

## *“He Was Speaking the Word to Them, So Far As They Were Able to Hear It”*

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*With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.*

Read Mark 4:33, 34

Verses 33 and 34 are Mark’s editorial on the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ. They form a fitting conclusion to the parables found in verses one and following. There are two questions confronting us in these two verses. Was what Jesus taught understandable by His immediate audience? And secondly, why did Jesus not explain everything to everyone rather than only to His disciples?

First, it must be understood how He taught with plainness and simplicity (v. 33). He did not preach what he could not illustrate; and when he was finished, the people who heard him understood what he had said. “Our Lord spoke in parables, adjusting His discourse to their capacity to understand. The implication is clear that parables were employed to make truth plain.”<sup>1</sup> They understood what He said in a context. The circumstances of the moment lent itself to interpreting the story. What might appear confusing to us was possibly apparent to His immediate audience. The larger idea presented by our Lord was clear. What He wanted them to understand could be understood.

Let us make no mistake here. There is a distinction drawn in our text between the group found in verse 33 and that of verse 34. The group found in verse 33 is the teeming masses that crowded around our Lord forcing Him to teach from a boat while the unruly gathering swirled around Him. By direct application, if your only interaction with our community of faith is Sunday morning, then you are a part of the larger audience to whom Jesus is teaching in verse 33.

Verse 34 makes it clear that there was more to His teaching than what was openly or publicly taught. Not everything He wanted to communicate or make known was done in the public arena.

However, there is a second aspect to our Lord’s methodology. It must be understood how He taught with intensity and design (v. 34). In addition to the larger group whom He addressed publicly, there was another group that showed themselves open and responsive to further instruction. I believe Mark’s comments are designed to show us the distinction between the two groups. New Testament scholar D. Edmond Hiebert confirms this idea with the following comment, “‘But privately to his own disciples’ – in contrast to ‘those without.’”<sup>2</sup> There was more to His instruction than what they heard publicly. I am immediately led to think of Matthew 28:18 and the call to disciple the nations and 2 Timothy 2:2 where we are called to take some further than the general listening population.

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2)

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 1:95.

<sup>2</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*, 112.

*Continued on the other side...*

In light of my current ministry I would like to take the time to share my perspective of the Sunday Morning Preaching hour (+15 minutes). First, I believe the Word of God properly handled has inherent power and is effectual. This means that if we did nothing but stand up and hear the reading of God's Word, God could change our lives for good. Second, I believe my primary responsibility is to explain the text in its historical context. Third, I believe a secondary responsibility is to provide and guide the audience with areas of application. Fourth, I believe the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and makes certain and necessary application in the people of God. Fifth, because of the limitations placed on us by our depravity to understand, our physical ability to listen, and necessary time restraints, I do not believe I can say all that needs to be said on a Sunday morning in a 35 minute time slot. This is why I provide the fuller study in the foyer before the service. You can take the study and go "deeper" into the text if you so choose. Sixth, because I do not believe everything that needs to be said can be said or endured in any 35 minute slot, we have provided ABF response groups, GLORIA, and various men's and women's Bible studies. Seventh, there is constant interaction by the elders with individuals on a personal, individual level for the purpose of soul care. Here is where the most intimate and delicate application is made to the audience. Eighth, because of my involvement with the flock on a personal, intimate level, I am careful as to how far I take certain applications. No one with whom I counsel and from whom I have received personal information wants to become a part of my application or illustration. For me to use any private situation as a public illustration is a breach of pastoral ethics and professional confidence. In light of this, my application is principle driven and broad. Although I believe my application is pointed enough to address specific issues within any given individual, they are broad enough to represent our fallen state at large. Ninth, I am constantly growing pastorally in my ability to handle the Word of God in a public arena. I am a teacher; this is my gifting, and I do not apologize for it. But this does not mean or assume I have attained any degree of perfection. I am persistently looking to see how I can better communicate the Word in a manner that is understandable by the congregation. I want to believe there is a unique relationship between the teaching, elder shepherd and the sheep identified in a community of faith.

With all of this said, let me propose the following thought: If you only attend on Sunday morning, then I would encourage you to consider attending some of our various other studies. I would encourage the men to lead their families by attending the ABF response groups, by attending GLORIA, by attending a men's study, by attending a Saturday morning study. Women also have many of these same options available to them. Rare and perhaps unhealthy is the person who can attend everything, but it is equally unhealthy to only attend Sunday morning. If Sunday morning is your only option, then praise Him. But if you have other options in addition to Sunday morning and you can, but do not avail yourself of them, you should consider strongly how you might start going to the next level.

May God continue to grow us in our understanding of who He is, what He is doing, and who we are in Him. May we never tire of seeing His working in His people.