

VOC – August 2015: In the gospel according to Mark we also address this question:

2. How does Jesus work?

Dear Listeners,

Last week we made a start with our journey through *Mark's account* of the gospel. We saw how Mark introduced the *Lord Jesus Christ* in a wonderful way: He is the fulfilment of the OT promises and prophecies, as we learned from Isaiah and Malachi. He is God appearing in the flesh of a true man, as His messenger *John the Baptist* presented Him and *God* pronounced Him to be. Jesus is great and John made himself very small and insignificant as a slave. When John baptized Jesus, *God Himself* confirmed that He was His Son whom He loved and in whom He was very pleased! After this public introduction the Holy Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert where He was *tempted by Satan*. Mark records this so as to show that the work Jesus was going to do wasn't just some interaction with the people around Him but He was engaged in a battle with *Satan*, the devil who had seduced man and brought all the sin and misery into this world!

Today, dear listeners, we want to see *how Jesus started His work* and proceeded in it. When He started out He announced by His performance that the *kingdom of God* was coming into the world. Hence He called people to *faith* and *repentance*! A new time is coming, He said, and the plans and promises of God with this world will be fulfilled. People had to *respond* to that message! Jesus also gathered a *core group* around Him of *disciples*, twelve followers whom He recruited for a special place and task in this kingdom of God. Mark, then, tells of Jesus' preaching in the synagogue, and shows that the people were very *impressed* with His teaching and preaching. Jesus confirmed this by *healing* a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Jesus cast out this spirit, and the people were *impressed* even more. They brought many sick and demon possessed to Him, and He *healed* them all!

Then Mark tells us in chapter 2 that some *resistance* arose against Jesus' work. He *forgave* a paralytic his *sins* and healed him. The leaders were shocked, and said: "He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The scribes and Pharisees were upset even more when they see Him eating with sinners and crooks; they disagree with Him on the practice of fasting; and they become even angrier when Jesus heals a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath! Then these *leaders* left Him and consulted with the others to *plot this Jesus's end*! Others too started to wonder what's wrong with this man. Even His family members became seriously concerned and think that He's lost His mind! The leaders who had come all the way from Jerusalem as well alleged that He was *possessed by the devil*! The Lord Jesus, however, knew what spirit was behind this resistance and opposition! He discerned that His work was splitting His followers into two camps: those who *believed* in Him and those that *rejected* Him!

Then He tells the people a parable to explain and highlight what's happening, why there are these *different reactions*! We find that parable in Mark 4: the parable about the *Sower*. Eve-

ryone knew what He meant when He spoke about a *Sower* sowing seed. All around them there was this farming community in which sowing seed was a common practice. Well, Jesus explains, like the sower *I sow the Word*, the message about the coming of the kingdom of God! Then the crucial question is: how does this Word *land* with the people? Does it fall in the *good soil* of the heart or not? Some seed, He says, falls on *rock-hard ground* and on the paths, so that the seed is wasted: that's how it lands with the leaders! Other seed falls among the *thorns and thistles*: that's the way His Word is received by the people who were impressed by His miracles but couldn't care much about His Word. Then there were others, such as His disciples, who were the people *accepting* the Word, receiving it in *good soil*, so that it could grow and bear fruits! That's what the Lord Jesus was looking for: *fertile soil*!

Central to Jesus' work, dear listeners, is the matter of "*listening!*" How do people listen? Are they *willing* to listen, interested in listening? That's still the main issue when the Word is preached in the church! It also is very important for *you* who are listening to the "Voice of the Church" via the radio! How are you listening? Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Now, as you know, people listen selectively; they hear what they want to hear and they close their ears to what they don't want to hear! There are people who are so wrapped up in worries and anxieties, in sorrow and grief, or with plans and pleasures for fun, that they can't listen at the same time! Then the Word doesn't land in good soil! Yes, when you *don't* listen that's not something neutral; it's *rejection*, turning God's Word away, and hardening your heart against Him!

There is only *one good response* to the hearing of the Word of God, dear listener, and that is *fertile soil*; a heart that listens, heeding His call! Even when it means that you will have to change, your listening will *show* in this change, it will show! Yet, Jesus' call, Jesus' appeal is seeking *your well-being, your life and salvation*, as He proclaims the good news of the kingdom of God! It's the *only* way of salvation and the way to a new creation. That's why Jesus' interaction with His hearers was so sharp, so passionate, and so powerful! All His works and words showed His *divine power*; just keep reading in Mark's account and you'll see His power over the sea and the storm, over the evil spirits, and over the word of His disciples! Indeed, by His *Word* the world was *created* and by His *Word* the world, the people, are *re-created*! The question today, therefore, is very pertinent: *how* have you listened? What is *your* response to the Word and work of Jesus? Does this Word fall in good soil or on a rocky path or among thistles! The *fruits* will tell you whether you are a follower of Jesus, a disciple of Christ, or not! I pray that you may have listened with an open heart and an eager spirit and show much fruit!

Thank you for listening!