

Pay attention to his words

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[0 : 00] Again he began to teach beside the sea, and a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

And he was teaching them many things in parables, and his teaching he said to them, Listen. A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.

Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil, and produced a grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

And he said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

[1 : 11] And he said to them, To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

And he said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word, and these are the ones along the path where the word is sown.

When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy, and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while.

Then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word.

But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word.

[2 : 24] And he said to them, Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed, and not on a stand?

For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest. Nor is anything secret except to come to light.

And he said to them, If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.

And he said to them, Pay attention to what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given.

And from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Well, we've read the whole of chapter 4, 1 to 25. We're going to focus this morning on verses 10 to 12 and 21 to 25.

Last week we were looking at the parable of the sower. This series is all about the advance of the kingdom of God in this age.

[3 : 34] And one thing that Jesus makes clear from the start in these chapters, chapters 3 and 4 of Mark, is that his kingdom is not going to advance as we might expect.

One of our sons went through a phase of being obsessed with tidal waves. How tall are they?

How far in do they go? I didn't know any of this stuff, so I don't know. Let's look it up. Have you ever seen one? No. We might expect the kingdom of God to advance a bit like a tidal wave, unmissable.

And we could be forgiven, I think, for expecting that. That's what the Jews were expecting. But we see here in chapters 3 and 4 this block of teaching that Jesus gives about how his kingdom will advance in this age.

And instead of a dazzling, undeniably missable tidal wave event. Surprise, actually. Through a word.

[4 : 44] Through a message, he says. A message like a seed landing on different soils. Like a quiet revolution in the present.

Oh, with a triumphant end. But a quiet revolution in the present. Jesus teaches about his kingdom in chapter 4 in parables.

That is, these earthly pictures with a heavenly meaning. And the parable of the sower is at the heart of this chapter. So if you can imagine, I don't know if you've ever seen these kind of pictures that are arranged with one great big picture in the middle, but then there's some satellite photos around it or something like that.

That's how this chapter is arranged. The parable of the sower is the great picture that Jesus gives. And then the satellite parables around it to expand on and elaborate the picture.

So we get these five further clarifications around the parable of the sower. We're going to look at three of them today and then two of them next week.

[5 : 52] So three lessons today. Three vital lessons about the advance of the kingdom. Or you might put it like this.

Three encouragements for the good soil. Three encouragements for the good soil. Number one. Jesus is both revealing and concealing his gospel in the present age.

Just look with me at verse 10. When Jesus was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God. But for those outside, everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive. They may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn.

And be forgiven. This is a strange teaching. By speaking in parables, Jesus is saying here, he is deliberately dividing.

[7 : 05] On the one hand, he is quietly revealing to his people the secret of the kingdom of God. Do you see that in verse 11? To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God.

What is the secret of the kingdom of God? The secret of the kingdom of God, that is shorthand for the gospel message. The message about the coming rule of God through his Messiah, King Jesus. And I think we see that way back in chapter 1 verse 15, where Mark summarises the gospel that Jesus, you might want to turn back to it, chapter 1 verse 15.

Jesus comes into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God. And what's he saying? The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe. What then is the secret of the kingdom of God? It is the gospel. So the secret of the kingdom of God has at its heart the identity and work of Jesus.

[8 : 13] Jesus' identity as the son of God, who died for his people, and who will come again one day to rule forever. That's at the heart of the secret of the kingdom of God, that Jesus is talking about in chapter 4 verse 11.

So Jesus describes the message of the gospel as a secret. Why? Well, it is a secret because the truth of the gospel is God's to reveal.

And he reveals it to whoever he chooses. These people around Jesus are his people. They are the ones who he has described as his brother, sister, and mother.

Just look back at chapter 3. Context is key. And chapter 3 verse 34. Looking about at those who sat around him, he said, here is my true family.

Here are my people. Just look at verse 10 of chapter 4. Those around him. That key word, that key phrase.

[9 : 28] Those around him with the 12. These are his people. Notice that he says in verse 11, to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God.

Not it will be given, but has been given. I take it, it is not because they've come to ask him that he's given them, but rather, they have come to ask him because God has already been at work in them, opening their eyes to see the true identity of Jesus.

To you has been given to see the truth about Jesus. And so to believe in Jesus, well, that is a gift of God's grace to his people. That's what Jesus is saying.

This has led some to describe the gospel message as an open secret. Open in the sense that it is proclaimed far and wide as Jesus had been doing.

Chapter 4 verse 1. A secret because the revelation of the truth of it to the human heart that is a gift of God.

[10:42] And so notice, therefore, the quietness of the advance of the kingdom of God. A massive crowd had heard the message. But in verse 10, by this stage, they had gone home, back to their dinners, back to their lives, back to their work, unmoved and uninterested.

But a handful come to Jesus quietly, alone in verse 10. Jesus says, to you has been given. They don't look any different.

What a quiet, unremarkable thing. Just these people who had begun to follow Jesus out of the crowd. a small minority. The kingdom of God is advancing as a secret, as the secret is given one by one to individuals.

And so, can I say, if you're a Christian here today, which I know is many of us, do you know how blessed you are to have been given sight to see the truth about Jesus' identity and his work?

No, we don't deserve it. But the glorious grace of God, the God of the universe, has revealed this most precious truth to you.

[12:08] I think we're meant to feel the privilege to you has been given by the grace of God. But it doesn't stop there. Read verse 11, the rest of verse 11 with me.

But for those outside, everything is in parables. So that they may indeed perceive, but not perceive. They may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

The point Jesus is making is that he is both revealing and concealing his gospel. Which raises the question, who is he concealing it from?

Verse 11, those outside. Who are they? And again, key to this is the context.

We've come across this group already. Those outside are those who have begun to harden their hearts against him. Just look again back at chapter 3.

[13:10] You'll see these, this terminology has already been used. Chapter 3, verse 31. His mother and his brothers came and standing outside, they sent to him and called to him.

And a crowd was sitting around him and they said, your mother and your brothers are outside. At that point, his family was saying he was mad.

along with the Jewish leaders who were saying that he was possessed by Satan. And along with the Jewish leaders who were plotting to kill him.

3, verse 6. And so, by this stage in the account, chapter 4, those outside carries a theological weight.

they are those who, despite the clear revelation of Jesus, have begun to harden their hearts against him.

[14:10] And in response to this, Jesus in 4, verse 2, begins to teach in parables. He began to speak in riddles.

In riddles. because his purpose at this stage was not only to reveal but also to conceal. And so, all they heard, those outside, all they heard was a story about farming and seeds and paths and birds. It was nonsense. On a level with a fairy tale. No impact. They might have gone home and you imagine them going home to their families. What did he talk about?

Well, you know, there was a story about a farmer going and sowing some seeds and some seeds grew and others didn't. What's next? Let's get on with the day.

Why did Jesus speak like this? Verse 12, so that they may indeed hear but not perceive. In other words, they could hear the words that Jesus was saying but they couldn't understand their meaning.

[15:26] They heard but they didn't hear. They saw but they didn't really see. They saw this man, Jesus, doing this stuff but actually they didn't understand what it meant.

it's spiritual blindness that Jesus is talking about here. How often this seems to be the case doesn't it? When people come and hear the gospel how often it just seems to get worse not better.

So what is Jesus saying? I think he's saying this. If people will close their eyes to his light if they will cover their ears to his words and if they will harden their hearts to his offer of grace well then the Lord Jesus will confirm them in their decision.

those who you might put it like this those who want to be blind those who want to be blind will be blinded and Jesus will cause his words to become blah blah blah like a story about farming that just makes no sense and has no relevance to life.

Very sobering isn't it? Why will he do this? verse 12 so that they will not be able to repent and turn and be forgiven.

[17:03] That word literally so that they should not to block them from ever coming to find forgiveness in him. this is this is uncomfortable right?

Is this a different kind of Jesus from the one we thought he was? So much more authority and control over the response of every man and woman to his gospel.

people well we might ask why does he tell us this? It's key to see who he's talking to he's not talking to those outside they've gone home.

He tells this to his disciples because his disciples have just seen the majority of the crowd walk off away from him though they've been hearing the same things and so the disciples needed to understand and we need to understand as we see the same thing today that there's been no mistake.

Jesus is doing a double work and so you might say this you might say the advance of the kingdom of God 101 lesson 101 the gospel divides there is a great division quietly happening today judgment has begun with Jesus the division of humanity the saved people of God given the secret of the kingdom of God by grace those outside hardened to the gospel and this is why so often people seem to become less and less open to the gospel over time now as we said last week I don't think we ever know in the case of an individual what's happening necessarily and yet when we see this happening and somebody who perhaps initially was really interested in the gospel but then over time it just doesn't make sense we're not surprised we must expect two responses to the gospel not one either the gospel becomes the greatest treasure of a person's heart or it becomes nonsense both are the deliberate work of

[19:33] Jesus in this age and if we don't realise this perhaps one thing that might happen is we might start trying to change the gospel there's nothing wrong with the gospel Jesus is doing a double work okay the first lesson secondly and we're going to come on to the parables now just two of the parables in chapters verse 21 to 25 the kingdom is hidden now one day to be seen by all so the second lesson I think and again this is an encouragement to good soil just look at verse 21 with me Jesus said to them is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed and not on a stand for nothing is hidden except to be made manifest nor is anything secret except to come to light if anyone has ears to hear let him hear now I think previously

I'd understood this slightly differently from now having come to it again I think the point Jesus is making here is don't mistake the present for the future the lamp here what is the lamp it must be the kingdom of God after all the kingdom is described as secret in verse 11 and nothing is secret except to come to light and so just as the purpose of a lamp is not to be hidden but to be brought out right nobody has a lamp that's hidden under their basket or in their wardrobe you switch it on but it's hidden it's all out in the open well so the purpose of the kingdom of God is not to remain hidden forever that's the point why would Jesus say this here it's a massive encouragement to his disciples because in the present there is a hiddenness and a quietness to the coming of Jesus do you feel that there's a hiddenness and a quietness to the kingdom of God in the present here in Dulwich today it is a secret that has been quietly given to his people as the word is preached across London across England across the world but it is not obvious to the watching world instead your colleagues or friends at school will ask questions like this if Jesus is the Messiah how come the world hasn't changed at all do you feel the hiddenness of the kingdom of God and so therefore here I think is a precious promise to the believer if the kingdom seems hidden now Jesus says it will not always be the case the day is coming when he will return on the clouds of heaven and bring the kingdom of God that's what

Jesus says in chapter nine the son of man is coming in the glory of his father! that day there will be no more secrets no more doubts no more will anybody be able to say where is your king where is your God where is this so called kingdom no more quiet revolution but instead every eye will see and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord this is the day that the apostle Peter calls the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ when he comes again there is a bright eternal day to come Jesus says here this day will span forever for the people of the risen Jesus and by the way on that day the fruitfulness of the life of the

Christian will be seen finally 30 60 100 fold won't be seen today it'll be seen then and so Jesus says in this first parable that hangs off the parable of the sower he says don't mistake the present for the future the current state of affairs will not always be the kingdom of God cannot remain hidden

forever it will not remain hidden forever there is a day to come and so Christian keep going in this age living by faith in the promises of God and how should we respond in the meantime well that's the point of the third parable just look down with me verse 24 he said to them pay attention to what you hear with the measure you use it will be measured to you and still more will be added to you for to the one who has more will be given and from the one who has not even what he has will be taken away well the third lesson bring a big tub of listening and

[25 : 04] God will bless you with understanding and faith you notice there is one command that resonates throughout this whole chapter repeated Jesus says listen you see that verse three listen you see it in verse nine he who has ears to hear let him hear you see it in verse 23 if anyone has ears to hear let him hear you see it in verse 24 pay attention to what you hear after last week we were left with the question what does it mean to be the good soil answer the good soil is the person who listens to Jesus and goes on listening and there is a great promise in this parable you see it because in this parable God promises that whoever brings a big tub of listening to

God's word he will bless with understanding and faith to overflowing with the measure you use it will be measured to you and then still more will be added imagine you're on a school camping trip or actually imagine you're on Lakeview where you have to bring your own bowl to Lakeview no Andy's shaking as if that's so part of the past but I bet there were school camping trips where you used to have to bring your own bowl and so you're in the line and they can only fill up what you've brought so if you bring a thimble they can only give you a thimble full of rice pudding if you bring a bucket! they could fill your bucket full of rice pudding that's the point Jesus is making with the measure you use it will be measured to you and we can see that this measure is listening to Jesus words clearly verse 24 pay attention to what you hear with the measure you use and as you listen with a big measure God will fill your soul with understanding and with faith you want more faith bring a big measure to God's word I think we see this happening in our own experience don't we I know it from my own experience those who grow in faith are those who listen and go on listening to God's word and that is the priority of their lives what does it look like to bring a big measure of listening I think three things I put there on your sheet time desire prayer time it obviously involves time the good soil I take it will prioritize listening to God's word as age pursuing the riches of the deceitfulness of riches and desire for other things the good soil by contrast will prioritize listening to God's word this may be a challenge to some of us is listening to God's word the priority of our lives maybe it was once is it still but it's not just time I think it's also how we listen with what attitude pay attention Jesus says attentiveness in other words it's desire bring a big measure of desire to know to learn eagerness humility in other words a big measure of I don't have the answers that you do Lord a big measure of I don't know please teach me

Lord possible I think if we've been a Christian for a while to think to know to begin to think we know all the answers and to come to the Bible thinking we already know what it's going to say do we still come in a humble way with desire a big measure of desire hunger and and thirdly prayerfulness as we come to God's word time desire prayer and the wonderful promise the wonderful promise is that God will fill us with understanding and with faith not he might but he will one comment here a key to a growing faith or a key to faith faith is not zapped out of nowhere sometimes people say you know I've prayed for more faith but it hasn't come as if it's zapped from nowhere and Jesus is saying actually no it is given to us as we bring a big measure of listening to

[30 : 08] God's word don't be surprised if your faith is dwindling and listening to God's word is not a priority in life you want to be good soil listen go on listening time desire prayer God will fill us maybe not in our timings maybe not according to our plan but he's promised to do it and ultimately we will bear fruit 30 60 100 fold no we won't see that fruit in the present probably that's the harvest that's on that day but the promise is there we will bear fruit in the end let's pray and so Lord we thank you for this wonderful promise that you will fill with understanding and with faith those who bring a big measure of listening to your word how we pray afresh that you would cause us to be the good soil thank you for giving us the by your grace the secret of the kingdom of

God that most precious knowledge sight to see who the Lord Jesus really is and we pray for any among us today who haven't yet seen been given that sight how we pray that you would open their eyes and we pray that together for their sake and for your glory amen