

# Now Hear This!

## ICEBREAKER...

It's easy to not pay attention - or to act as if you're listening, and say "hmm" at all the right times. Can you think of a time you haven't bothered listening, and it's got you into hot water?

## Mark 4

As Mark begins to record the teaching of Jesus in more detail, it's important that we get things in perspective. The parables we'll be looking at in this study may seem familiar - but there's a twist. First, we need to look at some old testament background.

**Review:** Jesus, the Son of God, is visiting Israel, God's people, just as the Old Testament prophets promised. The thing the teachers of the law haven't noticed, though, is that the Old Testament promises are not all good news! When God comes to visit, he'll be looking for a righteousness that comes right from the heart - as Jesus puts it somewhere else, he's seeking people with "a hunger and thirst for righteousness." And if he doesn't find it among his people, there will be judgement for them. Israel expects Rome to cop God's wrath... but the real enemy is within!

## The Judgement of Ignorance!

In **Isaiah 6:9-10**, God gives the prophet Isaiah a peculiar message. What is he to tell the people of Israel?

What does it seem like God is doing?

What would be the result if Israel really listened, really saw, and really understood?

Isaiah asks God how long this will be the case (v11). What is God's response? (v11-13)

Israel went through all the destruction that God warns them about. The land was indeed left ruined and deserted - the people were sent far away, into exile in Assyria and Babylon. What glimmer of hope is there for an end to the time of "not seeing or listening"?

Somehow, there's going to be a "seed" left, that will regrow. It will be like a green shoot springing from the stump of an old tree. If Israel was "ever hearing but never understanding," and "ever seeing but never perceiving," what will need to CHANGE when the "shoot springs up"? What will the NEW people of God be like?

## Testing, Testing...

Read the parable of the sower in **Mark 4:1 to 20**.

Why is everything said in parables to "those on the outside"?

The Ultimate Test... When God comes to visit his people in the person of Jesus, will they be listening? That's the question that's going to determine who is part of the Kingdom and who isn't!

In the light of what we've just seen, Jesus doesn't use these parables so much as to "make things simple," but to test his listeners! This is no "easy ride" he's inviting us to come on - rather, it's a journey that involves serious listening, thinking, and commitment.

Read the parable of the sower again, together with the explanation Jesus gives to his disciples.

What is the seed? Who is the sower?

List all the threats to listening to the word and bearing fruit...

Can you think of ways in which trouble or persecution tempts you to fall away from Jesus?

Can you think of ways in which worries, wealth and worldly desires drag you away from being committed to the Word?

### **WARNING!**

Jesus says wealth is deceitful. That means, if you're having this problem, you won't THINK you have a problem! Maybe you could share some thoughts about this in your group, and come up with some strategies to avoid being deceived.

Jesus gives three ways people can hear the word unfruitfully. But on the positive side, what will it mean to be a fruitful listener?

### **More Parables of the Kingdom...**

Read the parables in verses 20 to 34.

a) In the short parable in verses 21 to 23, we usually think the light refers to us. But the prophet Isaiah often talks about a light that is one day going to dawn in Israel. Take a look at Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7. What is this light? What would Jesus be saying in the parable if he has these words of Isaiah in mind?

b) If this is the case, and it's important to listen to the words of Jesus, what is the point of the next parable, in verses 24-25?

c) According to the parable of the growing seed, and the parable of the mustard seed, what is involved in being part of the Kingdom?

d) What is the "work" of the Kingdom, according to these parables? How do we carry it on?

### **Finally...**

Think about how carefully YOU have listened to the word. Coming into the Kingdom means listening to Jesus, and seeing him for who he really is. Some did, some didn't. It's only those who grabbed hold of the words of Jesus who entered the kingdom. It's the same with us! The word is still doing its work of growing the Kingdom... so be careful how you listen!