



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Week 12: Listen

What are parables that we find in Jesus' teaching?

- I. Parables use everyday things and people to teach everlasting truths and concepts
- II. Parables usually speak to ethical or behavioural issues
- III. Parables tell us about God's nature
- IV. Parables have one main point

In the parables found in Mark's Gospel, Jesus taught about those who would make it into the kingdom and those who would be excluded. The parables were mysterious and multi-faceted and required deep thought and repentance in order to be understood in the way he intended.

1. Jesus' Parables Pull The Curious Closer And Push The Resistant Further Away

- Read Mark 4:1-12

In the first parable, Jesus quoted Isaiah 6, where God was explaining to Isaiah that the people he was being called to minister to were already too hard-hearted to turn and repent. Isaiah's job was still to warn these Israelites of God's discipline if they continued to live in such a way. Jesus quoted this text because his ministry to Israel was in some ways the fulfilment of Isaiah's ministry. Through teaching in parables he was calling those with soft hearts to life-changing transformation, and at the same time pushing those with hard hearts, like in the days of Isaiah, even further away. Jesus called those who had ears to hear his message, to really tune in, to pay attention and to heed his message. He asks the same of us.

- ❖ Q: Why is it important for us to know how to interpret parables correctly?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think Jesus didn't just teach his message about the Kingdom clearly instead of using parables as a teaching method, which took work and a soft heart in order to understand?

2. Some Soil Repels

- Read Mark 4:13-15

Jesus wanted his listeners to identify which kind of hearts they had by comparing their hearts to four kinds of soil. The first kind of heart refuses to respond to the word. For some, this means rejecting the gospel outright, but for those who are saved it is the refusal of the heart to respond and change. We can tell if we are resistant by how we justify our behaviour, and try and rationalize around what the word is calling us to do and the changes it is calling us to make. We just won't do it because we have resistant hearts to the word of God.

- ❖ Q: Do you sit in church each week and critique the message? Do you listen to a whole message thinking how it applies to someone you know who needs to change or do you have an open heart that is soft to the word and convicted, which brings about repentance?
- ❖ Q: Are there certain areas of the word that you are resistant to? Do you find yourself not able to accept certain things that Jesus says because you don't like it or don't understand it?
- ❖ Q: What do you think the difference is between someone who has a resistant heart and someone who just doesn't understand the word?
- ❖ Q: If someone here has a resistant heart, but does actually want to change, what do you think they should do? Do you think this is something the Gospel Community can assist in?

3. Some Soil Receives, But Doesn't Root For Growth

- Read Mark 4:16-17 & 1 Peter 2:21

The heart usually goes in one of two ways in times of suffering. It should soften us and make us rely heavily on Jesus who is the one who can bring healing balm to our pain. But for many of us, because of the condition of our hearts, we become hard-hearted and resist God's word. This is most often because our suffering does not fit into our small picture of a loving and good God. So when things don't make sense, we shut God out and will not let his word speak to us. At these times we forget so easily that our call to follow Christ is not a call to a life of comfort: health, wealth and prosperity, but it is rather a call to follow him in his sufferings, knowing that he will not abandon us in them.

- ❖ Q: Have you ever been through a process of suffering and closed your heart towards God? What changed to soften you again?





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4. Some Soil Receives, Grows, But Doesn't Get Weeded

- Read Mark 4:18-19

It is very easy to allow the desire for a good standard of living, as well as the general busyness and routines of life, to take priority in our hearts while letting the word of God and the works of God slip right out of our lives. Many of us sit in our church gatherings week in and week out finding the messages inspiring or convicting, but by the next day in the business of life we have already forgotten what it was we were so convicted of. If we fall into this category, Jesus asks us to reassess our priorities and make some course corrections.

- ❖ Q: Why is it so easy to let the word of God slip out of our lives?
- ❖ Q: Let's be honest and accountable with each other here: roughly, how much time (if at all) over the past few months have you purposefully set aside time and energy in order to read the word of God and to pray?
- ❖ Q: Does our lack of time and effort to be in God's word reveal a lack of desire for him, or does it reveal priorities that need reordering?
- ❖ Q: How well are we able to live this life without God's word nourishing us? (See Matthew 4:4)

5. Some Soil Receives, Grows, Protects AND Reproduces

- Read Mark 4:20

We all want to have hearts like this. But hearts like this don't just happen, it takes work. Holiness isn't something we one day wake up to. We make plans for every other area of our lives and we need plans for growing in faithfulness to the work of God's word in our lives. If we have soft hearts that want to grow, we need to be proactive about it.

- ❖ Q: Why does spiritual growth not just happen without any effort on our part?
- ❖ Q: What are some things that have helped to grow you spiritually in the past?
- ❖ Q: What are you going to put in place to that this message brings fruit into your life?

