

# Who is He?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Three men walked into a bar, one ducked. Holly got it. Three men walked into a bar, one ducked.

There's a dawning around the room, people are slowly getting it. Who hasn't got it yet? Don't embarrass yourself, it's okay. I never got it the first time I heard it. Your dad tells it too, oh well. I know where I got it but I didn't get it from your dad. It's great actually because you say something like that and you just get this laugh and nobody else is laughing because nobody else gets it. And then you say it again and maybe a few more get it and if you haven't got it yet, somebody can explain it to you after church tonight. But you heard the same words, everybody heard the same words and some of you understood them, some of you didn't and those on the inside, sorry, some of you, I'm going to adjust that because I can't see.

That's my glasses. Brian Rose not hidden, is he? Some of you heard those words in a totally wrong way and others got the secret.

[ 1 : 33 ] The way parables work, Jesus says something and some people get it and there are those on the inside so they get what he says and everybody else is on the outside in a sense they're excluded from what he says because they don't just get what he's trying to say.

We're working through Mark's gospel at present. We've been there the last few weeks. It's not really a biography of Jesus. Sometimes we talk about the gospels being a biography but the more we've done Mark's gospel the last few weeks, I've seen and for me that this is fast-paced preaching.

This is Mark telling us about Jesus quite rapidly and making a whole number of points as he goes along. It's a gospel that can be read in an hour. Mark's a preacher. He's on about Jesus.

He's throwing out a life-saving message that anyone can hear and he knows that telling people about Jesus is going to get a response. It will be heard or it will be not heard. It will be accepted or it will be rejected and you don't have to be clever, hate him or love him.

These words are powerful enough to bring people to a real faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of you took up my challenge the other week. I was terribly encouraged by this but one of you took the Mark's gospel from Morning Church the other week, took it home and offered it to somebody in your family and said, would you think about reading this and writing any questions you've got in it as you go and would you meet with me again sometime after you've done it and we'll talk about whatever questions you've got coming out of it.

[ 3 : 02 ] Now, I haven't heard the end of that story yet but I'm really interested to hear the end of that story. Today we come to a brand new area in this Sermon of Jesus and it begins at chapter 4, verse 1 and I'd really like you to have your Bibles open as I speak.

Jesus began to teach by the lake and 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 parable. So what Mark's actually saying to us is he's introducing this new idea that Jesus used stories as a way of communicating.

He used parables. He spoke in a way, he told a story to make a point. Stories that draw us in emotionally and then catch us unexpectedly with a sledgehammer between the eyes.

Jesus uses stories which get under our guard. We listen to a good story with delight. The story gets past our defences, it plays with our emotions and then it drives the point home.

[ 4 : 10 ] One of the most famous examples of a story like this in the Bible is in the Old Testament in 2 Samuel chapter 12. David is God's king and David has angered God by sleeping with Uriah's wife Bathsheba.

She is a drop-dead gorgeous woman that he has drooled over as he looked down from his roof and saw her taking a bath. She was straight out of a Jerusalem men's magazine.

She got pregnant and David stepped in and he didn't do the modern thing and kill the baby, he killed the husband instead. It's a really sordid tale and the king who is described as a man after God's own heart sins in a high-handed way that he really seems to have got away with and he can even look pretty cocky because he can look like the man who's taken this beautiful woman into his own family after her husband's been unfortunately killed on the battlefield.

What a man. Not many people know the secret but God does and he confronts him. And he sends his prophet, Nathan, to tell the king that he's under judgment.

It's a really dangerous thing bringing the word of God to people who might not want to hear it. And Nathan tells David a story. He tells him a parable.

[ 5 : 40 ] He says, there's two men in a town, king. He says, one of them's rich and one of them's poor and the rich man, well, he had a vast herd of animals and the poor man, well, he had one little lamb that he nurtured and he cared for like one of his own family.

The rich man had unexpected visitors and instead of using his own sheep to feed them, he kills the poor man's lamb to feed them. And David hears the story and he's absolutely fired up by the injustice of it and so in 2 Samuel 12, it says, David burned with anger against the man and he said to Nathan, as surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die and he must pay for that lamb four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity.

So David's anger and his passion is aroused at a story of terrible injustice and Nathan plunges the sword in at home with the words, you are the man.

Now, I don't know if you realise it, I see it with older people, but we have this amazing capacity for seeing injustice and failure in the lives of other people, not us, and being completely blind to ourselves.

We see everything else that's wrong in the world except us. And it's a great story because this is a story that gets past our defences, it captures our emotions and it makes us hunger for what is right and it drives its point home.

[ 7 : 14 ] That's what a parable does. So Mark 4, Jesus tells a story, a parable, verse 3, it begins, listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed and 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 seed fell among the thorns which grew up and choked the plants so that they did not bear grain and still other seed fell on good soil, it came up, it grew and produced the crop multiplying 30, 60 or even 100 times.

So there's a farmer and the farmer goes out to plant a crop. I used to live in north-western New South Wales and that is big crop growing country, flat ground, big crop growing country.

And when it comes close to planting, the farmers start to get really edgy and excited because they really want to get going but they've got to wait for the timing to be just right when they plant their seeds because they want to give themselves the very best opportunity of growing the very best crop that they can.

They're looking for results. So when a farmer puts a seed in the ground today or tomorrow, he's not just thinking today or tomorrow, he is thinking five months into the future when he's going to be bringing in his harvest from what he's planted.

[ 8 : 51 ] One of the funny things I saw in the country was the competitiveness of farmers. The farmers would be watching one another to see who'd go first.

When's the time right? Who's going to start planting? And I knew one bloke who lived in this farm. They're huge farms, 5,000 acres and this bit of a laneway that ran between them.

And just before planting time was really ready, he'd go into his shed and he'd pull out his planting machine behind a giant tractor, fire it up and he'd drive the tractor up and down through his whole field without any seed in it.

Because he'd look into trick his neighbours because his neighbours would see what he was doing and they'd go into their sheds and get their planters and come out and plant too. He thought it was a great joke and I think it was.

In Jesus' day, farming was a lot lower tech. The farmer worked through the fields throwing out handfuls of grain and it spread around. The seeds seemed good. Nothing wrong with the seed but

where it lands determines how it grows.

[ 9 : 55 ] That's what this parable's about. And he tells us that some of the seed lands on a path, never gets a chance to put down its roots. The birds fly in and they have a feed.

Some lands on rocky soil. It starts to grow but as soon as the sun gets hot it dries the roots, they wither and they die because they haven't gone down deep into moisture. There's other seed which grew with weeds that choked the plant and stopped it bearing any fruit at all.

But the other seed landed in good soil. It grew and multiplied even as much as 100 times which was a great return. Now I need you to help me out with this. I think Andrew's going to push a button on that PowerPoint.

I want you to have your Bibles open and tell me what the responses are when you read through this parable especially in the second half of it. So when Jesus explains it he says there's some seed that lands on a path and I want to know from the text do they hear?

The seed that goes out to the path is the message heard? If the seed is the word of God is it heard? Yes. Is it received? Help me out faster.

[ 11 : 09 ] No. Is there joy? No. Does it get roots? No. Is there fruit? No. The second one's the rocky place the short root type stuff it withers and dies but is it heard?

Yes. Is it received? Yes. Is there joy? Is that in the text? It is. You're right. Does it get roots?

No. It doesn't get roots and is there fruit? No. Fourth, the third one the thorns does it is the word heard? Yes. Is it received?

Yes. Is it with joy? Come on. What's in the Bible? No.

No, there's no joy. Does it get roots? Come on, be brave. Yes, it does get roots and is there fruit?

[ 12 : 12 ] No. Last one is it heard? Yes. Is it received? Yes. Is it with joy? We presume so. Does it get roots? Yes.

And is there fruit? Yes. See what it shows us? There's only one of these settings where there is a result where there is fruit where the word of God goes out and there is fruit.

Now it's a great story you've got to ask what does it mean? And at first telling no one gets it not even Jesus' disciples. So in verse 10 it says, when he was alone the twelve and the others around him asked about the parables and he told them the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you but to 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. And then Jesus said to them don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? So Jesus very clearly says some people get it and some people won't.

And he says you guys will get it because God has made you one. I'm going to do something. My fault.

[ 13 : 31 ] Guess what I did tonight? I turned the fans up to full bore and guess what's happening here? My paper's blowing everywhere. Now I can use both my hands and I can look properly. Jesus says you guys will get it because the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you.

The disciples are not smart enough to work it out for themselves. They become insiders because God gives them what they need to become insiders. So if you're a Christian it is because God has made you one.

Faith is God's gift to you. There are no self-made men or women in the kingdom of heaven. We don't get ourselves there. God brings us into his family and into his kingdom and we are there because of his incredibly gracious kindness and love.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6 from the Old Testament and Isaiah is being commissioned by God to tell people about God and his coming judgment. And it's a really interesting passage because God knows most people will not respond to the prophet's message.

He knows in advance that most will come to judgment and nevertheless he sends his prophet out in a very unpopular role to a group of people who mostly won't listen.

[ 14 : 48 ] The word of God will be veiled to them. They may be ever seeing but never perceiving and ever hearing but never understanding otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.

They see, they hear, they don't understand. So you can be sitting in church tonight and see and hear and not understand.

But the point is if they listen properly to the word of God they might turn around and repent and be saved. So in the parable of the sower the very first word in this parable is probably the most important.

Listen. It's Jesus speaking. Listen. It's very emphatic. Listen. He's saying hear this right. Jesus is not mincing word. He is saying it is imperative to listen. You've got to hear and understand what I am about to say. Now the disciples do not understand it all and Jesus needs to explain it to them.

[15:58] So Jesus takes his disciples aside and gives them a ball by ball description of what this parable means. He unpacks it for his followers who want to understand.

So verse 14 the farmer sows the word. The seed is the word of God. And so in a story which begins with this really urgent appeal to listen Jesus now explains that they must listen to him.

He is the word of God. And once you've been shown the secret it's like aha now I see I understand what this parable is about. And the story is about four different ways that people listen to Jesus. It describes how his word impacts us. And so this is a parable this is a story which is about us. The parable explains where every person sitting here in church tonight it explains where we sit with regard to Jesus.

No exception I'm in this parable and you're in this parable. The seed is good Jesus is good his word is good it's powerful in its own right.

[17:14] John tells us that the word became flesh and camped amongst us. The writer of Hebrews says the word of God is living and active stronger than any double edged sword it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

And so Jesus says to us we've got to listen to him and he's really saying to us we must pay very careful attention to him and what he has to say. And he's saying that how we respond to him is how God will determine how fruitful your life is from God's point of view.

See God views success and fruitfulness in a very different way than the world. He's not looking for long and impressive CVs and PhDs and big bank balances and property portfolios and legacies.

God might allow us to have some of those things as we age and mature or whatever it is but fruitfulness will be seen in a life which is rich in walking with Jesus and trusting him.

A life of faith a life where he impacts who we are and everything we do. People who are impacted by Jesus Christ to our core. So what are the four responses to the spoken word of God?

[18:42] Verse 15 some people are like seed along the path where the word is sown and as soon as they hear it Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

He's really saying to us that some people are hard paths with hard hearts. They hear the word. There's no response.

There's no interest. It's like a male in our family. You know, me or my son or one of us sitting in the lounge room with the remote control in our hand and Kerry's calling us to dinner and the word goes out and nothing happens in response.

It's ignored. And it's saying to us that people like that have no reason to even think that there's a God that they need to respond to. There can be people talking around them all the time about God and who he is and what they believe about him but they don't even notice because they are not even prepared to go to first base.

And Jesus describes them as the ones from whom Satan comes and snatches it away and God's judgment day will come and they will be like, oh did you say something?

[20:01] Why didn't you warn me? In 2 Corinthians chapter 4 it says the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

They are deaf and blind to God's saving truth. The second group of verse 16 others like seeds 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 and when trouble or persecution comes because of the word they quickly fall away. These are people they make a great beginning but they don't go anywhere. They come to church, they come to youth group, they get involved in a group or a small group or a bible study, something like that and they say oh how fantastic everything is and they are even joyful about what they have begun to experience.

they seem like they want to get involved and then they're just gone. And it's almost as though they were never here. It worked for a while, it was a great experience for a time and then they just moved on.

People encounter Jesus, they hear his word, they become convinced of the truth of it, they want to respond and then the implications start to weigh really heavily. it might make a difference to my

living arrangements or my relationships.

[ 21 : 33 ] They can see that it might impact Sunday or discretionary time it has. In some places they might think it's going to lead me into persecution, I'm going to be in strife at work, I'm going to lose opportunity for advancement.

And what they start to see is that God is getting in the way of the life that they have mapped out for themselves and they just fizzle. They are not prepared to bear the cost.

But the third group of hearers are the most disturbing from a local church point of view and I guess for us tonight. It says in verse 18, still others like seeds sown among thorns hear the word but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word making it unfruitful.

And this is the really sad one because if you could just strip away the weeds and strip away the thorn plants, these plants look pretty good. I said this morning they look really good and they're quite magnificent but I actually think I'm probably wrong.

They look pretty green and they look okay but they're not as good as what they could be. They're lush, they're well cultivated, they're fed, they're very fine botanical specimens. And whether it's an individual or whether it's a whole church, these people can look pretty good.

[ 22 : 54 ] This church can look pretty good if it's full of people like this. But they're massively flawed. They don't reproduce.

There is no fruit. These people grew, they choked, they don't come to fruitful maturity because they're choked out by weeds and thorns.

Get this, they understood the word of Jesus, it began to change them, other things took over, look at what they got choked by, they got choked by worries of life, deceitfulness of wealth, desire for other things.

And they didn't suddenly get choked, weeds and thorns grew amongst the good plants. In another place Jesus told a different parable where an enemy of the farmer came along and he sowed weeds into a good crop, he intentionally tried to ruin it.

I don't think most of us intentionally try to ruin our response to Jesus' command to listen. We just try to listen to too many different voices at the same time.

[ 24 : 08 ] We want to prosper in our work, that's a good thing, we'd like to be successful in business, that's a good thing, we want our kids to achieve at school, that's a good thing, but it becomes a two masters sort of thing because, and Jesus says to us things like no one can serve two masters, he'll love one and hate the other or vice versa.

And so we tell kids, some of us as parents have told our kids things like, well you've got to listen to that voice at school because school is what's going to open up opportunity into the future and that will unlock the keys to career and therefore income and wealth and wellbeing.

And if you do the thing properly at school through the week, then I just might let you go to youth group on Friday night. I have a wealthy friend really interested in Jesus as a young adult.

His dad always had great ambition for him. He lived to please his earthly father and himself. He went after money, he got it, he's felt its power and he's used its power to intimidate other people.

He went after sex, he got it, had choked his relationship with the Lord Jesus and he has been fruitless in terms of God's kingdom and its values ever since. Churches can be full of people who have choked, churches are full of people who profess faith in Christ and bear very little fruit for it.

[ 25 : 36 ] I had quite a wonderful conversation after church this morning, a man came to me and he said, don't just tell people the negatives, tell people the positives about this, he said, I was a man who had choked.

He came from a church up the north shore of Sydney, he said, I was wealthy, I was successful in my business, I was starting to think about the Audi that I deserved to drive.

He said, I'd walk down the street and look in the real estate agent's windows at the next house that I might move to. I had a Christian heart, my Christian heart I wanted to be a Christian philanthropist, you know, that means somebody who gives away lots of money.

And he said, my plan was to make the first two or three million for myself to set myself up and then everything else that came in later I'd just give to the Lord. And he said, I had no joy in the thorns, no joy.

And he said, God brought me to a point where I had to acknowledge that I was living for me and not for him and I had to relinquish some of my dreams and ambitions. And he said, guess what I got?

[ 26 : 42 ] joy. I got joy and my life started to become fruitful for the Lord Jesus. And he told me this morning that he now works as a lay minister in his church, not that everybody's got to do that.

But he said, to say to people, if I preach this again, to say that when we give up, we give up our idols because God gives us something much better.

That's the motivator. God gives us joy when we submit to him and yield to him in terms of his purposes. I went to a conference the other day and the speaker said that we have churches full of consumers.

And I don't think I'm talking to you like that tonight, but I'm using it as an example. He said, sometimes in churches people are like Russian ice skating judges.

They hold up scorecards. So let's give Nick and the Musos an eight for the music tonight. But if it drops below five or six, we're out of here.

[ 27 : 46 ] We're going to another church. Maybe the preaching's a 7.5, but we really expect nine in this church. Our preaching's good preaching. And the speaker was urging us to listen to the voice of the Lord Jesus and to act on what he said to us and to move us into mission mode and to bear fruit.

The last word that the Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples before he went back into heaven, he said, all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me. Go into all the world and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and I am with you always to the very end of the age.

Now the man speaking to us the other day was not a young man or a hot gun or anything like that. He was 70 years old, and he said to us very plainly that he is, and I quote, this is his quote, damned angry with people and churches that do not give a damn about people who are currently damned by God.

He said that with some feeling. The last place the word is planted is in good soil. Verse 20, others like seed sown on good soil hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop 30, 60, or even 100 times what was sown.

Jesus is fruitful in the lives of people who don't just hear his word, but also take it to heart and accept it. And I think when I think about fruitfulness, I'm thinking broad acceptance, broad change, broad fruitfulness, lives which overflow with the fruit of God's spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, lives which have mission-hearted care and concern for people that we know who don't know the Lord Jesus.

[ 29 : 36 ] People who are unashamed to go to school or to go to uni or to go to work and say, yes, I believe in Jesus Christ as Lord. Not necessarily like that, but however is appropriate in a place that you find yourself. Churches full of people who are impacting others with the very good word of the very good Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm not sure how you judge yourself tonight, where you fit in this spectrum of responses to Jesus' word, and I want you to judge yourself, I don't want you to judge others, because in telling this story, Jesus makes it very clear that there is only one response that he's looking for, and it's the response which bears lots of fruit joyfully.

And he says, listen intently to him. And I think I want to say to you tonight that if you haven't been listening or you haven't known how to listen, you can change.

You can move from a wrong response to the right one very simply, really. Haven't been listening at all, been excited, but that was a long time ago.

Got stale in church with too many competing voices, too many masters. Jesus invites us to begin again today to listen very intently to his voice, to seek after his kingdom, to pursue his righteousness, to become very fruitful in God's hands in a way which will bring him much glory and bring you much joy.

[ 31 : 09 ] If that's something that you would like to begin afresh today, tonight, then I'm saying to you I'm going to stay down here with one or two others at the end of the service and I would love to pray with you in making that sort of commitment and beginning again with the Lord Jesus.

Amen.