

Faith in the Word of the King

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[0 : 00] you might be sitting here for the first time being in our church for the first time or a church for the first time. You might have been here for a hundred years like I have, it feels like, and you might be wondering why do we do this bit of church, the bit that I'm doing, why do we do this preaching bit of church every week? We know that God speaks through his word, the Bible. In 2 Timothy it says that all scripture is God-breathed as if God was speaking it to you directly. His words in the Bible, read and explained, are empowered by his spirit, they are his living voice. And we are commanded in the Bible too to pass on his word through reading and preaching when we gather together carefully and wherever we are. We can trace the practice of doing this back from today through church history, back to the disciples ministry and back to Mark 2 verse 2 where we hear that Jesus began to preach the message of good news to all. Now I was preparing to preach today, that lineage struck me because Jesus' example followed faithfully for many, many, many generations.

Through that preaching and proclamation of Jesus' words, that's why I am right here doing the same today. So this week, like the last and the one before that and the one before that, we're going to hear God speak in his word. And I'm going to try and help you understand it, apply it, and love it. So let me pray and ask him to do what he has promised he will do and speak to us. Let's pray. Amen. Lord Jesus, open our ears to hear you speak today. May the words of my mouth be filled with messages from you. Would you speak through your Holy Spirit to me, through me today, so that we may together hear your words with open ears. For it is a privilege that you, O God, would speak to us. Amen.

So far in Mark, which we've been stepping through the last few weeks of church, we've heard that Jesus was preaching and healing and proving himself by miracles and defying the conventions of the culture of his day. He loved people who were outsiders, who didn't fit into the culture of the time, who were often outcast. And he shunned the insiders, the people who thought that they had everything together. We haven't seen, though, yet how Jesus preached day to day. It was a big deal what he was doing. We know that he was preaching. Mark 4 is where we get to hear about it. So today, I want to do three, take you through three steps. We're going to discover how Jesus preached and why. Because it's not what you might expect. We're going to try and understand what his preaching means for him and for his kingdom. And lastly, we're going to look at how his teaching leads and empowers his followers in his kingdom. But right now, let's discover how he preached. So get your Bible, go to Mark 4, and if the fan doesn't keep blowing it away, keep it open in front of you.

[3 : 52] Jesus was outside in a boat on the lake. The crowd around him was so large that he had to get in the water to stay away from them so that they could all hear him rather than being crushed.

So eager were so many to hear him. So he gets into a boat and he says, listen. And then he spoke to them using parables. A parable is this kind of wisdom story that gives us insight into the real world.

It literally means to put one thing beside another. Like a story beside reality itself.

These are puzzles of wisdom that when interpreted correctly can reform whole worldviews, reshape cultures, reform ways of living, ways of thinking, all with this little story. But the problem with parables is that they're like riddles. They're tricky. They're completely unclear without an interpretation.

Like a lock that needs a key. Jesus explained to his disciples why he used parables in Mark 4 in verse 11. And if you were listening to the passage, this is the verse that sounds out of place. So have a look. This is why Jesus used parables. He says, Everything is said in parables. Everything.

[5 : 39] So that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding. Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.

Wait. Wait. Wait. Wait. Sounds like Jesus was deliberately trying to exclude people. Is he? Why does he say this? Jesus here is quoting from the Old Testament. From a book in the Old Testament called Isaiah.

Where God calls a bloke called Isaiah to be a prophet. Using those exact words. Jesus here is aligning himself as God's messenger.

And perhaps his disciples and the other people gathered around at that moment, they might have understood that. But still, that's a strange part of God's calling of Isaiah to pick out.

[6 : 47] It's not by accident that Jesus places his preaching alongside what God's people knew was God's invitation for a man to be God's messenger.

But Jesus quoting Isaiah, he also reveals that Jesus' messages from God as parables, they're going to demand a special perception and understanding.

And without those, the heroes of the parables will miss forgiveness from God and receive judgment. See, they're pretty important. So rather than this being Jesus deliberately excluding people, he's warning people to pay attention and seek understanding and perception, or they're going to miss out.

I said before that parables are locked and need a key. And to understand their meaning and application, they would need explaining by someone very wise, or explaining by the person who wrote them.

Who will provide the key for Jesus' parables? Or more specifically, who might be the key that we're to look to, to get understanding.

[8 : 10] So, right now, put yourself in the crowd around the lake. How would you make sense of these parables? Let me first tell you how not to understand these parables.

Do not make yourself the key to their interpretation. You are not the key to understanding Jesus' preaching.

Their author alone knows their meaning, and you cannot open a lock without being given a key. If I stand before one of those vintage old doors with an old lock, with one of those huge big keyholes, apart from it being kind of cool and making me think about all the Lord of the Rings books that I read when I was young, with all the elaborate ways of opening doors and things to say and that kind of stuff, I would be stuck.

I wouldn't know what to do. The only thing I've got is a hand or a finger or something to try and jam into that lock to try and get it open. That's not going to help. So take care with these parables.

Your finger's not going to open the lock. You can't do it. And take care with the word of God too. See that you never take your culture, your desires, your preferences, and project those onto the word to make it suit you.

[9 : 44] Rather, look to Jesus himself, to his words, and to the life that he lived, to see what these words truly mean and how to apply them to their life, your life.

Now, the best part of this passage, I think, is that people came to Jesus to do exactly that, straight away.

Look at chapter 4, verse 10. People came to Jesus to hear him straight after that first parable. They were desperate to hear what it meant. And it's not just Jesus' disciples. It's not just Jesus going home with the guys who gave him a lift. It's just a bunch of people who really wanted to know what was going on.

And Jesus was willing to explain it to them, to those who would come close and hear further. But vast numbers of people, a crowd so big that the guy had to go into the water to avoid getting crushed, vast numbers of people went home after hearing Jesus' parables without seeking Jesus' insight into them, and they assumed that they could comprehend and apply them without him, or they were totally irrelevant, it didn't matter.

[11 : 12] Judgment and a real lack of wisdom. God is not being people, heard by people, who respond like that.

Jesus is seeking people who when they hear Jesus speak, yearn for more words from him, so that many would receive the salvation that he brings, and the forgiveness from sins that he offers.

Jesus knew people needed his insight. Which is why he asks those rhetorical questions in verse 13. Look at verse 13 with me.

Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? Well, the answer is by asking you, Jesus, to explain them and say more.

Jesus is the one to come to for the key to understanding all God's word. He is the king of the kingdom of God.

[12:14] And we come to this passage now and to our Bibles every day because of Jesus' willingness to embody and reveal that he is the key.

He is the key to the kingdom of God. Good news. I'm not going to preach to you today in parables. I'm first not clever enough to write them because they're so rich and difficult and amazing. But I'm going to dive with you into these that Jesus shared. There's four of them today. And we're going to see what they reveal about his kingdom. And then we're going to look at how he unlocks the parables for our life and mission.

And we're going to start with the two short parables, two of them that begin with the statement. The kingdom of God is like... See how the design of the parable works?

Each little story reveals part of the kingdom as revealed by the king. The kingdom of God here is not about a realm or a geographical location, but it's all about who the ruler is and how he rules.

[13:30] See, the king of the kingdom of God did not come with an army or tanks, no force. He didn't drive out the physical enemies of God's people like they might have expected him to do, but he came with words of invitation, grace, and love.

These parables reveal the king of the kingdom of God. They're breathtaking. They're disarming. They're deep. So let's have a look at some of them.

First, the kingdom of God is like a lamp. Look at me at verse 21. That'll be over the page if you've got a church Bible in front of you.

Verse 21 of chapter 4. 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 on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

[14:36] If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. The kingdom is the light in a dark room.

It's on a stand. It's up high where the light can disperse from. It's not hidden. Its light reveals what lies in the darkness, illuminating the unknown and providing the view for man to take steps back to God.

The light provides insight and understanding for the world that we live in. Jesus' life shows us that he is this lamp on a stand.

That people would see their way to God when they saw him. He does not want mystery or exclusion, but invites and provides nearness to God as people see him.

as they see the light. So second, let's go to verse 30 where the kingdom of God is like a seed.

[15:50] A little seed contains all the potential of a huge tree in a tiny grain. Its power under control in the face of terrible odds.

God is in Mark 4. Jesus is just this carpenter standing in a boat, but he is the king of the most powerful kingdom to ever take hold of the world.

The gospel has circled the globe. It's crossed barriers of continents and language. It's been greeted by young and old and clever people and foolish people.

It's even been embraced by its enemies. This tree has grown so much that it now connects us, connects you, to the word that he preached by the lake that day, to this broke carpenter standing in a boat 2,000 years ago.

He was just a seed, but look at the tree. On first reading, these parables are like prophecy.

[17:01] They're like insights into the life that Jesus would live out in the pages of Mark to come, and they are. But they're even more than that. Here's how we know.

Have a look at verse 33 and 34. With many similar parables, Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.

He didn't say anything to them without using a parable, but when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. Jesus always offered an explanation for his parables.

We can compare Jesus' life and example to these stories to see his kingdom come. There's more. If we just heard these stories and then clearly watched how he lived, that's what we would see in those parables, but there's more.

The good news is that Mark chose one parable that Jesus preaches and explains to help us see deeper into all the other parables to come.

[18:12] Let's jump back to the beginning of Mark 4. This may be the only parable you know. This was my favourite one growing up. I love the idea of God being gracious and I also really really like

the story of the prodigal son because I often felt like one or both of those people in that story.

It may be a really well-known parable that you can think of right away. I'm not going to go deeply into it. I'm just going to describe it but I think that God might have something very very different to say to you than you think is actually written there because I can tell you that growing up both prodigal son and this one I had my own interpretation that suited me.

Let's see what Jesus says. He describes a farmer sowing seeds. Four soils and four responses to the seed as it is sown.

The story is very simple but Jesus explains its epic implications for us all. He says the key for us is what the seed is and our response to it.

So then later in verse 13 to 20 we learn that the seed is the word. It's God's message preached and lived out through Jesus.

[19 : 53] If you were a farmer standing in that crowd and you heard Jesus describing a story of a farmer just lobbing grain everywhere with some of it going on the path and some of it going on the rocks and some of it going into bad soil, you'd think what a waste.

That's actually what's going to grab your attention if you're an agriculturalist. but in this story it reveals Jesus' gracious strategy so that all might hear the good news.

He's not playing favourites, he's not going, oh those people will get it, I'll go over here. He's preaching it to everyone. So as Jesus preaches and so is the word, people respond to hearing it and see here that there's this existing barrier to accepting God's word.

It's in verse 15. Look at your Bible and see if you can see what it is, verse 15. It's Satan himself. Jesus is fully aware of Satan's intention to remove the word, undermine the word and distract the soil from growing the word and bearing fruit.

Satan wants to silence Jesus' message. Within the parable there's an implied boundary of Satan's ability to influence the reception of the word, which is to say that he cannot silence the word everywhere.

[21 : 30] It is always good to hear that Satan's work against us has limits. But it's certainly something to be aware of.

And then there's good soil that accepts the word. That soil is personified right at the moment of him explaining it by the people who've gone to Jesus to understand this parable.

Those who seek his word and receive it with gladness. The seed in them will grow and bear fruit. fruit. If you have ever been to western New South Wales or to the country anywhere, you would have seen fields of canola, cotton, wheat, all different kinds of things.

I imagine wheat because I grew up in dairy country and there's no fields of anything anywhere. Wheat seems just about as normal as I can imagine. but think about this.

Think about a wheat seed falling in the ground and growing up. What's the crop at the end? More seeds. More of what the farmer threw out there in the first place.

[22 : 48] It is the good news that Jesus the farmer can re-sow through the life and labours of his followers to come.

And that's the glorious transition that Mark holds up here. The transition that is the pattern for understanding all the parables.

They show us how Jesus will usher in his kingdom and grow his followers through his word so that they can be involved in the continuing growth of the kingdom through the word.

We're invited to join Jesus followers in verse 10. Crowded round and near Jesus to hear him speak and explain how we follow him into the parable.

The words and parables of Jesus are about him and his word grows in us and the parables become about us to.

[23 : 59] Think about the parable of the sower. We've just been given the word by Jesus and as we gather around him through the ministry of those who follow Jesus from then till now through the preaching of the written word.

Now we too take that same seed that is the word and we too sow it everywhere. Not showing favoritism, not dividing our churches by language or culture.

We want everyone to hear no matter who they are wherever we are. We share the word hoping it will be received and accepted.

That's our mission as Jesus followers. to take his word and to sow it everywhere. We too know also that we are each hearers of the word day by day, Sunday by Sunday.

I read this parable of the sower and I know that some days I am a hard pavement to the word of God.

[25 : 16] You might feel like that right now. Satan is still in the business of removing the word from my ears and from yours.

You might be listening right now and not be listening to the challenge of God through his word. Satan loves to rob you of the good news.

He loves to undermine it with doubts. He loves to distract you with other things. As you sit in church each week, I can tell you that I am exactly the same. I sit in church, I hear the Bible, I read it, and I'm thinking about my anxieties as a father, I'm worrying about the things that I need to get done the next day because the house is a mess and I'm the only one at home.

I'm thinking about the most ridiculous things and ignoring the words of my saviour who is speaking to me face to face through his word.

Sounds like something I wouldn't do if I really did believe that. And that's the trick of Satan. Time spent before Jesus in that place in the kingdom inspires a life of mission, sharing the gospel in action and word.

[26 : 41] love. But the result in this parable of someone who hears the word but gets distracted is a life choked by weeds, the weeds of distraction and idolatry and following after things like it mentions wealth specifically.

there is yet hope for every listener while you eagerly seek to hear the word. If you feel like any of those other soils right now as you receive the word of God your hope is that God is in the business of changing you and readying us by his spirit to receive his word, to multiply it in kingdom-minded lives.

You've got to keep coming to it. You've got to keep listening to him. It's not through any good works that you're going to do.

It's not through any striving harder after doing the right thing. It's going to be through the word of Jesus by his Holy Spirit. Do you see how this parable empowers our lives for the kingdom?

It is for us as fresh today as it was that day by the lake. So now that we've seen how Jesus' life and who he is is the pattern of the parable but also he has given us the ministry of the word and we have become part of the parable ourselves.

[28 : 36] Let's look back at the other two parables that we've already seen. The one about the lamp and the one about the mustard seed. The kingdom of God is like a lamp because Jesus has transferred the word from him to us.

The light of Jesus' word is now your lamp in your hand to put on the stand of your life every day and to never hide it. For it will be Jesus' word alone that will help you see people in the darkness and motivate you to bring them through their horrible blindness to salvation to Jesus in his light.

How incredible is that? How incredible is that? What about the mustard seed? God's word changes us dirt specks into seeds with limitless gospel sharing potential.

No matter where you think you are or where you've been, the potential for gospel ministry is limitless.

Your life can be fruitful for the kingdom through the word of God. And that's the growth strategy for enlarging the kingdom is through God's people.

[30 : 10] That brings us to our last parable, the parable of the harvest in verses 26. the lamp and the mustard seed, like Takeshi taught us about last week.

Mark has put them together like a sandwich. They're like the bread and here comes the filling, the good bit in the middle, the crescendo of those three. let's read verse 26.

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, all by itself the soil produces grain, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head, and as soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come.

God does the growing in unseen and sometimes unknown ways and he does it in your life and in the lives of those around you through his word.

[31 : 28] You have a place in the kingdom of God and it's to sit right there with the disciples gathered around the saviour listening to him. The time we spend, like I've said before, the time we spend in that place hearing Jesus inspires a life of mission, sharing the gospel in action and word.

You have become like a farmer planting seeds. you plant the seed of the gospel wherever and whatever your field, whether it be home or work or a church, wherever you happen to be, wherever you are tending the ground and give it your best shot to help it grow.

Wait patiently for the growth that God does by his Holy Spirit through his word for the moment when the harvest is ripe. Friends, we long to see harvest time for this community.

When many patches of soil are out there and there's many seeds growing, people are hearing the word of God and some, many, they're all beginning to respond.

And while we wait, we know the gospel has been sown, we continue to sow it everywhere. We're united by Jesus' word as a people desperate to see the world around us encounter Jesus.

[33 : 02] We exist as a church to take God's grace to us and to sow it into all peoples. That is our mission. And we long to celebrate the day of harvest with one person, with ten, with a thousand.

Those who accept the word of Jesus. We long to welcome those into a life of sharing the word alongside us. Joy and eternity.

I told you that when we started, that I stand here today preaching the word because some people preached it to me. They showed me that Jesus was the key to unlocking the words of God God that I had been hearing as I was growing up.

It's like they were banging on the door, screaming to get my attention. attention. It's like they could not help but see me in my anxious, fearful state trying to piece together with my understanding and the things that I was getting when I read the Bible or hear it at school or I hear it from my friends who weren't keen on it at all.

I didn't know where to go but that group of people together, they slipped this key under the door.

They said Jesus is the way to unlock the kingdom so I could find freedom with God, walk through the door and go and take that key and slip it under more doors.

[34 : 45] I stand here because of Viv and Steve and Chris and Steve and Stephen and Louise, lots of steves in my life growing up, just saying, but I found the key that Jesus is because they gave it to me.

Who sowed the gospel in you? What an opportunity we have to go and do the same. So we've heard that Jesus preached in parables, heard about his kingdom and heard about our role in it now. God's word. It's the word that unites us here today. It's the word of God that is our strength and our courage, our insight, our refuge, and our message.

So wherever you preach the gospel, however you do it in word or deed, wherever you are, sow the word in abundance into the field of chatwood and beyond.

God's and wait patiently for the harvest until we get to sit with Jesus and speak to him face to face.

[36 : 00] Never miss a chance to open the Bible and listen to him. Keep going to his word, having faith and trust only in the word of our king. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, we hear your word as you speak. You are the way for sinners to come back to their maker.

We thank you that you scattered the seed of this good news so widely and graciously that we can be here to receive it and sow it today. May many here accept your word for the first time today.

Enable us to bear the fruit of the gospel in our lives as we come to hear you speak every Sunday, every day, every moment we can. And Jesus, may we never miss the chance to hear and learn and respond in worship to your word as you lead us into your eternal kingdom.

Amen.