

2:21-22 Analogy: Jesus is doing something *destructively new*

2:23-28 Jesus sits above the law of Moses

3:1-6 Teachers of the law reject the life-giver...

3:7-12 ...whom normal suffering people need

3:13-19 Jesus appoints twelve new pillars for 'Israel'

3:20-35 Jesus sets up a new house/family for those who humbly listen

3:20-21 Jesus' family, 'He is out of his mind'

3:22 Jewish teachers, 'He is evil'

3:23-29 Jesus, 'Satan wouldn't defeat himself!'

3:30 Jewish teachers, 'He is evil'

3:31-35 Jesus, 'You are out of my family'

#### 4:1-34 Expect God's kingdom to be insignificant until God makes it huge!

4:1-20 God's word receives many kinds of hearing, but only true hearers bear lasting fruit

4:1-9 Told through parable

4:10-12 Explained with Isaiah 6: God will blind many!

(will be relevant when we see **miracle** → **blindness** in the rest of Mark 4-8)

4:13-20 Parable explained literally

4:21-25 The kingdom of God will start hidden, but will end up visible

- In the meantime, listen with a large measure!

4:26-29 The kingdom of God's growth is beyond human control

- But humans can 'sow'

4:30-32 The kingdom of God will start tiny, and end up huge

4:33-34 Jesus' parables conceal from outsiders and reveal to his disciples

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <p><b>Define Kingdom of God</b></p> <p>King Jesus' saving rule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- now embodied in a small, and apparently insignificant church,</li><li>- but destined for eternal and glorious fullness</li></ul> |
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### Small group discussion questions

- 2:21-3:35
1. How persuaded are you that Mark is alluding to Exodus 24 as he writes about Jesus going up a mountain before appointing the Twelve?
  2. How exciting is this section where Jesus is shown to be *king of a new and humble Israel*?

- 4:1-34
3. How persuaded are you that *Kingdom of God* is King Jesus' saving rule:
    - now embodied in a small and apparently insignificant church,
    - but destined for eternal and glorious fullness?
  4. Is the *path* person (4:3,15) in the church, or an unchurched person? Why does this matter?

5. Fill in this table

|                                  | #1 path | #2 rocky places | #3 among thorns | #4 good soil |
|----------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Do they appear to be listening?  |         |                 |                 |              |
| Are they actually listening?     |         |                 |                 |              |
| What literally goes wrong/right? |         |                 |                 |              |

6. What do you make of the difference between *apparent* and *actual* listening in soils 2 and 3?
7. How do you feel about Jesus' refrain 'whoever has ears to hear, let them hear'?

### Getting back into the text

- 2:21-22
1. In context, how stern is Jesus' message in these verses?
- 2:23-28
2. What is the effect of Jesus asking the Pharisees, 'have you never read'?
  3. How does the theme of authority work in 2:27-28?
- 3:1-6
4. How does returning to a synagogue on another Sabbath intensify the conflict?
  5. What is the irony of Jesus' opponents refusing to answer a question about saving life, before leaving to plan his death?
- 3:7-12
6. What is the effect of placing this enormous, needy crowd immediately after the religious and political leaders decide to kill Jesus?
  7. How does the response of the unclean spirits contrast with the response of the Pharisees?
- 3:13-19
8. How persuaded are you that Mark is alluding to Exodus 24 as he writes about Jesus going up a mountain before appointing the Twelve?
- 3:20-35
9. What is the effect of placing the teachers' accusation inside the account of Jesus' family coming to restrain him?
  10. How might the accusations that Jesus is *out of his mind* and being *controlled by Satan* link?
  11. How does the repeated language of a 'house' prepare for Jesus' declaration about his new family?
  12. What is the effect of Jesus' biological family standing *outside*, while those listening to him sit *inside* with him?

- 4:1-20 13. How does the progression from the path, to shallow soil, to thorny soil make the apparent response to the word increasingly promising before it ultimately fails?
14. Why does the parable begin with the command ‘Listen!’ in 4:3 and end with ‘Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear’ in 4:9?
15. Some people think the lesson of the parable of the sower is to *sow widely*. How would you argue that we are the soils, not the sower?
16. What are the main lessons of the parable of the sower? Be specific.
17. Why might the fruitful soil produce differing amounts (*thirty, sixty and a hundred times*) rather than one uniform harvest?
18. How does the disciples’ need to ask for an explanation prevent us from equating *true hearing* with immediately understanding everything?
19. How does Mark use Isaiah 6:9-10?
20. In 4:13 Jesus asks his disciples, ‘Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?’ How might this verse function within the story?
- 4:21-25 21. What makes hiding a lamp under a bowl or bed absurd? How does that absurdity imply that the kingdom’s present hiddenness cannot be its final condition?
22. Why is the command ‘If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear’ repeated immediately after the promise that what is hidden will be revealed?
23. What is added by the stronger command in 4:24, ‘Consider carefully what you hear’? How is careful hearing different from merely being present?
24. Why does Jesus promise ‘even more’ to the person who listens with a large measure?
- 4:26-29 25. What is the effect of ‘whether he sleeps or gets up’ and ‘though he does not know how’ (4:27)?
26. To what extent does ‘all by itself’ (4:28) exclude human involvement in the kingdom of God’s growth?
27. Consider someone who sows the word of God but (a) cannot see results, and one who (b) has visible growth. How might this parable act as a leveller of these two disciples?
- 4:30-32 28. In what ways is the mustard seed analogy better than saying e.g. ‘The kingdom of God will start tiny, and end up huge’?
29. What is added by the image of birds nesting or resting in the plant’s shade?
- 4:33-34 30. Why might Mark have included 4:33 ‘with many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them’?

eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

<sup>17</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'

<sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?'

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. <sup>20</sup> But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

<sup>21</sup> 'No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.'

<sup>23</sup> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some ears of corn. <sup>24</sup> The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'

<sup>25</sup> He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? <sup>26</sup> In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.'

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'

**3** Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. <sup>2</sup> Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. <sup>3</sup> Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone.'

<sup>4</sup> Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent.

<sup>5</sup> He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. <sup>6</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

#### Isaiah 54:5-8

<sup>5</sup> For your Maker is your husband,  
the LORD of hosts is his name;  
and the Holy One of Israel  
is your Redeemer,  
the God of the whole earth he is called.  
<sup>6</sup> For the LORD has called you  
like a wife deserted  
and grieved in spirit,  
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,  
says your God.  
<sup>7</sup> For a brief moment I deserted you,  
but with great compassion  
I will gather you.  
<sup>8</sup> In overflowing anger for a moment  
I hid my face from you,  
but with everlasting love  
I will have compassion on you,"  
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

#### 1 Samuel 21:1-6

Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?"  
<sup>2</sup> And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place.  
<sup>3</sup> Now then, what do you have at hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." <sup>4</sup> And the priest answered David, "I have no common bread at hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women."  
<sup>5</sup> And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" <sup>6</sup> So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

**Exodus 24:3-8**

<sup>3</sup> Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." <sup>4</sup> And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." <sup>8</sup> And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

<sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. <sup>8</sup> When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. <sup>9</sup> Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. <sup>10</sup> For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. <sup>11</sup> Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' <sup>12</sup> But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> He appointed twelve<sup>a</sup> that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and to have authority to drive out demons. <sup>16</sup> These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); <sup>17</sup> James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder'), <sup>18</sup> Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family<sup>b</sup> heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'

<sup>22</sup> And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'

<sup>23</sup> So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. <sup>27</sup> In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. <sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.'

<sup>30</sup> He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit.'

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting round him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'

<sup>33</sup> 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked.

<sup>a</sup> Some manuscripts *twelve – designating them apostles –*

<sup>b</sup> Or *his associates*

<sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'

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

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'

<sup>10</sup> When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> 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 <sup>12</sup> so that,

“they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,  
and ever hearing but never understanding;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? <sup>14</sup> The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.'

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, 'Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? <sup>22</sup> For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

<sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.'

<sup>a</sup> Isaiah 6:9,10

<sup>24</sup> 'Consider carefully what you hear,' he continued. 'With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more. <sup>25</sup> Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.'

<sup>26</sup> He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> All by itself the soil produces corn – first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. <sup>29</sup> As soon as the corn is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'

<sup>30</sup> Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. <sup>32</sup> Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'

<sup>33</sup> With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup> He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

<sup>35</sup> That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' <sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'

<sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

<sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

<sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'

**5** They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.<sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup> When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. <sup>3</sup> This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. <sup>4</sup> For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

<sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. <sup>7</sup> He shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son

<sup>a</sup> Some manuscripts *Gadarenes*; other manuscripts *Gergesenes*