

The Word of the King Mark 4:1-20
Christ Church Huntingdon Sunday 13th October 2019

3V9

- *PRAY= that we would have “ears to hear”.*
- Last week was our 9th wedding anniversary (pottery)
 - Got Emma this on Amazon.
 - Not as nice as the mug she gave me, but I think she likes it!
 - Just little thing... but more expensive next year!
 - Now here's reviews. 3x5 stars.
 - Others' opinions help me to be more confident about my purchase!
- We all know to be wary when reviews terrible.
 - Hydro Mousse liquid lawn- 72% 1 star.
 - Claims to renew dead grass totally fraudulent. Internet outcry!
- But suppose reviews more mixed.
 - This wifi extender.
 - The reviews are divided!
 - Would the spread of opinions have stopped you (not risk it), or would you have wanted to make your own decision
 - A mix, or esp negative comments can make you hesitate.
- Same with Christianity.
 - If you are making decision (as Jo did) can be faced with a problem.
 - The reviews are divided.
 - Billions of people in the world claim J is God's Son come to save.
 - But billions of people reject it.
 - Some even start out +ve then turn -ve.
 - In a divided world, it's another thing to be divided over.
 - Do you go with the opinions (reviews) of others, or decide J is God's King, and humanity's hope for a broken world?
- That's where this passage is so helpful.
 - J has faced lots +ve reception but lately particularly seen -ve rejection.
 - 12 disciples followed him – 5 stars
 - Religious leaders- 1 star thought from devil
 - Even family 2 stars- thought he was mad
 - What should we make of that?
 - This passage shows that a division doesn't take J by surprise
 - In fact it was always going to be like that,
 - and there are reasons why people reject.
 - And the fact that there is a spread of responses to Jesus shouldn't discourage us, whether Christians, or if we are weighing up Christianity for the first time.
- So I've called it “Don't the division discourage you”
 - And we will walk through the parable
 - See a surprise And draw out 2 lessons.

- For those of us who have been working through Mark's gospel recent weeks.
- 3 things we've seen before...
 - The **Lake**. Early days of ministry- Galilee.
 - The **Crowd**. See huge & growing crowds,
 - don't always know what they've come for.
 - This one so large has to teach from a boat natural amphitheatre,
 - and stop them touching him.
 - Good thing people didn't usually swim.
 - He's teaching. Jesus the preacher (his priority). What?....
 - **Parables**
 - Saw that in v23. Thought provoking stories with a meaning.
 - Normally think these are Sunday school stories using everyday language (birds, seed, field) to make it easier to understand.
 - Will see today, not just for kids, and not nec to make it simpler.
- Let's launch into the 4 parts of the story.

V3- seed. No tractors in those days, a sower would sow seed by scattering/broadcast.

1. V4. Path. Previous hardened ground from where people walk. Not likely. Birds.
2. V5-6. Rocky. Likely to get scorched hot middle eastern sun.
3. V7. Thorns, had to contend with others, and share soil with weeds.
4. V8. Good soil. Aha. That's what farmer wants. Ideal for perfect Hovis bread.

Then v9. Play on words- ears of corn. Ears of the listeners.

And That's it! No explanation to the others- that's the end of the sermon.

Our Sunday school theory that parables to make things simpler not ringing true.

Just left hanging with a few agricultural anecdotes!

- No wonder V10 ask for explanation. V10
- And J explains and first we get a lesson in general about parables.
 - V11-12
 - Hard verses
 - But here's surprise.
 - Parables aren't to make things easier to understand
 - Lessons put in everyday images so everyone can get it!
 - They have a sieve effect
 - They actually force the division.
 - Kind of riddles that leave us saying
 - Hmm- I don't get that- I'm not interested
 - Hmm- I don't get that- I want to know more.
 - In fact how we respond to the parables is indicative of how we respond to Jesus.
 - So difference between accepting and rejecting is not cleverness
 - It's a gift. Why we need to be so humble

- Doesn't Jesus want people to follow him?
 - Yes, but there's something about parables that take some thinking. They force you to stop and think and tease out the meaning.
 - Understanding the truth is not a right, or even something that clever people have.
 - But described by Jesus as a gift.
 - "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you".
 - "But to those on the outside everything is said in parables".
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- The cryptic nature of Jesus' teaching itself here sieves out those who are responding positively from those who are responding negatively
 - Parables divide! That's the surprise.
 - Either you are given the secret, because you come as it were longing for the gift of understanding.
 - Or you have already decided that Jesus is not for you, and so his teaching actually has a negative effect, as you rejecting the only lifeboat that there is., and they have the effect of stopping you believe.
 - It's a reminder that listening to the Bible is dangerous.
 - The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay.
 - Will be we hardened towards Jesus or softened towards him?
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- That leads us onto our first lesson...
 - **1) Be receptive in your listening.**
 - I've chosen that word "receptive" very carefully.
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- Not everyone gives Jesus a five star rating.
 - Some think he's a nice moral teacher, but not the Son of God.
 - Some think he's an inspirational example and leader, but not more
 - Some think he's mad, like his family do.
 - Some think he's bad, like the Pharisees do.
 - What does it take not just to perceive, but to see (v12)
 - Not just to hear but to understand and so turn and be forgiven?
 - It's not cleverness, it's a gift.
 - So will we be receptive?
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- **Can I speak to those who are not Christians today.** And we welcome people of every faith and no faith to be with us on a Sunday. We have set ourselves up to be a church where agnostics and atheists are MOST welcome, and can sit and listen and quietly disagree, and ask their questions.
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- We get it that not everyone agrees with Christianity straight away. It raises serious questions- ask them, to your Christian friend or family.

- But will your attitude be one of “Jesus, If you are there show me, I’m willing to look at the evidence and be convinced”. I’m willing to read, I’m willing to listen online. I have an **open mind**.
- Or is it **closed mind** “I’ve already made up my mind that you are not there”. A God man walking on the planet doesn’t happen.
- Be careful. Jesus predicts some will reject him,
 - and he’s not phased [as many around him do reject him: then and now]
 - “ever seeing but never perceiving”.
- **But it’s not just non-Christians who need to be receptive.**
 - Christians too can be rather lacking in humility when it comes to listening too.
 - We can be like the crowds sitting on a plane listening to the safety briefing, but it’s going in one ear, and out the other, possibly via our sermon notepad on the way,
 - Either because we think we’ve heard it before
 - Or because we know think we know it all already.
 - But do we know it all?
 - And do we live it all already? Has it filtered into every part of our lives?
 - Non-Christians can spot hypocrisy a mile off.
 - Ever Hearing but never understanding.
 - Be receptive in your listening!
 - “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear”.
- Well next Jesus goes back over the parable in private with the disciples to explain it to them. And what he teaches us, explains exactly why the amazon reviews of Jesus are so mixed. They were always going to be. There are reasons people reject Jesus.
- And I think this section gives us realism in our expectations of how people will react to the message, especially if we are in the business of trying to pass it onto others.
- So my second lesson as we work through the final few verses is

2) Be realistic in your sowing.

Let’s look at verses 13-20.

- V13. It’s going to take 3 years, and the death, resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit before they fully get it, but Jesus patiently starts them on that journey here.
- V14.
- V15 The path.
 - Some reject straight away. A well meaning Christian invites to church.
 - No thanks I’m not interested.
 - ▲At college studied geology. Xn year above, me in my year, year below.

- Put on a talk- what has God got to do with rocks.
 - Some came but straight away not interested. Not for me.
 - Perhaps it was just decided already.
 - Perhaps mind on other things.
 - Satan is thrilled.
 - Because he has robbed their thinking of the truth that can rescue them.
- V16 Rocky soil,
 - One friend from geology. Incredible interest.
 - In fact returned the stolen plates and from colleges/pubs around town
 - But didn't last. Now as far as I know.
 - Short time. Initial interest.
 - I think it was trouble, rather than persecution in his case.
 - Difficulty of living for Jesus. Short lived.
- V17 Thorny soil.
 - Fascinating worries of this life
 - Will I get a relationship/ Job/ family/ pay the bills. AND...
 - Deceitfulness of wealth.
 - WOW- sermon in that phrase alone. money tells lies.
 - I love this Pinocchio dollar bill.
 - Remember how when he lied nose grew.
 - Money tells us if you have me
 - I will give you happiness
 - I will buy you out of a problem
 - I will give you friends
 - I will make your name last forever.
 - But it's lies. Porky pies. Jesus is the saviour not money.
 - And sadly too many people start interested in Jesus (5 star review), but ultimately money or the desire for other things has choked the word, so much that there's no Christian faith left (unwittingly money gets 5 stars, and they forget about Jesus).
 - Don't reject Jesus because other people do-
 - There are reasons for that.
 - Don't reject him yourself. He really is the King.
 - And don't stop telling others when
 - Don't be discouraged by the division.
 - Jesus himself expected it to happen.
- But wonderfully, he also expected a harvest. Fruitfulness for the Sower.
- V20
- Some seed falls on good soil.
- What do they do? HEAR ACCEPT PRODUCE
- Friend at uni. Wasn't a Christian. But came to that talk. Listened.
- **Let's pray.** Help us be careful to make the right choice. And follow Jesus even if others reject. Amen.