



Growth Group Questions
January 26, 2025
“Listening Matters”

CONTEXT:

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) Jesus used a very distinctive form of teaching – a parable – to help illustrate spiritual truths, as well as to push people to reflect on their own lives and consider what the kingdom of God was all about. It is interesting to note that the gospel of John contains no parables.

Jesus did not speak in parables in order to withhold truth. In quoting from Isaiah 6, Jesus is showing that parables are more like spiritual tests that separate those who understand and believe from those who do not. Just as Israel would not listen to God or Isaiah, so some of the people of Jesus’ day would also not listen to him about the arrival of the kingdom of God.

The parable begins in verse 3 and ends the same way in verse 9. In both verses Jesus says pay attention and listen carefully. The implication in the parable is that not everyone is going to “hear” what Jesus is saying. Though this parable is often called the Parable of the Sower, the emphasis seems to focus more on the condition of the different soils.

The word “secret” or “mystery” in verse 11 is found in the Gospels only here and in the same parables told in Matthew 13 and Luke 8. However, it appears twenty-one times in the apostle Paul’s writing and four times in Revelation. Paul talks about this “mystery/secret” as a truth that was not known in the past, and that cannot be known except by divine revelation recently revealed by God. The “revealed truth” that both Jesus and Paul are talking about is that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

Jesus describes four types of soils which relate to four spiritual conditions of people’s hearts. Discipleship rests on listening and hearing and obeying. Jesus warns there is a quick and superficial hearing that does not last. Verse 20 implies an ongoing hearing. We don’t just listen for God’s voice one time. Rather, it is a lifetime of listening. Hearing, receiving and bearing fruit are marks of disciples and for those who do listen and are obedient, there is a promise of a supernatural harvest.

SCRIPTURE:

Mark 4:1-20

¹ Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. 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!"

¹³ Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? ¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

Hosea 2:21-23

²¹ "In that day I will respond,"
declares the LORD—

"I will respond to the skies,
and they will respond to the earth;

²² and the earth will respond to the grain,
the new wine and the olive oil,
and they will respond to Jezreel.

²³ I will plant her for myself in the land;

I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.'
I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people';
and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

Isaiah 6:8-10

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

⁹ He said, “Go and tell this people:
“Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull and close their eyes.^[a]

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

John 12:24

²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Luke 11:28

²⁸ He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

QUESTIONS:

1. In Mark 4:10-20, Jesus explains to the disciples the parable that he told to the crowd in Mark 4:1-9. What does this parable challenge us to examine in our own lives?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when He said “Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”? (Mark 4:9)
3. We are told that the four different types of soil represent four different types of people. Do you think people have a choice as to what type of soil they are? Can the soil type change?
4. Pastor Paul said that we need to be “attentive listeners” to God. What does it mean to be an attentive listener?
5. Pastor Paul said that if each of us took away only one thing from this week’s sermon, he hoped it would be: “Jesus’ power is released in your life only by your being attentive.” What do you think he was saying to us?
6. What Bible verses do you believe speak to how God wants us to listen to Him?
7. What helps you to be a more attentive listener to Jesus?
8. Pastor Paul quoted Eugene Peterson as saying that the most important questions we should ask about any text is not “What does this mean?” but “What can I obey? As you read through Mark 4:1-20, how do you answer the question: “What can I obey?”

9. Think about your daily Bible study habits. What might change in your life if you asked yourself the question “What can I obey?” as part of your daily Bible reading?
10. Pastor Paul’s sermon focused Mark 4:1-20. As you read through the entire chapter during the week, was there anything else in Chapter 4 that particularly spoke to you?

PASTOR PAUL’S SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. What is distracting you from listening to Jesus and what can you do about it?
2. When can you set aside 15-30 minutes a day to simply listen to Jesus?