

Life Group Notes for the Week Beginning Sunday 23 January 2022

Living The Jesus Way – Parables of the Kingdom

Mark 4:1-34



Opening

Of all the parables that Jesus told, which means the most to you; which do you like best?

The Passage Mark 4:1-34

- Ask someone to read the whole passage out loud.
- Give a few moments for each person to read it through again in silence and ask that as they do so they select one word or phrase or verse that stands out for them; either it strikes them or puzzles them, encourages, challenges or disturbs them.
- Go round the group and ask each person to share their choice.

What effect do you think Jesus wanted to have on people's lives by telling the parable of the sower?

Many of the parables of the Kingdom were told to reconfigure people's expectations about the coming of God's Kingdom. What misguided views, held by His hearers, do you think Jesus was trying to correct?

Most of Jesus' Jewish hearers would be expecting the Kingdom to come as an explosive act of divine intervention to defeat Israel's enemies and establish Israel as the leading nation on earth, ushering in a time of unrivalled prosperity and a worldwide recognition of Israel's God as the only true God. "They believed that God's Kingdom would explode onto the world's stage in a blaze of glory" (Tom Wright).

What different view of the Kingdom do the parables in the passage present?

What does the "good soil" represent? What does the bumper harvest represent?

Why did Jesus speak in parables so much?

In verses 11-12 Jesus seems to be saying that He spoke in coded way through the parables so that the secret of the Kingdom of God is kept hidden from some people. Was He deliberately trying to exclude some people? What did He mean by saying this?

Mark 4:24-25 “has inspired all sorts of reflections, including a whole Shakespeare play *Measure for Measure*” (Tom Wright). What do you think Jesus meant?

Issues

One implication of the parable of the sower is that quite a few of those who hear the Word do not bear fruit (and are therefore not included in the Kingdom of God). This would have deeply scandalised Jesus’ Jewish hearers, who believed that they belonged to God’s Kingdom by virtue of being born a Jew!

What preconceptions about how God is supposed to work today might prevent us and others from welcoming God and His word?

Are there people today who assume that they qualify for membership of God’s Kingdom by virtue of something other than the hearing and the acceptance of God’s Word?

The use of parables in scripture is not restricted to the ministry of Jesus. Some of the Old Testament prophets spoke in parables. Can you think of any?

Nathan’s parable to King David following his affair with Bathsheba is a good example (2 Samuel 12:1-14). What effect did it have on David? Do you think it would have had such a powerful effect if Nathan had simply rebuked David in direct terms instead of doing it in terms of the story of the ewe lamb? What do you think this tells us about the parables of Jesus?

Do you think that preachers today should speak in parables?

Reflection

Do I have the sort of heart that hears and accepts the seed of God’s word and produces a bumper harvest? If not, what sort of gardening might I need to do?