



WEEK SIX

MARK 4:1-34

LIKE HE MIGHT NOT OWN THE PLACE?

So far in Mark, we've seen Jesus act like God himself, like God is described in the Old Testament. It's like he owns the place: Israel, demons, even people like us! By this stage in Mark, you might think everyone would acknowledge Jesus as their king. But they don't, especially not the Jewish religious leaders. So why not? What's the problem? Is it something lacking in Jesus himself?

READ MARK 4:1-25

1. Look at verses 3, 9, 15, 16, 18, 20 and 23. What's the big thing Jesus tells people to do here?

2. Look at verses 14-20. Why isn't the word of Jesus universally accepted? Does the fault lie in Jesus himself, the word he speaks, or elsewhere?

3. For each response to the word of Jesus in verses 14-20, describe in your own words what that looks like today:

Where seed fell

What that looks like today

"Along the path"

"Rocky ground"

"Among thorns"

"Good soil"

4. In verses 10-12 Jesus explains why he's now teaching in parables, i.e. riddles. Why does Jesus explain the riddles to his followers but not to anyone else? (see also verses 33-34)

SO THEY WON'T TURN AND BE FORGIVEN?

In verse 12 Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. After Israel had rejected many clear calls to turn from their sin and be forgiven (see e.g. Isaiah 1), in 6:9-13 God told Isaiah that now it was too late, punishment had to fall to purify the nation. What followed were several cycles of sin/punishment/persistent-impurity. So Isaiah 53 said that cycle will be broken only once one innocent servant of God one day takes the punishment everyone else deserves. Here in Mark, Israel has heard Jesus speak plainly: "Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15). But the majority has not listened. Starting in Mark 4, Jesus speaks in riddles to prevent them listening, so that ultimately he'll be executed by the nations' leaders, and at the cross the Isaiah 53 punishment would fall on Jesus himself.

5. Look at verse 25. For followers of Jesus, what do they "have" such that they "will be given more"? For people who won't follow Jesus, how is it that "even what they have will be taken away"?

- How is this illustrated by what happens to the different "soils"?

READ MARK 4:26-34

6. What do you think is the main point of these two parables, about the slowly growing seed and the tiny mustard seed?

- How could this point relate to the parable of the four soils?

7. Despite acting like he owns the place, like God himself, not everyone listened to Jesus. What range of reactions do you expect if you talk about Jesus?

8. What's the danger in expecting *all positive* reactions?

- What about expecting *all negative* reactions?

9. In practice, how could you find out what kind of "soil" your friends, family, neighbours, workmates are?

10. "Good soil" people believe the word they receive and "multiply" it, passing it on to others, not "hiding their lamp" but "putting it on its stand". Has this passage encouraged you to do that more? How so?

If Jesus is God himself - the king of God's kingdom - we might expect everyone to simply accept that. If so, we're headed for disappointment! We might want to see God's kingdom explode with growth, but even with Jesus himself the growth was slow. Of course, we mustn't make the opposite mistake either. Jesus really is the king of God's kingdom, so he's not going to suddenly lose his mojo! We're not going to be the last people to accept him. There are many, many more people who don't yet believe in Jesus but who one day will. Our response of gratitude and faithfulness to Jesus is to simply find those who are ready to hear about him. We'll do that by trying to lovingly and respectfully share the truth about Jesus, often throughout a long time of relationship with someone, and seeing what God eventually does with that in their hearts. Let's pray that we would do that and that we'd have the joy of seeing God grow his word in the people we know and love.