

Hearing Jesus' Words

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[0 : 00] Christianity Explored study which will be happening in the new year which is going to be looking at Mark's Gospel after. Mark 4 verse 1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake.

The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake. While all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.

He taught them many things by parables and in his teaching said, Listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root.

Other seeds fell among the thorns which grew up and choked the plants so that they did not bear grain. Still other seeds fell on good soil.

[1 : 06] It came up, grew and produced a crop multiplying 30, 60 or even 100 times. Then Jesus said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. When he was alone, the twelve and others around him asked him about the parables.

He told them, The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But those on the outside, everything is said in parables. Then Jesus said to them, Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seeds among the path where the word is sown.

As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like the seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy.

But since they have no root, they only last a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

[2 : 24] Still others, like seeds sown among thorns, hear the word. But the worries of this life, the seedfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Others, like the seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accepting it, and produce a crop thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown. Verse 21.

He said to them, Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it onto a stand. For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Consider carefully what you hear, he continued. With the measure you use it, it will be measured to you. And even more. Whoever has will be given more. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. He also said, This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

[3 : 30] All by itself does the soil produce of corn. First the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come. Again he said to them, What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?

Or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.

With many similar parables, Jesus spoke the word to them as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Thank you. Well, let's have our Bibles open.

Take notes if you wish. Please talk afterwards if you have any questions. Let's pray together as we hear God's word.

[4 : 51] Father, we come to your word. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging the thoughts and attitudes of our heart.

Father, we come to your word. Father, we come to your word. And we ask that it would speak into our lives. Speak to the very core of our being.

Showing us who we are. Telling us what you are like. And helping us to see the kind of response that we should have.

Amen. Amen. Amen. We pray for your Holy Spirit in all of this. For it is his power, working through your word, that brings life to us.

And changes us. So please do your work amongst us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[6 : 03] Amen. Listen. That's how Jesus starts his first parable in verse 3 of chapter 4.

Listen. And then look how he finishes in verse 9. Then Jesus said to them, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

And if we still haven't got the point, verse 23, if anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.

Consider carefully what you hear. But why on earth should we be listening to the words of Jesus?

Of all the other voices wanting our attention and claiming that we should listen to them, why should we hear what Jesus has to say? What makes his words any more important than, say, the likes of David Norris, Martin McGinnis, or Dana, or any other of the presidential candidates?

[7 : 23] Why should we listen to Jesus? Why are we even here on a Sunday morning with our Bibles open? Why aren't we just at home with the telly on or listening to the radio or talking to other people?

Are their words not just as important? Why is Jesus saying, listen? Well, let me try and explain.

Mark's Gospel, as we've been looking at together over these weeks, introduces us to a world of disorder and a world of darkness. The first, or the opening scenes of Mark's Gospel, show us that it is a world that is full of sickness and disease.

The people are broken and they're hurt. The weak and the poor are marginalised and ostracised. They're pushed out of society.

There's a disorder to life and to the world. But not only that, there's something sinister as well. Evil spirits are also active.

[8 : 35] People are possessed by demons. There is a darkness all around. And it's into this world of disorder and darkness that Jesus comes.

We're introduced to him in this way. But rather than run away from this world, Jesus enters into it. He deliberately goes out of his way to come into contact with this disorder and darkness.

And he begins to meet these people. And he begins to talk to these people. He speaks into the darkness.

Look back at chapter 1, verse 25. One of the first accounts that were given here, Jesus is that it's a Sunday morning and he's got up to teach and he has his Bible open and he's speaking away.

And this evil spirit comes from nowhere and disrupts the whole proceedings. And look what Jesus says in verse 25 of chapter 1. Be quiet, said Jesus sternly.

[9 : 46] Come out of him. The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. With a simple word, he speaks into the darkness.

It obeys him and the darkness is dispelled. Later we see that Jesus also speaks into the disorder.

He meets a man with leprosy. A man with leprosy would have been pushed out to the outside, ostracised. And he comes to Jesus and he says, verse 41, Jesus says, Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and he touched the man.

I am willing, he said, be clean. Immediately, the leprosy left him and he was cured. And as we read on, he gets back into society.

With a simple word, Jesus speaks into the disorder and it obeys and order is returned to this man's life. Jesus is being introduced to us in these early chapters as God's King who has supreme power and ultimate authority.

[11 : 11] And the way that power and authority is being expressed is through his simple words as he begins to talk to people. Just like we're talking now.

Words like that spoken into people's lives and everything has changed. So when we get back to Mark 4, when Jesus says, Listen, if you have ears to hear, now is a good time to start using them. This is, chapter 4 is one of the first times we get an extended look at what Jesus has to say, one of his first big teaching sessions.

And I don't think it's a mistake that his first big teaching session is to tell us about the importance of his word, the centrality of his word.

Verse 3 says, Listen, chapter 4, verse 3. Listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed. Later we're told what that means in verse 14.

[12:27] Jesus says it's the farmer who sows the word. The seed is the word. Well, what's the word? Well, the word is the message that Jesus preached and taught.

It's the gospel. It's the good news. And it summarized for us back in chapter 1, verse 15. The time has come, Jesus said. The kingdom of God is near.

The time for that restoration, for things to be put right, for lives to be put back in order. The time is now here. And the way for that to happen, he says, is to repent and to believe the good news.

This is the message. This is the word that Jesus taught. And speaking this word becomes central to Jesus' mission.

In chapter 1, verse 38, we read Jesus replied, they're all wanting Jesus for something. And he says, let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so that I can preach there also.

[13:34] that is why I've come. His teaching this word is central. In fact, the word and teaching the word becomes central to the disciples' mission.

Chapter 3, verse 14. We're told there that he appointed the twelve. He designated them apostles. That he might be with them and that he might send them out to preach this word.

Because this word has power. It changes lives. And he says, I want you to go with the same message and do that same work. And so as we read through this story of chapter 4, we discover why Jesus' word must be kept central.

Why it's so primary. Why there's such a focus on it. Look at verse 20 of chapter 4. Others like seed sown on good soil hear the word and accept the word.

He's telling us that people enter into the kingdom, people get restored and get renewed as they hear the word and accept the word.

[14:47] But not only that, look at the rest of verse 20. It says they produce a crop 30, 60 or even 100 times what was sown.

It begins to multiply. The kingdom grows significantly as this word begins to be planted and sown in people's lives in all different places.

So if we take the word out of this, well, we have an empty kingdom. Nobody can get into the kingdom without the word.

You take the word out, we've got an empty kingdom. And we've got a dead kingdom because it can't grow. You remove the gospel, you remove the good news, and we're left with nothing.

Now if the word was central to Jesus' mission, the God-man coming to the world, if this is central to him, then I think it's got to be central to us and to our church.

[15:47] And I think people can get confused here. And I just want to kind of take a little detour, a little side here, and just explain some things. We get confused about the words of Jesus and the deeds of Jesus.

In fact, some people think that, well, they achieved the same result. Some people speak about Jesus and that gets them into the kingdom. Other people kind of do good things and that gets them into the kingdom.

But that's not the way. Three things here, very simply. Word and deed are different. They are distinct. The deed primarily addresses our physical needs.

We do these one to another. While the word addresses our spiritual helplessness. It comes from outside to us. Physical deeds are done one to another.

The word comes from outside to us in our helplessness. So they're different. They're distinct. But while they're distinct, they're also inseparable. Mark has shown us all the way through the first few chapters that Jesus didn't separate them.

[16:58] So neither should we. He had compassion on people. He spent time with people. But he also spoke to the people. He reached out to touch the people.

But he also taught the people. He held them together. So it wasn't saying you can only do one and you can't do the other. No, they were held together. However, the word must remain central. Good deeds are never going to get people into the kingdom. And good deeds are never going to make his kingdom grow big. God's word is what enables the people to enter and God's word is what's going to build it.

So it's not a case of either or, but both and. We've got to keep them together. But within that, the diagram is trying to show is that the word must remain central. The gospel, the good news of Jesus. It's got to be central. And that's the whole big point, if you like, of this parable. Being word-centered recognizes that the word, the good news about Jesus is the means by which people enter and it's the way in which the kingdom is going to grow.

[18 : 11] It's the way this church is going to grow. But being word-centered also means that this is a message that has to be told. It has to be proclaimed.

It's a message of good news. It's going to be good for people's lives. It's going to change them and transform them. And the world is in desperate need and it is this message that Jesus brings into this world that's going to change things.

So the word must remain central to our lives and to our work. So that's the first thing.

And as we go through this story, this word is being spoken to a huge crowd of people who've gathered around Jesus, who's sitting on a boat on the edge of a lake, speaking to these crowds of people.

And as we read through it, it seems like there's four different ways to respond. I think we all know the story and it seems like there's four different ways. But the reality is there's only two ways to respond to the words of Jesus.

[19 : 24] Look at verse 15. Let's read these through. Some people, he said, are like seeds sown along the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes along with his temptation and he takes the word that was sown in them.

Then there's others like seeds sown on rocky places. They hear the word and they get very excited by it and they come along for a while and they're reading it for a while. But since they don't have any root, it only lasts a short time.

And when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. And then there's others where the seed is sown like among thorns and they hear the word.

And they're grabbed by it. It's something they haven't heard before. But then there's the worries of life, getting up for work and having to pay the bills and the deceitfulness of wealth and wanting a little bit more than we have and the desires for other things, wanting more and more stuff.

And it begins to replace the word and it begins to choke and it makes it unfruitful. So do you see there that these first three groups, they all hear the word but the result is exactly the same.

[20 : 53] They all end up rejecting the word. The word. Now there may be different reasons. Maybe on the one hand it's Satan and his temptation. Maybe it's troubles in life.

Maybe it's the desires of our heart. But the end result is the same. It's rejection. But the last group in verse 20, they also hear the word and they accept the word.

Others like seed sown on good soil hear the word and accept it. Now the big question through all of this is if all hear the word, this big huge crowd and we're all kind of in that crowd too now, if we're all hearing the word, why do some reject the word and some accept it?

Why is that? That's a big question, isn't it? Why are some of them going with it and some of them not going with it? Because they've all heard it. Well, I think it all depends on how well we listen.

How we hear the word is critical. And hearing Jesus well requires three things from us. Helpless, dependent, and longing.

[22 : 06] The first is helpless. Those who hear the word see their own helplessness. Look at 4 verse 10.

When he was alone, the twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. Now that's interesting, isn't it? Because they've all heard it, but nobody has understood what Jesus has first said.

He talked about a farmer sowing the seed. Hello? What was that about? Most of them have gone away stubbornly trying to figure it out for themselves.

They've heard them, but now they've all gone. A few, however, have stayed behind because they don't know what it means. And so they've come to Jesus.

And look what Jesus says to those who have come to him. Verse 11. He told them, the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you.

[23 : 08] Because you see your own helplessness and an inability for you to figure it all out, you are going to be given understanding. Understanding of the kingdom, of who Jesus is and why he's come and why we need him, in some sense, is secret.

It's a mystery. We could never really figure it out. And we're never going to really understand what it's all about unless it's revealed to us, unless somebody gives us insight into it.

Look what it says in verse 11. The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. This revelation, it's a gift from God to us.

It's not something that we can figure out by ourselves, by our own intelligence. So it demands that we come to Jesus helpless. That we don't know.

We need to put up our hands and say, I'm sorry, I don't know what that means instead of trying to pretend we do. In fact, if we don't come helpless to God's word, it has the opposite effect.

[24 : 20] Look at the rest of verse 11. But to those on the outside, those are the ones who've now drifted away. They've heard it, but they don't come back wanting to know more.

Those on the outside, everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing, but never perceiving.

Ever hearing, but never understanding. Otherwise, they might turn and be forgiven. Now those are difficult verses, aren't they?

It seems like Jesus doesn't want people to understand. It's as if he's saying, I'm going to say something so that people can't understand it.

It's almost like he's deliberately hiding the truth from them. Well, in some ways, he is. You see, God's word has this double effect.

[25 : 23] On the one hand, it opens people's minds, and then on the other hand, it closes people's minds. Everybody can hear, and to one group of people, it will open their minds.

To another group, it will close their minds. To those who are open, and who see their need of help, they are given understanding. But to those who are stubborn, and don't see their need of help, and don't see what's the point in all of this, their understanding is taken away from them.

So people who hear well will come helpless. Second, those who hear the word are going to be dependent on Jesus.

Look at verse 21. He said to them, Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it up on a stand, high up in the room?

Because the purpose of a lamp or a light in any situation is to illuminate it, to enable you to see what's going on. And Jesus is saying, I am that light.

[26 : 42] I have come to help you see. I've come to reveal what is hidden. Verse 22. For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed.

Whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. And if anybody has ears to hear, let them hear. So can you hear what I am saying?

Are you listening to me? Says Jesus. I not only speak words to you, but I am the one who gives you understanding of those words. Without me, you're always going to be in the dark.

Without me, you'll never know the way into the kingdom. You'll never be able to figure things out.

Trusting in your own intellect or reason is never going to work. Relying on the church and their interpretation.

That's not going to work. You must depend on me to reveal the truth of my word to you. And that's the difference between these two groups of people.

[27 : 46] The few that come back to them are helpless. They're saying, we don't know. Tell us. But they come dependent because they know that Jesus is the only one who's going to give them insight. And third, those who hear the word come longing for more.

Verse 24. Consider carefully what you hear, he continued. With the measure you use it, it will be measured to you and even more.

Now, our attitude to Jesus' word becomes the measure by which Jesus will respond to us.

So let's make this all very real and very practical right now. We're reading Jesus' word, we're studying it and we're thinking about it and we're all hearing it. Our attitude to it right now will be the measure by which Jesus responds to each one of us right now.

In other words, if we come longing for more, if we come with an attitude that wants to be filled, then he is going to fill us.

[29 : 06] He's going to respond with a good measure. But if we come content and just think, ah, Jesus' word, heard this story, been there, done that, will receive very little.

Verse 25, whoever has will be given more. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from him.

Can you see what's going on here? Those who are eager in their desire to understand, they'll be given more understanding. If we come with an attitude that is longing and wanting for more of Jesus and understanding more of him, God is going to respond generously and he's going to fill us up and he's going to enable us to grasp the things about his kingdom.

He's going to be generous. If we come empty and say, please fill me, he'll fill you. But the opposite is also true and this is why it's so critical that we get this.

if our attitude is one of contentment and one of not really into it, then what little understanding we may have is going to be taken from us.

[30 : 31] God's word has a double effect. It not only brings people to salvation and opens their minds, but it closes people's minds.

So people who hear well come longing for more. And this is how we should listen. This is how we should hear Jesus' words.

Jesus is God's appointed king who has come to speak into the disorder and the darkness of our lives. He has something to say to us. But we're never going to grasp it.

We're never going to get it unless we become helpless, dependent and longing. The power of Jesus' word then.

While hearing is a good thing and it's a right thing, Jesus wants us to know that at the end of the day it's his word that's going to bring about the change.

[31 : 40] The reason why we listen is because Jesus' word is active and powerful. When it is heard it begins to work in our lives in amazing ways.

First, the word works supernaturally. Look at verse 26. He has two little stories that follow this. The word works supernaturally in our lives.

Verse 26. He also said this is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. It's still the same idea of the seed being the word. Night and day whether he sleeps or gets up the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how and all by itself the soil produces corn first the stalk then the ear then the full grain in the ear.

As soon as the grain is ripe he puts a sickle to it because the harvest has come. Hearing Jesus' word receiving it and accepting it is just like planting a little seed in the ground.

By a supernatural power outside of ourselves it begins to grow and sprout and brings about new life. Just as a farmer can't make a seed grow just as a gardener can't make a seed grow he doesn't even know how it happens so we can't bring about this new life for ourselves.

[33 : 06] The word he's saying has a supernatural power and if we plant that seed into our lives if we plant the word of God into our lives we can be confident that it's going to grow and it's going to bring about a change.

We can't do it but the gospel is supernatural and unless we try and unless we plant it in it's not going to grow and work.

It's supernatural it's a powerful thing. But second he says the word works surprisingly verse 30 again he said what shall we say the kingdom of God is like or what parable shall we use to describe it?

It is like a mustard seed it's the same idea the seed is the word which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground yet when planted it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.

And he's reminding us here that his word works with surprising results. Not only are we encouraged to plant the gospel seeds in our own lives we are to begin to plant these seeds into other people's lives just as a tiny mustard seed grows into a huge big tree big enough for birds to rest so Jesus' word will have the same impact within us and within our community.

[34 : 42] Excuse me. so the good news is so powerful that when we begin to plant it in our lives it will bring about a supernatural work and when we begin to plant it in others it will cause that growth to happen.

God will have to plant and let me just say a couple of things to apply all of this through for us. His word is central it's primary we've got to listen to it in a certain way and if we do it will bring about a supernatural and surprising work.

So if you're a parent here this morning and you've got little children their lives are being bombarded by all kinds of words every day from television from school from friends words words words are piling in.

The greatest words that you can ever speak to them is the words of Jesus. Nobody else is going to tell them. That is your prime responsibility as a parent.

I'm a parent. Johnny read the Bible with your children. Talk to them about it. Teach them what it is to come to God's word helpless dependent and longing.

[36 : 15] Every one of us as parents take your time. Read with each other all of us together and I know this is what some of you do.

Some of you meet up during the week one to one. You take time out in the week and you begin to read the Bible and as you do see the confidence in his word because it's so powerful it will change you and it will bring about a growth in your life and a growth within the church.

The most important thing for us to do is to do that. And I think if we begin to do these things we will be so excited so enthused we will begin to see the change in our own lives that the words of Jesus will become so natural, so beautiful, so wonderful that we will begin to talk those words to other people as well.

But if we want other people to hear those words we've got to start hearing them for ourselves first. Jesus' word must be a priority.

Keep it central. Listen to it well and have confidence in its amazing power to change lives and to grow big.

[37 : 43] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father, we recognize that there are many things that will come in to try and steal away the words.

Satan is there ready to take that seed and the worries of life, the things that are happening this week are ready to come in and bombard our minds and take away what is sown. and struggles and pressures. So we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit allow that word, allow that seed to settle in our lives.

May we hear it. May we accept it. God, may it produce in us amazing results in our own lives. May it produce amazing results in this church and in this community.

May God do amazing things through his word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[39 : 08] Thank you.