**The Gospel of Mark: A Disciple’s Mirror**

***Reflections on Following Jesus --***From A Handbook on Cross-Bearing

**Mark 4:1-34**

***Victory in Jesus. . .*** Or, A Battle Plan for Righteousness

**What’s (happening in) the story?** Jesus explains how He wins.

If Mark 3 was about recruiting Gospel soldiers, chapter four is their battle plan. Jesus is letting us in on just how His Kingdom progresses, and that comes with both encouragement and warning. On the one hand, nothing will stop God’s Kingdom plan, and on the other hand, that plan is a slow-developing, truth-centered, growth-ensuring, people-oriented, opposition-guaranteeing battle with both dullness and evil.

**What’s the challenge in the story?** Are my spiritual ears open?

God’s Kingdom is rolling out “in real time” as a process, but registers as an event every time God’s truth encounters a person. What do we do when confronted with the reality of God’s Kingdom (His right to rule as head of Creation)? Am I truly listening?

**What are the key elements in the story?**

Jesus wants us to grasp why and how His Kingdom grows and is opposed, lest we enter the conflict with naivete or blind passion. He describes the battle as the interaction of people with His word:

1. Jesus’ first and foremost command is a clear call for all peoples to open themselves to His authoritative

 word. vv. 1-9

“Listen. . . He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

2. The hard-hearted misread Him, dying in doubt, distress or distraction, but His own embrace His word and find life. vv. 10-20

“To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God. . .”

3. The Word is clear, not hidden, and God honors and nurtures even the weakest faith in it; but hard-hearted rejecters will lose all. vv. 21-25 “To the one who has, more will be given.”

4. Don’t be discouraged if you fail to see growth of God’s Kingdom, for it will be victorious in due time. And while the Kingdom starts small, its growth and maturity are inevitable and will be seen by all. vv. 26-32 “Seed. . .”

5. And don’t despair if you misunderstand! Jesus teaches us according to our capacity to comprehend. vv. 33, 34

“As they were able to bear. . . explained everything.”

**What’s the big idea (main point) of the story?**

While the Gospel is a riddle to unbelievers, who reject it, believers find abundant life as disciples of Jesus, who encourages them and patiently teaches them their role in His ever-expanding Kingdom.

***So, let’s take a look at ourselves in Mark’s mirror. . .***

* What kind of hearer am I? Doubtful, distressed, distracted, fruitful?

 Am I a true follower of Jesus, God’s Son? James 1:19-25

* Am I paying attention? Am I “leaning into” Jesus’ teaching?

 Will I increase my “measure” of attention? Luke 10:38-42

* Do I understand that God’s Kingdom is triumphant, and growing, even when its progress seems slow or

 hidden? 2 Peter 3:8-13

* Do I truly believe Jesus honors and grows even the smallest faith? What am I “able to bear”? Isaiah

 40:9-11; 42:1-4