

Hearing the Word

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[0 : 00] Well good morning everyone, keep that passage in front of you there and let's spend some time in it this morning. Let's pray and then ask God to help us understand well. Our Father in heaven, thanks for your word. We thank you that you allow us to hear you speak and explain things to us.

Help us to have ears to hear and hearts to obey and eyes to see. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Now last week, just to bring you up to speed, we had looking at the unforgivable sin and we got the 15 words or less and a couple of people put in some really good summaries and I thought I'd let you know what they were so that you'd be encouraged to think about yours as well today to have the conversations after church as well.

So a couple of summaries in 15 words last week that were very helpful I thought. Worldly thinking judges Jesus as bad or mad, those who follow him will be judged in the same way.

And a second 15 word reflection was, Jesus will forgive anything of any repentant sinner but will not forgive those who remain unrepentant.

Good summaries. Okay, so now let's look at the passages before us this morning and I want you to have a look at verse 24 of chapter 4 and tell the person next to you what it means, right?

[1 : 28] Pay attention to what you hear, with the measure you use it will be measured to you and still more will be given and to the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. So have a yarn about that, what that might mean to the person next to you and then we'll get stuck into the parables from chapter 4 to start with, verse 1.

Just a minute or two, have a look at it, have a think about it. Alright, we'll keep that bit of the Bible in mind and let's press into the parable of the sower.

If there's one parable you've heard, it's probably this one, if you've been around churches for a while, if you've thought about Christian life at all, you've probably thought about the parable of the sower.

We're here by the sea again and Jesus starts teaching in parables, you see, in verse 2. Notice how Mark introduces the parables. Jesus is teaching many things in parables.

There's lots of parables that are told, more than what we've got here recorded for us. And we have four here in chapter 4. And the important thing to learn and to notice is that we're to learn things from the parables.

[2 : 40] They're not just sort of stories to just have on the back burner but they're actually, Jesus is teaching things here. Each parable has something to teach us, if we have ears to hear.

But parables are also a dark saying, separating those who do and don't understand, speaking to those who are insiders and unintelligible to those who are the outsiders.

And you see there at the close of chapter 4, verse 33, with many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear. He did not speak to them without a parable but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

So it's clear there's insiders and outsiders when it comes to understanding the parables. And the dominant theme here, you see in chapter 4, is hearing, verse 3.

Verse 3 literally says, hear. You guys, hear is what it says. And Jesus is teaching this, commanding this, the people to hear.

[3 : 44] They're to hear what he says. And then we'll see what quality of hearing they actually have. The word comes up about at least 11 times in chapter 4.

And Jesus tells this parable to people while he's sitting in a boat. It's a sign of his sort of authority. He's on the water, on the boat. And you've got the parable there in verses 4 to 9.

The seed sown on the path is devoured by the bird straight away. The seed sows on rocky ground, it germinates, but the scorching hot sun burns it off. Some seed falls on thorny ground, is choked and produces no grain.

And then some seed falls on good soil, produces grain, multiplying what's sown in it, 30, 60, 100 fold. Now no farmer would sow seed without a purpose.

And the whole purpose of sowing is that you might reap a harvest, it's pointless, scattering seed otherwise. Otherwise you're wasting your time and your energy and your money and everybody's effort. And so you see the word of God is broadly sown.

[4 : 45] And the reception and the response varies greatly. And notice the bookend of the parable here. In the parable of the sower, verse 1, it starts off, he's teaching and they say, hear.

Verse 2, hear. And then it finishes with, those who have ears to hear, let him hear. For the one who has ears to hear, let him hear. So there's this bookending of hearing going on within the parable itself.

The problem is, not everyone has ears to hear. Because there is hearing and there is hearing, isn't there? He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And there's an explanation for some who will really hear.

Verse 9. Who is it that has the ears to hear? Parables have a parabolic purpose, don't they? It's weird when you read this parable and the explanation of them.

It seems that those he's called himself, they'll get to hear. And the disciples want to know what he's speaking about to the people in parables. And we see Jesus gives a private tutorial to his followers here in verse 10.

[5 : 58] But you see there in verse 11, he said to them, To you has been given the secrets of the kingdom of God, but to those outside, everything is in parables.

And then you see the crazy reason why it's in parables. So that. Why? So that they will see but not perceive, hear but not understand, lest they turn and be forgiven.

Verse 12 picks up on a common observation and complaint of God's prophets in the Old Testament. But, you know, in chapter 29 and Jeremiah chapter 5 verse 21 and Ezekiel chapter 12 verse 2.

Though God's people have, you can see the footnotes in your Bibles there where that points them out there. Even though God speaks and that people have seen the works of God, the people of Israel, God's chosen people, do not obey, do not believe, do not trust.

And they will not live appropriately. Though they have heard the word of God, the people fail to obey. And because of that, God is concealing his word.

[7 : 23] Concealing the word of truth for them. God takes away what they've received. Even what they have heard is taken away from them.

Jesus is quoting from Isaiah chapter 6 verse 9. It's worth coming back to Isaiah chapter 6 with me. Come back to Isaiah chapter 6. In the middle of the Bible, Isaiah, Jeremiah.

Isaiah chapter 6. I know your phones are scrolling but I'd rather your pages are turning. Isaiah chapter 6. And have a look at it with me here.

Isaiah chapter 6. Pick it up at verse 8. So Isaiah's been commissioned. And then we see what he says in verse 8.

I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am, send me. And he said, Go and say to these people, Keep on hearing but do not understand.

[8 : 27] Keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of his people dull and their eyes heavy and blind their eyes. Lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

And I said, How long, O Lord? And he said, Until cities lie in waste without inhabitant and houses without people and the land is a desert waste.

And the Lord moves people far away. And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And they were tenth to remain and it will be burned again like a terebinth or an oak.

Whose stump remains when it's felled. The holy seed is its stump. Now why would God say that to his people? Well the context of Isaiah is that the people of God have forsaken him.

Come back to Isaiah chapter 1. Back to Isaiah chapter 1. Just a couple of pages back. In the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

[9 : 41] Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth. The Lord has spoken. Children I have reared and brought up. But they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner.

And the donkey its master's crib. But Israel does not know. My people do not understand. Verse 4. Our sinful nation. Our people laden with iniquity.

Offspring of evildoers. Children who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They are utterly estranged.

It's Isaiah's job to pronounce a curse, if you like, upon the people of Israel. Keep on hearing but don't understand.

Keep on seeing but do not perceive. And then his commission is to make the heart of Israel dull, their ears heavy, blind their eyes.

[10 : 35] So they won't, so they will not, so they cannot see, cannot understand. They will not repent and not be healed. And how long is Isaiah to keep doing that?

Until the people experience the judgment of God for their rebellion against him. Until the people are cut off from the land of Israel and taken off to the land of Babylon. To captivity there.

The very nation of Israel, his chosen people, are getting what they ask for. They're getting the rebellion of God against them.

The Lord will make sure that they have no chance to repent. And so they cannot avoid the judgment that he's going to bring upon them. By the hand of the Babylonians.

They don't want to know God. They'll be cut off from him and off to Babylon. Now the shocking thing about Jesus' parables, which he's picking up, this thing quoting Isaiah 6, is he does it so that the people who hear them won't understand.

[11 : 46] Now that's a shock, isn't it? Got to be a shock. That Jesus comes to speak so that people won't understand.

He does it so that people will not perceive. He does it so that people will not turn and be forgiven. And who is he addressing?

The people of Israel, including the very leaders and teachers of Israel, is who he's teaching. And who is the holy seed? No one less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Now that's a shocking and confronting thing to hear. Jesus teaches in parables so that those on the outside cannot, will not, do not see, will not hear, will not repent.

Lest God turn and forgive them. Some who think they're on the inside are actually on the outside. And it requires God, in his mercy and mercy alone, to open up the eyes of the hearts to see.

[12 : 56] And so repent and believe that Jesus truly is their Messiah. And it's a gracious thing that he ever does that for anybody.

And now God himself is amongst them. God the Son, Jesus, is sowing the word of the kingdom of God. But the people fail to recognise him and are actually prevented from recognising him.

It's not that they don't see him, he's visible. They can see him front and centre in their face. It's not that they don't hear him speak. They hear the words, alright. But they fail to act on what they see and what they hear.

They won't really hear or else they would repent. And so you see in verse 10, he's alone with the 12. They're asking about the parables. And the good news is that these people that Jesus called himself are the insiders.

He'll explain the parable to them so that they can understand and hear. And as he explains it to them, we get to overhear as well. So that we can understand.

[14 : 09] Which makes it all the more urgent, doesn't it? That I hear what Jesus is saying as I overhear what he's teaching the insiders of those close to him.

And so the parables explain to them and to us. And the issue is going to be, here we go. The issue is going to be, will I hear?

Alright? I'll say it again. The issue is, will I hear? Okay. There's only one soil that is productive.

Just one. There's only one recipient that is commended. Just one. Out of the four soils, only one produces a crop.

And so let's get into it. Verse 14. The seed is the word. Right? That's the seed.

[15 : 21] Which begs the question, what is the word of God? At one level, it is the preaching of the kingdom of God. That Jesus is Lord.

That's what Jesus has been going around preaching. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news, the gospel. And the word of God is also the whole Bible. Old and New Testament.

We didn't have the New Testament when Jesus was around. So the word was at least the Old Testament. And the word of God is to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The very word of God is the very speech of God. And people's hearts are the landing ground for the seed.

The word which is sown, which is scattered on all, widely. See the verse 15. The word is sown in people.

[16 : 23] Verse 15. Have a look at it with me. 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.

So the heart is the landing ground for the seed in people. And there are people whose hearts are hardened pathways.

Their hearts are hard. They hear. But Satan immediately comes and takes the word away. It never has a chance to grow.

These people's hearts are like where people have walked the hard path. There's no, nothing can grow on there. Hear the Bible taught.

But pay no attention to what's heard. It's like going shopping for your wife, I think. She tells you you think you understand. You don't write it down.

[17 : 32] You get everything wrong. It goes in one ear and out the other. You should have got capsicum and you got cucumbers. You should have got broccoli and you got beans.

And wonder why she's upset when you get home. The truth is, some can hear the word of God, but not hear it. And not realise that it's the very words of life's.

And the devil snatches it away. Distracts you. The word doesn't find a place in our life. And so you go on living in utter ignorance towards God.

And the tragedy is that this may be the case for some in this room here today. People could be going to church for years and years, hearing the word of God, but never hearing it.

For it never finds a reception in the heart. For it never finds any more than just noise on the eardrums. Clearly these people, these soils, are not Christians.

[18 : 41] Yet, God might have mercy and we pray he does. And softens the heart because only he can do it. If that's you here today, wouldn't it be great if that changed today?

Second, the rocky soil. There are those who are the rocky soil. Verse 16 and 17. They receive the word of God immediately with joy. But, see, but.

The seed sprouts in the moist, warm, shallow soil. It's there. And it germinates quickly, but it's got nowhere to take root.

The heart is rocky ground. They might wear the Christian T-shirt. They might go and love the Christian talk. Sounds like they're lapping up the word of God. Might look like the religious person is supposed to look like.

We think that caricature, what they're supposed to look like. And yet have not drunk deeply of the grace of God. And sunk their spiritual roots deep into the scriptures. But, verse 17. As soon as it becomes difficult to stand by the word.

[19 : 48] Verse 17. 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. When the word of God causes strife. Or life to become difficult. When suffering comes. When persecution comes.

When attacks come on the person because of the word they hold on to. Immediately they wilt. Scorch. And are gone. When persecution comes.

Now there is falling away. Right? And it's the idea of actually coming to a downfall. The truth being exposed.

What's talking about here. The reality is that of unbelief in the first place. And so giving up on the word. It's not Christian belief. It's intellectual assent or whatever it is.

[20 : 50] But it's not saving faith. There's no perseverance on that person's behalf. On what basis can they call themselves Christians?

And then there is the thorny soil. Verse 18 to 19.

The thorny ground. The thorny ground. The hearts are a thorny field. And this cuts particularly close to the bone.

These people hear the word of God. They hear the gospel of God. They might hear the scriptures. Understand it. Believe it.

And actually start growing. Again they hear the word. But these people only grow so far. And they produce no fruit.

[21 : 45] Notice what happens here. The cares of the world. Right? Verse 19. 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. The cares of the world.

There are many. The deceitfulness of riches. The desires for other things. Enter in and choke the word.

And it proves unfruitful. The great peril is that without change in this relationship to worldly things. These people will not enter the kingdom of God. The weeds choke out the word.

I'll say it again. The weeds choke out the word. The cares of the world. Can choke out the word of God. When the world's pursuits take priority over the word of God.

[22 : 51] It's possible for good things. Right? Of the world to become our gods. And then strangle the life out of us. But notice the deceitfulness of wealth.

Now hear it loud and clear. Right? Did you get that word? Deceitful. It's not maybe deceitful. It is deceitful.

The deceitfulness of wealth. Wealth promises what it cannot deliver. I'll say it again. Wealth promises what it cannot deliver.

Wealth lies to us. I want to shock you. Wealth lies to us. Wealth promises happiness, security, power, prestige, freedom, life, joy, happiness.

That's what the power King Lord adds. That's what the power **■**u things. That's what the power among people are. Mark it. Don't they? Wealth is deceptive.

[24:10] Wealth can be a great and helpful servant. But it is certainly a terrible, terrible master. desires for other things things other than entering the kingdom of god things other than the glory of god actually enter in and choke the word there's no doubt about it and notice there's no fruit and if there's no fruit there's no salvation why i'll push it to you even harder if there's no fruit then there's no evidence of faith the desires of the world bring death towards god if there's no fruit on what basis can we call ourselves christians on what basis can we call ourselves followers of jesus and then verse 20 wouldn't this be great isn't this great to see and know the good soil verse 20 hearts of these people are like good soil they hear the word and they accept it and bear fruit might be a small crop might be a massive crop doesn't matter what matters is it's a crop that there's fruit 30 60 100 fold they believe the word they trust the word they rely on the word of god they live by the word of god hear the word of god read the word of god meditate over the word of god love the word of god they're not just hearers the word but doers of the word and we'll see all kinds of fruit it will be persevering in the faith when it's tough will stand firm in the truth through trials and persecution will receive the word particularly when it challenges my way of life when the cares of the world will not dominate our diaries the riches of the world will not determine our days the question though is what does it mean to bear fruit well let's have a think about kingdom fruit mineral two and you can rattle around this all morning over morning tea please do please do don't let the word of god just get taken away by the satan let me make a few questions uh suggestions about what the fruit looks like okay first of all character i've got a few c's or force the issue character we should be bearing fruit of the spirit galatians chapter 5 growing more like jesus love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control should be increasing and bearing more and more of that kind of thing that'll be evidence the word of god but come to 2 peter come to 2 peter chapter 1 with me please 2 peter chapter 1 it's towards the back of the bibles just after hebrews so you're almost there when you get revelation 2 peter chapter 1 2 peter chapter 1 i'm going to read out verses 3 to 8 here we go to 2 peter chapter 1 verses 3 to 8 and listen towards the verse 8 his divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness throughout the knowledge of him who calls us to his own glory and excellence by which he's granted us his very precious his precious and very great promises so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature and that's massive isn't it having escaped from the corruption that is in the world caused by sinful desire for this very reason here we go make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affliction and brotherly affection with love for if these qualities are yours and are increasing they are keeping you from being ineffective or

unfruitful in the knowledge of our lord jesus christ so it's not just a matter of just having a little bit of it once you've got it you keep more and more of it increasing in this fruit the christian character will be fruit will be different to the world about us completely different in our attitudes and our ambitions our lifestyle our language our money usage our choices everything will be different we're putting off the old self and putting on the new self as we hear about in colossians chapter 3 our christian character will be fruit another aspect of christian character is going to be charity i try to make a c word for here we go charity what i mean by that is good works the good works the good works that god has prepared for us to walk in ephesians chapter 2 and james talks about caring for the poor for the sick and for the lonely being the marks of true religion charity lovely to hear the barnabas aid program this morning let me encourage you and commend that to you and thirdly children i think we should be seeing children in fact we must be seeing children we should be seeing others come into the kingdom of god if not directly then indirectly by our gospel partnership in the body of christ we should be seeing more and more followers of jesus i was encouraged this week to hear another person come to faith through the good news course wouldn't it be wonderful if we had news of that every day every week twos and threes and fours and fives of people becoming followers of jesus through the good news course and others like it we should have a heart for the lost seeing others established in the kingdom of god as we turn and help others to understand the truth of the gospel will we see others move closer to jesus because of us we'll be opening up the word of god our own wasn't it wild to hear tim talk about i've got the word of god with our kids you know now if we're not seeing if you're not seeing these things of character not seeing these things of charity if you're not seeing these things of children as james says you say you have faith good let me see your deeds for faith without deeds is dead well that's the end of the parable of the sower but let me talk about the kingdom expectations because god records three more parables that follow the parable of the sower to be further illustrative i think of what he's trying to teach us firstly verses 21 25 those who hear it get more there you go there's my summary if we fail to hear the word of god we'll be not given more of the word of god and even what we have of the word of god will be taken away from us i'm pretty sure that's what verse 24 saying if we pay attention to what we hear and receive it recognizing for what it is measuring it esteeming it for what it is the precious powerful enduring saving word of god if we make that assessment we are good soil and we will be given more and more fruit to bear secondly there will be a harvest

verses 26 to 29 we see that the kingdom of god is like a man scatters seed all over the ground the seed grows seed really is productive it does grow the word of god grows somewhere it will the word of god grows and will produce a harvest god will do it it is unstoppable you cannot prevent the word of god doing what it goes out to do and one day the harvest will come and the grain is going to be brought in and those who have heard the word will be in the kingdom of god and those who don't finally from little things big things grow verse 30 to 32 the word of god might seem small puny weak fragile foolish and yet once planted it grows and grows and grows and eventually it will be the largest kingdom in the universe in the universe it will be cosmic in scale and jesus the son of god the son of man will bring it in and so the question remains and the question really is which kind of hearer am i what kind of soil am i let's pray our father in heaven we thank you for your word that we've heard this morning and we do pray that you would work in us that we would produce fruit in accordance with repentance that we would bear fruit in accordance with your word and that we might see the things of children being born into the family of god through us we might see the the charity of the word of god working in us and the good works you prepared in advance for us to walk in and you might we might see the character of christ formed for we pray in jesus name amen