into this world. He was and is God become man without ceasing to be God.
    - a. We could do entire lessons on this, but consider one point. While on earth Jesus did not live as God. He lived as a man in dependence on God His Father. By doing so, He became the standard of behavior for sons and daughters of God. I John 2:6; etc.
    - b. Mark 4:35-40 records an incident from Jesus' life. While Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, a great wind storm arose. The ship was covered with waves (Matt 8:24) and the boat was filling with water (Luke 8:23). They were in great danger.
      1. v37--Notice that there were two very different responses or reactions to the storm. The disciples were terrified. They were professional fisherman who lived on the shores of the sea. They had experience with weather conditions in the area. What they could see and what they felt based on what they saw made them afraid. No doubt they had seen other fisherman killed by this type of storm. But Jesus was asleep in the ship.
      2. Jesus' view of reality (in His humanity) was that nothing could come against Him that was

bigger than God His Father. Jesus knew that His Father stills the stormy seas and He knew He was authorized to act in His Father's name by His power. Ps 107:29; Ps 89:9; Ps 65:7; John 14:9,10; 5:19; etc.

c. By this point in time, Jesus' disciples have seen Him do some marvelous things and have been assured of God's care for them.

1. Here's a partial list (because not everything Jesus did is recorded, John 20:30) in the New Testament.

A. The disciples have seen numerous people healed, demoniacs set free from devils, and a dead man restored to life. They saw Jesus turn water into wine at a marriage celebration.

B. Jesus has preached the Sermon on the Mount where, among other things, He taught His followers that they could approach God as their Father and look to Him to meet their needs just as He does for the birds and flowers.

C. And, Jesus had just finished relating the parable of the sower sowing the Word where He explained that things will arise to challenge and distract you from God's Word.

2. Yet, in the moment, all they had seen Jesus do and heard Him teach went out the window. Notice the first words out of their mouth: v38--Don't you care that we're going to die?

3. v39,40--Jesus helped them, but made it clear that He expected them to trust Him, to have faith and confidence in Him. Luke 8:25 (Amp)--Where is your faith? Where is you faith—your trust, your confidence in Me, [in my veracity and My integrity]? (Amp)

3. There's a lot in this incident we could talk about, but consider one thought. All Jesus expected from the disciples was that they believe His Words and His works. That's what God wants from us now.

Our part in any interaction with God is to believe what He says about Himself and His works.

a. We get constant input from our senses (what we see and hear). This information stimulates our emotions. We then process what we see and feel based on our perception of reality.

1. We have to work to counteract these processes. Our view of reality has to change. What God says has to have the greater reality for us.

2. That doesn't happen automatically. We have to spend time with Jesus through reading the written Word. The Living Word is revealed through the written Word.

b. The Bible is a supernatural book that will change our view of reality and bring us to the point where we truly believe that nothing can come against us that is bigger than God. And, therefore, we are no longer moved by the circumstances of life. We know that God will get us through.

C. Consider an interesting incident about focusing on Jesus that is recorded in Luke 10:38-42. Jesus was teaching in the home of his friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary.

1. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were sisters and brother. They lived together in Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. John 11:1-32; 12:1,2

a. v38--Martha is presumed to have been a widow, and the head of the household, since it is said that she received Jesus into her house. It is equally plausible that these were two unmarried sisters ran the household for their brother.

b. v39--Mary sat at Jesus' feet, listening to Him teach. This was the custom for Jewish scholars to literally sit at the feet of rabbis as they taught. For example, Acts 22:3 says that Paul was brought up (or educated) at the feet of Gamaliel. "Sat" means to sit down near or besides. One translation says: Mary settled down at the feet of Jesus (Phillips). Another says she stayed there (NEB).

2. v40--Martha, on the other hand, was up serving the people in attendance. The account says she was cumbered about much serving. Cumbered means to be drawn off, drawn away in the sense of being over occupied about a thing; to drag all around.

a. Here are several translations: Distracted will all her preparations (NASB); by her many tasks (NEB); worried about all she had to do for them (Beck); was so busy attending to them that she grew worried (Moffatt).

b. Martha was serving the people, but she was obviously emotionally stirred up because she had so much to do and no one to help her. She appealed to Jesus, asking Him to tell Mary to help her. We have to presume that she fully expected Jesus to side with her in this issue. Note Jesus' assessment and comments about the situation. v41--Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things.

1. Careful means to be anxious about something. The root word means to part or divide through distraction. In other words, her attention is divided and she is distracted and troubled or disturbed.

2. This word (or a form of it) is used in a number of places (Matt 6:25,27,28,31,34; Matt 10:19; Luke 12:11,22,25,26; Luke 10:41; Phil 4:6). *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Greek*

*Words* says it means to have a distracting care—not necessarily a wicked or evil care. It just takes your focus off of the Lord.

3. v42--Jesus says of Mary that she has chosen that good part which will not be taken from her.

3. Let's analyze this. What's going on? Why is this incident included in the Bible?

a. Needful means a need, a necessity. Mary chose or selected "the most important things" (Phillips).

Mary chose to focus on Jesus and His Word and look away from serving duties. She chose what cannot be taken from her. The things which are seen are temporary but she chose to focus on the unseen through Jesus' words. Matt 4:4; Job 23:23

1. Serving duties are not wrong, but they can be a distraction. Remember, Jesus said the cares of this world can choke the Word of God and make it unfruitful. Mark 4:19

2. Jesus said that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will be taken care of. Matt 6:33

b. It's so easy to get caught up in the activities of life which, by their very nature, can turn our attention away from God. What we see and feel becomes bigger to us than God and what He says, producing emotions in us that cause us to doubt God's care and concern for us.

D. Conclusion: We haven't said all there is to say about this. But consider one thought as we close. Mary chose to focus her attention on Jesus for that period of time.

1. She may have had to resist thoughts about how that, if she were really a good person, she would help her sister. She may have heard a few whispers from people about what a bad sister she was for not helping her sister.

2. Obviously, this incident is not recorded in the Bible to give us an excuse to neglect our duties or not help people. The point is to show that we need to do what ever we need to do to keep our attention focused on Jesus so we won't be moved by life's trials. Lots more next week!