

Listening or just hearing.

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[0 : 0 0] So this chapter that we're starting this morning, we're looking at for the next three weeks, chapter four. In it, we get the start, really, of where Jesus starts using parables to teach.

And the first parable that we see in Mark's Gospel is really all about how you listen to parables. Which is an interesting thing. And the big question that I suppose I want to start with this morning is, is there a difference?

Is there a difference between hearing and listening? I think we probably know that that's true. We all know, don't we, if someone is listening to you or if they're just hearing you.

Maybe you've experienced this. I know I have you talking to a friend or member of the family. And you can sort of tell. You might even ask them if you know them well enough. Did you just hear what I said?

I don't know about you, but I remember I frequently got told by my mum, go tidy your room. And mum would say, did you hear what I said?

[1 : 0 6] And the kid replies, maybe if you've got kids yourself, this is a common thing that you might hear back. Yes, I heard you. And the parent says, well, if you heard me, then why aren't you doing it?

Because what we're experiencing then is that they're hearing, but they're not actually listening. And there's a difference. Jesus in this passage, in this parable, is teaching them what it means to listen to him.

Not just to hear what he says. Because listening is more than just having your ears open and allowing the sound of someone's voice to register with your brain.

Listening is absorbing what someone is saying. And off the back of what you hear them say, it means that there is a response.

A response is needed if you're listening. Either you continue in conversation, that is a response. Or you take action if it's an instruction. Or if it's a warning, you might take advice.

[2 : 0 9] If you're really listening, it always governs a response. To listen properly, to listen properly, it actually takes humility. If you listen, and you don't just hear, then what you're saying to the person who's speaking is that they have something valuable, that's worth paying attention to.

That you have something that I value that you're saying. You're telling the person indirectly that you value them by not talking over them, by listening to them, not just hearing them.

And Jesus, in this passage, in this parable, he's actually teaching a parable about how to listen to his parables. About how to listen, in fact, to anything he says.

About how to listen to him and the message of the word, the gospel that he brings, the good news. And in this morning's chapters, we have two parables.

And the reason I've chosen them together is I think they're interconnected. They're about how you listen. Not just hearing. But also they're about what are the consequences of hearing without listening.

[3 : 18] Or what are the consequences of not taking the word to heart, of ignoring it. It's worth reminding ourselves that Jesus, he taught in parables.

We know that he tells us that in verse 2. He taught them many things by parables. Just a reminder for us all, just as a check, what is a parable. It is a story with a deeper meaning.

Jesus isn't the only person to use parables to teach throughout history. We've done that. You think Aesop's fables or the just so stories. And even modern day movies that, you know, they kind of work as a parable when they have a political message lurking in the background.

However, there is a difference with Jesus. Because often, I would say, if you think back to the majority of parables or fables, fables, they're designed to teach us some aspect of morality or earthly wisdom.

You think the hare and the tortoise. Hare speeds off on the race. He's miles ahead. He decides to have a nap before he finishes, whilst the tortoise slowly plods along.

[4 : 27] But he ends up winning. The moral lesson of the story is that you can be more successful by doing things slowly and steadily than by acting quickly and carelessly. But there's some truth to that.

But let's not make the mistake that this is what Jesus does in his parables. He's not, sometimes he does impart morality. But he's not, he's not there to impart mere morality.

Because his parables always talk of something deeper spiritually. They talk about who he is. They talk about the reality of who we are. And they talk about his kingdom.

The kingdom of God. Which means that the purpose of him teaching in parables is not just about us living better and being a better member of society. But they're actually there to warn us or to encourage us about what real spiritual life means.

But about really who he is. It's about the way that we live and the choices that we make about him. That's why he teaches in parables.

[5 : 34] Which brings us to thinking through this parable together. The first question that I want to ask, it comes at the verses that we're going to look at.

They come right in the middle of the section in between the parable and the explanation. And they come because you're not on your own. You might be thinking, well, why exactly does Jesus teach in parables then?

Because the disciples, it turns out, they're not quite clear on that themselves. You look with me. You see in verse 10. When he was alone, the twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.

And he tells them, the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. And here we get it. But to those on the outside, everything is said in parables.

So that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving. And ever hearing but never understanding. Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven. Now that might sound a little confusing to begin with.

[6 : 37] Didn't Jesus come so that people would hear him and be forgiven? I just want to be clear. What Jesus is not saying, by quoting Isaiah there. He's not saying that he doesn't want people to be forgiven.

Remember, we've just said that is why he came. He came with the offer of forgiveness to everyone who would put their trust in him. No, right here, he's telling us about the difference between people who really listen and people who just hear.

Or to put it another way, people who perceive, who see the story, but they don't perceive who's saying it and what they're saying. They don't take his warning seriously.

They don't listen. So they don't understand. And they don't perceive because they ignore. And we see Jesus' point is right.

If he talks in a parable where the message is hidden. If people really, really listen to him. And think deeply about what he's saying. He'll give understanding.

[7 : 41] But if you just hear him and ignore him. You won't perceive. You won't understand. You won't turn to him. And you won't be forgiven.

The word of God, if you do that, if you ignore, will actually make you less likely to receive forgiveness. Because your heart, the very fibre of your being, of who you are, will be hardened towards the one who offers you forgiveness.

So this parable about how you hear and listen is, it's really a warning about those who don't listen and those who, and an encouragement to those who will.

True listening, and as I said, is an act of humility. Whereas just hearing and ignoring is pride. Thinking that someone does, thinking that Jesus doesn't have something to say to you.

Listening is that positive action that requires the attentive posture that intimates to the person speaking that they are valued to say.

[8 : 39] There is a choice, isn't there? There's a choice when anyone is speaking to you. And there's a choice with, when Jesus speaks.

Whoever has ears, let him hear, Jesus says. In other words, what he means by that is, whoever wants to listen, to really take note, let him really listen and take note.

That's what he means, that the decision to do that is a choice. We all make choices, some of them don't matter. You know, what sauce are you going to put on your chips? Doesn't really matter, but some of them do.

Some of them matter. Will you drive on the right side of the road? Matters. Just choosing to listen to Jesus is a choice. Choosing to just hear him is a choice.

What is it that we do when Jesus speaks? Will we listen to him? What Jesus has to say is worth listening to, because it's more than good advice.

[9 : 42] He's there to warn those who listen. What we see is there's two reasons why he teaches. It functions on two ways. We've seen it in one sense.

It separates those who will listen from those who don't. But on another way, what it does is it encourages those who have listened already, and it warns those who will listen, who want to start listening.

We've seen Jesus' disciples have puzzled themselves about the parable. But the great thing is, in his word, we're privy. We get this amazing opportunity where we're privy to the explanation he gives them.

Because he goes on to explain the meaning of this parable. Now, for the sake of clarity, it's worth pointing out, reminding ourselves of each aspect. Because on first reading, the parable is quite complex.

There's only really three parts that we need to understand. The farmer, the seed, and the ground. Verse 14, we realize who the farmer is. It's Jesus himself. He's the farmer.

[10 : 46] He's spreading the seed. We know the seed. It is the word of God. The truth about who he is. The good news that he preaches. We know, verse 4, that Jesus scatters the seed liberally.

It's not like he just goes to one part and chucks a thousand seeds. He scatters the seed across the whole farmland. That is the intention. That the word of God goes to every corner of the land.

There is no patch of ground that he doesn't reach. So that's the first two. The farmer and the seed. But the third aspect, and where most of the attention is given, is the ground.

It's the ground. It's the different types of ground that represent the different types of people that hear the word. The path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and the good soil.

Now perhaps what's confusing as well here is on first glance, you would think four types of ground, four types of people. But the reality is there's not four types of people here.

[11 : 45] There's two. There's only two. The reason we know that is because at the end of the parable you can separate the ground into two categories. Those where the seed has grown and fruit is produced.

And those that don't grow and are fruitless. Jesus. Jesus is really challenging here. Because he's saying there's two types of people. Those who listen to the word and produce spiritual fruit.

And those that don't and are fruitless. It's very provocative. But we have to ask ourselves, what is his intention? Why is he being this provocative?

Why are three out of the four grounds fruitless? And the purpose there is that primarily he wants to warn. He wants to warn those people of what a fruitless life looks like.

And to listen to it. And so that's how we're going to break looking at this parable. By looking first at the three first types of ground that are fruitless.

[12 : 47] And then we'll go on to the last one. And the first three, as I said, they're there to warn. So what do we have? Those that are there to warn. The path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground.

It's picture language. Jesus is warning the crowd. He's warning that the bad grounds represent people who are tempted. But can't resist the temptation. Who can't resist the temptation.

The first temptation we see to the one group, the people. It's represented as the path. The temptation is that where people are tempted by the evil. By Satan, the devil.

You look at what happens when the seed, the word of God, lands on the path. Verse 4. The birds come and eat up the seed. Jesus says that it is Satan who comes and takes away the word.

Before the seed has even begun to take root, it is snatched. Spiritual evil. The devil is real. And he comes and takes away the seed. In John 8, Jesus gives Satan, the devil, a name.

[13 : 47] He calls him the father of lies. The tempter. And right from the beginning, that is what Satan does. He denies the promises of God made to Adam and Eve.

He suggests that God isn't good. That Jesus doesn't really love you. I want to save you. That's the lies that he will tell you today. And it's nonsense. It is evil and the work of evil.

And there are some who says, there are some who will, where the work of lies come to us, denying who Jesus is. There are some who will believe those lies.

And will be fruitless. That's what Jesus is saying. Second temptation we see to the second group. The people represented as the rocky ground.

Verse 5. There's not much soil. The seed shoots up quickly. But there's no root. And the seedling withers under the intensity of the sun. Some people, Jesus is saying, show early enthusiasm for the truth.

[14 : 49] But when heat comes in life. When heat comes from other people. Troubles. Trials. Maybe persecution. The response. I didn't sign up for this.

I like all the stuff about Jesus loving me. Forgiveness. He died for me. That God is for me and not against me. Brilliant. But the animosity from friends.

The strange looks. The ridicules. I'm inside. As we follow Jesus in the same way that he was hounded for who he said he was.

Followers of Jesus are also hounded for saying who he is. And that can be too much. For some people. It is tempting to say in those moments, is this worth it?

Is this worth it? And the world can tempt us to run away. The world can tempt us to run away by applying heat onto our lives where we say, is this worth it?

[15 : 50] This is the group where it's too much. The temptation is too much. Final temptation. So the third group. People are represented as the thorny ground.

Verse 7. There is soil there. But thorny weeds have grown. And so the seed takes root. But it is choked by the thorns.

Jesus explains, verse 19, that the thorns represent the worries of life. The deceitfulness of wealth. It's the desires for other things that come into our life. And it chokes the word that is heard.

Here the temptation comes not from the devil. It doesn't come from the world around us. But it comes from our sinful hearts. It is the pursuit, the desire of things as more important than God himself.

More important than God himself and the blessings he offers. It might be explained as when, and we do this too, don't we?

[16 : 52] When we're looking for a temporary fix. Maybe temporary satisfaction in this life. Believing the lie that we've believed in our hearts. That material wealth, earthly possessions and acceptance by other people will bring happiness.

It is where we turn a good thing, a good thing given to us by God, as more important than him.

We do it, there's lots of places we do that. You could pick any example. One issue I think that's prevalent amongst, particularly amongst Western societies, we do, you know, we do it with our health.

It is good to be healthy. It's really good to be healthy. But healthy eating and maintaining the right clothes size can turn into an obsession. When it becomes the thing that actually controls how we live, what we do and the decisions we make, we can become paralysed by people's opinions of us.

Being praised by others is a great encouragement. But if we live for the praise of others, or adversely fear negative opinions, it will control us.

[18 : 01] And these things can choke the word in us. Because we're living for that instead of what God says, the truth that he says. The third group is where that temptation is too much.

Where the desires of life choke the word. The fact that he actually does say is that he accepts you based on nothing that you will do. He accepts you whether you're healthy or not, he accepts you.

Where the other people's opinion, it doesn't matter. The only opinion actually that matters is the one of the Lord Jesus Christ. And his opinion of you never changes. He always accepts you. The third group is where that temptation is too much.

Jesus is saying that these are people who are like this and will grow up like this, becoming spiritually fruitless.

Now, it's not for me and it's not for any of us to identify which people are which ground. That's really, it's not for us to do that. But actually, it is right for us to inspect our own hearts and to hear the warning.

[19 : 16] To truly listen to what Jesus is saying and ask ourselves, is one of these grounds, mate? It is very confrontational.

And I know it feels unnerving. It feels unsettling. Maybe even alarming. And I'll let you in on a secret if you don't know this already.

Everyone is tempted by these things. Everyone. You're not, if you're tempted, don't think that you're a unique case. Because everyone is tempted by these three things.

And those temptations, at some point in life, will get the better of everyone. If you're feeling convicted by those questions, you're not on your own. In fact, you're just like everyone else.

We're always tempted by the devil, by the world, and by our sinful hearts. But this is a warning to listen to Jesus. He who has ears.

[20 : 17] Let him hear. Listen. Don't be ground where the words can't go. And if you needed any more clarity on what Jesus means, in the second parable, just look with me in verse 25.

Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. You know that with a plant. If a plant doesn't bear fruit, eventually that plant will die.

Even what it has will go. It's the warning. We're given lots in this life. Everything we have is a gift from the living God. There are pointers to him everywhere.

There is the message of the good news. And there is Jesus teaching us. Will we listen to him and take note? Don't be ground where the word can't go.

Okay. Okay. So that's the first group. The first three. The final one. The second group of people. This is there to encourage us.

[21 : 19] So we've been warned. But we need to be encouraged. And Jesus does that to those who hear. So that's the first group. The three types of ground. But the final ground is the good soil. The fruitful ground.

Verse 8. We see that the seed grows from good soil. And what do we see? It produces a crop. Some multiply in 30. Some 60. A hundred times.

And Jesus explains. That the seed sown on the good soil. Is when people hear the word. They hear what Jesus says. And they accept it.

And it produces a crop. It produces spiritual fruit in them. 30, 60. Or maybe a hundred times what was sown. When the seed falls on good soil. Everything that happens to this seed.

Is everything that doesn't happen with the other three. The word doesn't get taken away by sitting. The word doesn't die because of the heat of the world.

[22 : 14] And it doesn't get choked because of our desires. But it goes torn. And produces a yield. It bears fruit. It is believed and accepted.

Now in farming terminology. At the time when Jesus wrote this. A five fold yield. Was considered to be an amazing harvest.

A five fold yield. And a ten fold yield. Was considered the type of yield. That you might get once in a lifetime. That a ten fold yield. Would be so much fruit and grain.

That you wouldn't know what to do with it. But look what Jesus says. He says. He says 30. 60. A hundred fold. What he is saying.

About the spiritual fruit here. Is an unimaginable harvest. Beyond expectations. Beyond even the amount. In farming terminology. That you could even comprehend.

[23 : 14] Jesus is saying. If you really listen to me. And don't just hear me. If you hear my word. You listen to my teaching. My parables. If you take seriously. Who I am. That I'm your king. Who has given life to you.

In my name. You will go down deep. And you will be. Spiritually fruitful. In a way. You don't even. You don't even believe. It's possible. You will be so fruitful.

That other people. Will be feeding. Of the word. Of the life. Coming out of you. In ways that you can't even comprehend. The seed of the gospel.

That grows in you. Produces. More seed to be spread. And even more fruit to eat. It is exponential growth. And he fleshes it out. In verse 23. If anyone has ears to hear.

Let them hear. Consider carefully. What you hear. With the measure you use. It will be measured to you. And even more. Whoever has. Will be given.

[24 : 13] More. If you have. If you've listened. And heard. And accepted. And believed. You will grow. And your fruit will be more. You'll be given. More. With the measure you use.

What you hear. It will be measured back to you. I don't know if you've ever experienced that. If you've tried to grow something yourself. I don't. A few years back.

I tried growing. A couple of years back. This is. I've tried to grow some potatoes. A couple of years. Now. I'm no green fingers. But I've tried to do it twice. There was one year.

Where I had a bumper crop of potatoes. And at the time. Every time I dug down this. With every bit of soil. There seemed to be more and more. And I ended up with this huge box. When the plant grew well.

I ended up with more. Even in normal farming. It's never when you plant one seed. It only gives one back. That would be pretty disappointing. More is always given.

[25 : 11] There's always more than you started. There's always an increase. There is more to you. There is more to you. As a child of God. Than meets the eye.

If God is at work in you. There's more going on in you. By the power of his Holy Spirit. Than you actually realise. There is spiritual fruit. In your life. We read it in Galatians.

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. The Holy Spirit of God. Is at work in you. Growing you more. To be like his son.

And I see that in each of us. You know. God sees. The living God. Jesus Christ sees. In the middle of the night. When you're knackered. And your wee one has woken up again.

And you patiently walk them back to sleep. Asking God to bless them. And bless you. And your family. God is at work in you. That's family discipleship. Right there.

[26 : 08] At 2.30 in the morning. You know. God sees. The living God. Jesus Christ sees. When you're at work. And you have to sit. Through someone. Using Jesus name.

As a curse word. And maybe there's one time. When you spoke up. And asked somebody. Could they just not do that? That's Jesus Christ. Right there. At work.

And he sees. When you're suffering. Because you're knackered. From your daily job. But you turn up. On a Sunday morning. To. To. Put up. To. To help out. In a small church plant.

And it's hard work. Jesus Christ. Sees. Your faithfulness. And our faithfulness. In keeping going. That is spiritual fruit. He sees that.

30. 60. A hundredfold. Spiritual fruit. Unimaginable. This. This. This. Is here. To encourage us. That Jesus. Is a working.

[27 : 06] And so. As we come in for landing. We've been thinking. About what it really means. To listen. And not just. To hear. Which ground are you?

The path? The rocky ground? Thorny ground? Or the good soil? Will we listen to him? Today? Today? And just to finish off.

We remember this. There is. There is only two types of people. Two types of ground. God can't be fooled. The gift of the gab doesn't work with him. But the fruit you produce.

Will be seen by all. It will be. It is seen by him. The one who loves you. Verse 21. Nothing will be. This isn't something.

That you can pull the wool. Over someone's eyes. But it is something. It isn't something.
That you can get away with. But it is something. That God will praise you for.

[28 : 01] As he lifts you up. Because you. The good works. That he's given to his son. And the inheritance. That he promises. As you're an heir. A co-heir with Christ.

He promises that to the good soul. He promises that to those. Who will listen to him. And will take him. At his word. Let's pray together.

Almighty God. We do give you thanks. And praise. We do love you. And we do thank you.
That you speak to us. We pray that you would. We would know.

And love you. And that you would help us. To listen to you. And to take you. At your word.
Your name is great. Your heart is kind. Your nature. Is to.

Is to know and love you. So we pray for your blessing upon us. Now in Jesus name.
Amen.