

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 4

Galilee: "The Purpose of Parables" Mark 3:7-4:34

Commentary: *It's all Greek to me....*

I remember watching the Charlie Brown TV specials – “A Charlie Brown Christmas” is still my favourite; followed by “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown,” and “A Boy Named Charlie Brown” – and laughing at the scenes when the ‘gang’ was in school, or dealing with adults; and the voices of the adults sounded like muffled “*Mhwah, mhwah, mhwah*” nonsense. It was as though the children and the adults were speaking different languages!

Later, on my various travels, when I was off the beaten track or on the local public transportation, and surrounded by a swarm of people all speaking Hindi, Nepalese, Chinese, Arabic, Hebrew, French – literally, speaking different languages – I realized that I might as well be hearing that “*Mhwah, mhwah, mhwah,*” because none of it was making sense to me.

Jesus came to “be-with” us – to enter into human form – in order to reveal to us the “good news” that the kingdom of God was coming. What this meant was He became incarnated into our flesh and bone so He could walk, talk, and live as one-of us in order to show us, through His actions and teaching what that kingdom was like – and what would be required of us to gain access to it. Why then, did He say that He used parables “*in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand*”? Why would Jesus keep this life-saving message from many of those clamouring to follow Him? Why did He choose to have His teaching sound like “*Mhwah, mhwah, mhwah*”?

So, What is the Purpose of the Parables?

The simple answer is that Jesus used parables to get a reaction: by saying at the end of His first teaching parable, “*Let anyone with ears to hear listen!*” Jesus is challenging His listeners to make a choice. What’s clear is He is not going to make it either an easy choice – or go easy on those making the choice.

Parables were/are short metaphorical, moral-based, example ‘stories’ – often rooted in commonly known or understood experiences; but used to teach something else. But Jesus’ first use of parables – and the parable’s imagery – was so unexpected that immediately His disciples ask Him point-blank; “*Why do you speak to the people in parables?*” Even they only heard “*Mhwah, mhwah, mhwah*”! Jesus’ answer is both surprising and revealing.

Mark has Jesus quoting directly from [Isaiah 6:8-13](#) He explains that His intent is to be ambiguous – at least to those people who were only band-wagon followers. The passage Jesus used depicts Isaiah’s vision of God’s command to warn Israel of the coming judgement, even though many have already hardened their hearts/minds against God. What God is saying is He knows that many will only hear “*Mhwah, mhwah, mhwah*” – a message that’s “*all Greek to them*” – but those who don’t will hear a powerful message of hope: Jesus is using God’s

promise of the coming king (Him) who will redeem and save God’s People.

Just as Jesus appointed only 12 out of many – and chose those who had chosen Him as His family – Jesus had little time for those who wouldn’t accept His message. He knew His parables would confound them. But He also knew that those who heard His message of “Good News” would give everything up in response. What will yours be?

“Greek to me” (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_to_me)

Latin: *Graecum est; non legitur* (“it is Greek, [therefore] it cannot be read”)

“That’s Greek to me,” or “it’s (all) Greek to me” is an idiom in English referring to something that is difficult to understand. Although to some it may seem an insult, the metaphor simply refers to the Greek language as typifying foreign communication, written or spoken, and may be a dead metaphor, one that has lost its original understood meaning. This phrase was increasingly used by monk scribes in the Middle Ages, as knowledge of the Greek alphabet and language was dwindling among those who were copying manuscripts in monastic libraries. Recorded usage of the metaphor in English traces back to the early modern period. It appears in 1599, in Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*:

CASSIUS: *Did Cicero say any thing?*

CASCA: *Ay, he spoke Greek.*

CASSIUS: *To what effect?*

CASCA: *Nay, an I tell you that, I’ll ne’er look you i’ the face again: but those that understood him smiled at one another and shook their heads; but, for mine own part, it was Greek to me. (Julius Caesar: Act I, Scene II; lines 286-292)*