

## Reflection Guide

### Mark 4:1-20

#### Big Idea

Jesus' kingdom is unlike earthly kingdoms. It does not come with force and coercion, but with listening with humility to the gospel word. In this parable, Jesus compares the gospel with a seed and our hearts to 4 kinds of soil. Which soil are we most like? What are the implications? Are we in or out of Jesus' kingdom? Is the gospel still bearing fruit in our life? He gives us 3 warnings of how NOT to listen to His words and promises to cultivate our hearts to become good soil.

#### Jesus' Kingdom

Earthly kingdoms come by coercion and force. Think Alexander the Great, Persians, Romans. The modern West is used to peaceful transition of power, but that's recent phenomena. But how does the Kingdom of God come? Is it like this? No. The gospel of the kingdom comes in like a little seed.

There are many in this crowd Jesus is talking to that probably think they are in, when they are not. Why? Jesus' kingdom does not just involve external behavior change, it's also not just a quick emotional response. It requires humble listening, deep contemplation, penetrating truth, transformation. It's much harder to tell whether you are really in Jesus' kingdom. That's why we have this parable and the other warnings. How should we listen so we can enter?

**1. Beware of listening with a hard heart.** *And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.* It's possible to be in contact with the gospel, to be listening, perhaps your whole life, but it never makes a personal penetration. Is this just an intellectual exercise? You may know information, but have these ideas ever become real to you?

*Whitfield...Were you ever in all your life sorry for your sins? Could you ever say, My sins are gone over my head as a burden too heavy for me to bear? Did you ever experience any such thing as this? Did ever any such thing as this pass between God and your soul?*

You have heard that Jesus died for sins. But is your name on it? Did he die for **your** sins? Have you ever felt a time in your life, when hearing God's word, you were waking up from a dream, like everything before that was not quite as real as it is now?

**When was the first time you realized that this had become real to you?  
(not that everyone knows WHEN it became real)  
Take some time to remember this together.**

**2. Beware of listening with a shallow heart.** *4:16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And 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.* There are some in that crowd, today and maybe even here. We have an emotional response to the gospel. We have heard the promises of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life and it makes sense and it's exciting! Yet the word does not take root and these folks fall away.

What is this heat? **Persecution and Tribulation** "because of the word" can be anything we end up losing for the sake of following Jesus. Could be friends, reputation, a job, or things we just can't or don't enjoy any more because Jesus is meant to take their place, maybe it's a relationship that you have sunk your whole life into. And now that person in your life...is at odds with God. Jesus comes as says following me means that I replace \_\_\_\_\_ in your life. Here's what many say and what we may be tempted to say: What good is Jesus without these things? Hearts begin to shrink back. Why is this?

- Our joy was never really in Jesus, only in what he could give us
- What they worshipped before Jesus (and after Jesus) was only what they lost in the heat.

- Trust was never transferred from those things to Jesus
- They were only a sufferer that needed a solution, not a sinner that needed a savior
- These are those who expect Jesus to come into my kingdom, not I am going to his.

**What defining thing, person, idea, etc is at odds with God in your life?  
Which one of the reasons listed might be behind your resistance to Jesus taking its place?**

**3. Beware of listening with a divided heart** *4:18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 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.*

You can know the truth. You see the promises. You can see your sin. But still not sense the power of the word to change you. And if you cannot sense the power of God in your life you lack assurance. You never know for sure if you belong to Jesus or not. You are never at rest. This rest/assurance/joy IS the fruit of the gospel, rightly understood and trusted. This fruit: our assurance, our joy, our holiness, our contentment in Christ... can be all being choked out, strangled, gasping for breath.

Cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches, desires for "other" things... when they are competing with Christ for your affections... and winning. We can **feel** just as lost and miserable as we did without the gospel... it becomes to us... unfruitful.

**Which one of these soils can we relate to the most tonight?**

**How do we become good soil?**

You say, I have rocks and thorns in my heart. I've tried to get them out. I don't know what to do. Here's the thing. It's not the soil's job to pull all the stuff out. It's the gardener's. It's our job to receive the seed.

*1 Peter 1:23 - born again by the living and enduring word of God.*

*James 1:21- in humility receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls... 18 - its item word of truth, by which in the exercise of HIS will, he "brought us fourth"*

In Humility ask God to give us ears to hear and the gift of repentance. (if we are asking this... he already has!)

**He changes us at the deepest level of our desires.**

What is the real problem here? world, riches, other things? Are those things wrong and so we should avoid them at all costs? No. The problem is the seeds of those thorns. It's our **cares** for the world. It's our **desire** for riches and "other things". So, while behavior is a sin. It's not the root of the problem. We can change our behavior. We can stop working so much, eating so much, sleeping so much, sleeping around so much. But that's not going to remove the seed of the thorns: the desires. That's religion.

Religion - says If I obey, God will accept me and bless me, because now he owes me that. This person is given to quick, but external change. (remember the boulder kingdom?)

The gospel - says I accepted by God and blessed by God because of Jesus obedience. This love from God changes what we want, changes what we care about and what we desire. This kind of change is slower and internal.

**Why do we continually do things that we know in the end are harmful, both to our own souls and others? "Deceitfulness."** Riches, possessions, anything we could have or want are deceitful. They are telling our hearts lies. What's the lie? I can satisfy you, I can fulfill you. Your job lies to you, the woman

on your computer screen lies to you, the Philly Cheesesteak and fries on the menu lies to you. It says “I am the best for you right now.” And we believe it. And because we are hardwired to do what we think is best for us in the moment, we do it.

**Why do we bite on that?** We have forgotten how good God is and that HE IS BEST FOR US. We have stopped listening. We have forsaken the fountain of living water.

**But here is where the seed comes in.** The gospel tells us that Jesus has taken our sinful cares and desires, our misplaced worship and our affection. He took the penalty for all of that off us and put it on himself. In humility, he suffered that eternal penalty for us, being separated from eternal joy in God the Father. He did that so we could be reunited with eternal joy himself.

When that message that seed takes root in us, there is no more room for the cares of the world. Our deepest care, our deepest desire is God. When that roots in our heart, all we desire is him. We are so taken and satisfied in our souls that there is no more room for other desires, the lies become powerless. And we bear fruit.

The key here is that nothing will affect our **care** and **desire** for them unless our cares and desires are first transferred somewhere else.

**Remember what the defining person or thing or event is in your lie.**

**How is Jesus better than this thing for you?**

**How can you help each other see that Jesus is MORE real and satisfying?**

**How can this good news keep us from biting on the lies, the “deceitfulness” of these things?**