

Kingdom Pictures

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[0 : 00] Short time this morning to look back at Mark's Gospel chapter 4 and to unpack that a little bit for us It can only be a skimming through this chapter There's a lot in this chapter, but I just want to give an overall picture of the chapter and what's in the chapter Jesus, we've come to recognise in our own lives and also through scripture Jesus is King of Kings Looking at Mark 4 on page 1005 Jesus is King of Kings, but we've seen so far, if you've been here for the last number of weeks when we looked at the first three chapters We see what Mark's trying to do, he's trying to tell us that Jesus will not conform to the kind of Jesus sometimes we think he is And he's giving us a picture of the real Jesus and sometimes that's different from what we would expect Jesus to be like And here in this chapter what he's reminding us about Jesus is saying Jesus is the one who speaks and who commands us to listen

No one tells me what to do, no one tells me to do anything But yet here Jesus is saying I'm going to speak and I want you to listen, I command you to listen And that comes across throughout this chapter quite a lot, he who has ears to hear let him hear He starts the parable of the surrogate and listen and later on he says here again, consider carefully what you hear, listen to what you hear So he's telling them all the people that he's speaking to the importance of listening And there's two responses in the chapter to Jesus when he speaks and it may be similar to the responses we have The crowd who listened to Jesus when he gives the parables and he tells the stories, they just go home Oh it's a really nice parable, I loved the stories that guy was telling but it was time for my tea so I'm going home So they all went home and then there was the disciples who were following Jesus who trusted in Jesus And they went back to Jesus and said well are you going to explain what they mean?

Well we don't understand them, they're just stories to us but please explain them and so Jesus went on to explain his parables to them And we need to think about the kind of responses we have to Jesus and to his word to the Bible Are we a bit more like the crowd?

He's like well that was very nice, a little passage there, I heard a sermon, I went home from a tea Or are we saying well I don't understand that, I need to know more What's Jesus saying, what is he saying to me in my life and will I need to go and speak to him and pray to him and ask him for his guidance and wisdom So we have this chapter which tells us lots of things and Jesus is speaking in lots of different ways I just want to pick up two things from this chapter for ourselves today The first is that there's mystery about Jesus and about the gospel That might be a strange thing to say, chapter 4 and verse 11 When Jesus is explaining the parable, he's saying the secret of the kingdom of God or the mystery, it could be translated Mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you So he's saying that the gospel and me, not me but Jesus is saying I'm not necessarily what you expect

And sometimes you're going to need me to help to explain what the gospel is all about And we don't like that, the fact that there's mystery in the gospel We like everything to be really easy and you know as a preacher I really like things to be easy I want everybody to understand everything that I say about the Bible or as we try and teach and unpack the Bible We like things to be A, B and C, clear cut, to be manageable, to be reasonable And we really want to be in control of Jesus and if we're in control of something we need to understand it, don't we?

[3 : 59] I've just got a new iPhone, it's not bad it's taken me a month to mention that After years in the wilderness, years in the communicative wilderness I've gone right bang up today I've passed all these in between stages and I've gone straight to an iPhone, right to the top But I haven't a clue how to use it, I'd be as well with a brick And so you know, it's impossible to control something that you don't understand in any way And sometimes we like Jesus to be like that, we want to understand everything about him so we can control How we deal with him and how we think about

him and how we interact with him in our lives But Jesus is saying in this passage and in many other places in the Bible It's not just exactly as we think it is sometimes And there's mystery in the Gospel Sometimes even as Christians we think, I want the Gospel to be a certain way I want Jesus as a king for everybody to see, I want Christianity to be popular I want a church to be full, I want everyone to believe easily

I want it to be well known and loved in the media, I want it to be attractive and simple And that's the kind of Gospel we want and but Jesus says it's not always like that And it can't always be like that And it can't always be flash and dramatic And like hitting the screen so that everyone sees and everyone knows because that's not how he works And he gives us parables in this chapter They explain a little bit about that and he says the kingdom, because he's talking about the kingdom of God That is those who belong to God, those who are part of the kingdom of God, those who are Christians And the kingdom of God of whom he is the king He says it comes quietly That's what these parables are about He gives probably the best known parable if we're Christians We're brought up in the church, we know the parable of the sower really well It's one of the most famous parables and he says He told them many things about the kingdom And then we're told that he's explaining what the kingdom of God is like

And then he goes on later when he talks about the parable of the growing seed The kingdom of God is like this Verse 30, what should we say the kingdom of God is like? It comes quietly And isn't that already been the picture?

It's like the sowing of seed How boring And how undramatic Imagine the headlines, the 6 o'clock news, man goes out, sows some seed Oh well boy, that's interesting You know, I see a guy going past, putting seed in the ground Not very interesting Not very dramatic, very everyday And that's what we're already seeing about Jesus He's a different kind of Messiah in these chapters He tells the guys who are healers, shh, don't tell anyone He comes quietly on the scene just in among the crowd He's baptised with the other people It's not a kind of king of kings that we're expecting That we're looking for And now he tells us that the kingdom comes quietly It's everyday sowing seed That's how God works Sowing seed, it doesn't turn heads, does it?

It's kind of dull It's un-exciting, it's un-remarkable And very often our work as Christians Our lives as Christians Our sharing of the gospel as Christians Is very un-remarkable and dull and ordinary It's just about living everyday as a Christian Like the girls in Derridun or ourselves here That we're just living out what it means to be a Christian In very un-remarkable, ordinary situations We don't hit the headlines, it's not hugely dramatic People aren't getting miraculously healed all over the place It's just very ordinary as we share Jesus Christ It's like we're living our Christian lives At one level under the radar Because God's ways are different It's not all about drama And it's not all about dramatic media-centered events That will turn people's hearts upside down It's just very everyday But it does involve unseen miracles, doesn't it?

[8 : 08] When Jesus Christ works in our lives There are miracles And often there are unseen miracles It's just like the seed, you know the seed goes into the ground It's very dull It just goes into the ground But there's something happening, isn't there?

It's germinating, it kind of dies And then it germinates And it begins to grow a little bit And eventually breaks the surface And then it grows more And then there's fruit and it's fantastic I'm not a farmer, I'm not a gardener in any sense Really whatsoever The only two things I've ever grown in my life Are potatoes and raspberries And you can see, you know, you could sometimes You get a photo of your garden in the winter Where the raspberries were And it's just kind of really empty And there's just wee thin spindly bits of wood Sticking up and tied to a wire But then you get a summer picture When the fruit is there And it's masses of green And you can't see any of the wee tiny wee sticks And there's lumps of, good technical term Lumps of raspberries there And there's all fruit And it's the same with potatoes, isn't it?

To get a winter photograph, it's just a bare ground And then when it's time to harvest the potatoes There's just all these shaws are there Really beautiful And you dig up and there's a lovely white Potatoes in the ground All from nothing And so miracles have happened When the seed is sown And that also is a picture These seed sowing pictures That are given in this chapter That's a picture also of what's happening in our hearts Is that unseen miracles are happening Amazing things are happening Jesus is transforming our hearts Softening our hearts, changing our hearts Making them more like himself as we believe And as we trust in him We're being transformed It's phenomenal We do bear fruit We do bear fruit Miracles are happening But it's unseen, it's slightly different And

the whole way of Jesus is very different, isn't it?

The kingdom is a different way Who would have thought that this king of kings Reigns by a path of rejection Crucifixion People dying to sin And being transformed from their hearts out So the kingdom that Jesus talks about It's a mystery It doesn't come the way we think The gospel doesn't grow the way we think Churches don't grow the way we would want Necessarily or think It's not a marketing ploy that we can engage We can't sell the gospel like we would sell Fresh orange juice It's not like that Jesus saying there's mystery My way's different And he also says it takes time, doesn't it?

Isn't that in the picture of the seed and the sower And in the different pictures of the seed And the sower In this chapter in verse 26 as well Where he talks about the seed You know, the farmer puts the seed in And he just goes to bed And then he gets up and goes to bed And gets up in the night and day Eventually the harvest comes And it takes time And in a relationship with Jesus As Christians Aren't we often looking all the time As kingdom Members of His kingdom Aren't we always looking for instant results I prayed yesterday And I want the answer today And if he doesn't answer today He's not hearing my prayers He's not listening And we demand an instant answer Instant holiness Multiple conversions I shared the gospel with my friend Why don't they believe today And we're always looking For this instant and dramatic result And Jesus says, look, it's my work I'm doing the work

[11:54] You're involved in sowing the seed But I'm changing people's hearts Sometimes that takes time You sow the seed You tell people about Jesus You share Jesus in your life But leave the rest to me Leave the growing to me And that's hugely significant And it's hugely significant In the life of faith And we recognize that faith is something That takes time We want all that wanted to be Easy to be a Christian from day one We want to understand everything From day one And he says, look, it takes patience It takes perseverance It takes perspective People say, well, what are you doing In St. Columbus?

What's happening with the church plan And Brunson? What's that all about? We have an A to Z strategy It's going to take time God might bless it God might not But we're sowing the seed We're going out and planting churches We're going out and trying to spread the gospel It's going to take time And that's so counter-cultural for us, isn't it?

Where everything's instant Where everything is for today And Jesus says, look, there will be a harvest My work will be done You will change But it might not be my way It might not be the way that I You expect me to work The kingdom will come And within that mystery I think there's also the truth that belief Isn't easy Believing in Jesus isn't easy Now we would love it to be, wouldn't it? We'd love this place to be filled with people And the first thing I would want to say to them is Oh, please come back Because believing in Jesus is really easy It's great That would be what the marketing director would say, wouldn't it? Come on back, yeah, it's great It's fantastic being a Christian And to believe is easy But Jesus says Belief is right And belief is good But belief isn't easy And he speaks about the offence of the word, doesn't he?

In this great and famous parable of the sower Where he says that the word gets sown It goes thrown out And there's different reactions to the word People react and respond differently And the word of God convicts us in our hearts Sometimes we react positively But then when trouble comes We just give it up That's the point Or we like it for a little while And we like the company But then the pursuit of wealth As Jesus says in this chapter When he talks about the parable Or our desire for other things Or the worries of life They just take over Sometimes we don't listen at all And Jesus says That's a piece of nonsense We don't like when God says My ways are not your ways We say, but I want them to be my ways I want to control you, Jesus I want to be in that position Where you're small and manageable And I can stick you in my back pocket And he says, no, I'm the God of the universe And believing isn't easy And there's opposition to our beliefs, isn't there?

[15:03] That is spoken of in this parable of the sower In the early verses of chapter 4 And even the parables themselves How often have we stood up and said Jesus spoke in parables in stories Because he wanted to make things easy Well, that's true and not true Because the parables were not simple For people who didn't hear the explanations Because the parables in some ways Concealed the truth of what Jesus was coming to do And that was Jesus' choice That's what is spoken about in verse 11 But those in the outside, everything is said in parables And that difficult verse from Isaiah Which says that people wouldn't believe Because things were told in part They wouldn't bother to find out Now, this quote that's taken from Isaiah Was when Isaiah went out with

the gospel The good news telling us That the parables were not simple But they were just telling the gospel The good news telling the people to turn back to God And they had rebelled against them As God's own people for so long

That by the time Isaiah was there They just, they really didn't want to hear What he had to say And it could almost be translated So that they may not see But may not perceive here But may not understand Because the last thing they want to do Is turn and be forgiven So Jesus told parables And a lot of people in the crowds They said, well, it was a nice story I liked that story about the farmer They went home for their tea They didn't bother to find Well, what is Jesus saying?

He's doing, did the crowds go Because they wanted to learn about becoming believers Or did they like the miracles? Did they hope that he would turn bread Water into wine Or that he would make bread enough For a whole crowd of 5,000 Or what he would do to raise someone from the dead Is that what they were looking for?

Well, when he told stories They just went home Crowd went home And Jesus saying, even as he tells This parable of the sower He's saying, that's what happens When the word is preached That's what happens when we read the Bible When we hear about Jesus We know there's a spiritual enemy Satan who takes the seed down Who takes the seed sometimes away Immediately People say, no, that's rubbish And they just reject it How sad that is For us to appreciate And then we know that Some listen But then fade away Not everyone believes There's opposition within our own heart To the Gospel There's opposition from outside In society, there's opposition Spiritually from the evil one Not everyone believes That's hard, isn't it?

That's a difficult truth But what Jesus is telling us Is that there will be a harvest And that we do have to recognize The opposition sometimes That is in our own hearts to believing And examine our own hearts And think about the way we listen How are you listening today To the Gospel?

[18 : 13] It's not really about me today I have my own responsibility Before God to listen When I'm preparing this word for me I have to listen to what God's saying But you also have a responsibility How are you listening?

How do you respond to Jesus? What kind of soil If you're using that picture, that parable What kind of soil is the word of God Going into today in your heart? Are you pleased with the message?

Do you recognize who Jesus is? Do you believe and follow him? When you don't understand it Are you going to ask him to explain the Gospel to you more Through prayer and through reading the Bible even further Or do you find that there's other things That you desire more There's other things that are more important That take away the Gospel from your heart Or when difficulties come Have you decided, well, Jesus can't really love me Because difficulties have come He says, that's not the reality That's not true How are we listening to the word of God?

How do you listen? How do we listen when the seed is sown? So there's this great challenge in the chapter And I've only very briefly been able to skim that That there's mystery about Jesus That we don't control him That he is the King of Kings That he has his Gospel He knows the kind of responses there are And he knows that we need to We need to go to him And ask him to prepare our hearts So that we will listen in the right way So that our hearts are good soil So that church And I'm going to say this because I'm always saying it And you're fed up with me saying that Church is not something passive That you just come to be entertained Or not as the case may be But it's active in that you have to have a prepared heart As I have to We have to be coming receptive and ready And listening for what God is saying And what his challenge is in our lives Because as the verse says He knows our hearts, you know He knows every single one of us today As we've come in

And he's challenging us to consider him as Lord And God And consider him as the King of Kings Who becomes the King of Kings By dying on a cross for our sins Isn't that amazing?

[20 : 26] Whoever would have thought Random homeless Jew 2,000 years ago Dying on a Roman cross Was to be the saviour of the world Is that the kind of King of Kings we were expecting? As God who went to the cross Nailed to the cross And rose again on the third day To prove his victory over sin and death and the grave That's the kind of saviour It's not a populist saviour It's not one we'll hear about in the nightclubs It's not one that's really popular with the media It's not one that people like to hear about Because it does require that recognition of our own need And of our own sin And our own lostness So that's one And just very briefly There's a mystery about Jesus That comes across in this passage And I hope that we'll be able to maybe talk a bit more detail About these things in the city groups this week I haven't had much time today But the other thing One of

the other things that comes out here Is that we're slow and fearful Learners from Jesus And that's a great encouragement in many ways And in many ways, there are many miracles

See at the end of the chapter There's that great story of Jesus coming in the storm Jesus said, the disciples say to him You know Don't you care if we drown? And Jesus said Why are you so afraid? Why do you have little faith? They were terrified even the winds and the waves would be They were slow and fearful learners They had great privileges Even in this chapter They had the mystery of the gospel They explained them what the parables meant And was teaching them That this mystery, this communication of truth By Jesus revealing it Was something that they were sharing They'd seen his miracles They'd heard his teaching, they were with him But the minute they got into the boat And the minute there was a storm in the boat They were full of doubt And they were full of fear And they said, Jesus, you really don't care for me You don't care for us, do you?

This picture is, it's a picture of ourselves as well And a picture of how Jesus deals with us Jesus loved them He cared for them He stayed with them Despite their failings, despite their denials Despite the fact that they turned their backs on them And ran away from them He cared for them And he loved them And he stuck with them Right through to beyond the cross And the resurrection And he met up with them again And he said, you're going to be the ones that will turn this world Upside down with the gospel And that is brilliant, isn't it?

We're afraid, we're fearful We're struggling, we're full of doubt And we struggle to stay as Christians And it's a battle for us And we're like the disciples We throw the question that Jesus You don't really care about us, do you?

[23 : 14] Things are miserable, why you don't care? And Jesus sticks with us Jesus is always there And we will be used by Jesus To bear his harvest And the response of us Is to be the response of the disciples The disciples were the ones who in this chapter At the end of the parable of the sword They came to Jesus And asked him to explain The parable That's the response Jesus wants from us I know we're full of doubt I know we're full of fear and questions But he wants us to respond in the same way Genius it is Genius I can have a great weight on my shoulder For every one of you As sheep Of which I'm an under shepherd As the ones that I passed to And I can cry tears for you when things go badly And I can weep that I'm unable to change your heart

Because I'm aware that I'm unable to change my own But the genius of the gospel Is that I can commit you to Jesus And ask you to come to Jesus In the same way that I must come to Jesus And we pray for that understanding To be disciples who rely on And who go to Jesus Christ To understand and to learn and to know And that's going to take time It's going to take effort It's a relationship with Jesus Christ That we must work at If our hearts are to be good soil That will receive the word of God And receive the person of Jesus And bear fruit for Jesus Christ Then in an ongoing way We've got a responsibility And we're going to be able to Have a responsibility To deal with the things that separate us From Jesus that's spoken about in this parable The deceitfulness of riches The desires, the idols that we put in our hearts Spiritually to be protected from Satan Who keeps us from believing

And recognize all these things And have our passion for Jesus Christ In our hearts And there's a harvest guaranteed So to people who come to Jesus We listen to him This whole chapter is about listening To Jesus Come to Jesus and listen And come to Jesus and learn Learn from what he says about your own heart here Learn about how you respond Learn about what he says about the kingdom Learn what he says about the harvest Learn what he says about trouble And about persecution and opposition And spiritual opposition And desires of our hearts Learn what he says about fear And learn what he says about doubt And allow him to change your heart So is it going to be That we're going to be part of the crowd Or are we going to be like his disciples You choose You choose today what it's going to be It's going to be part of the crowd Who will walk out, go for my tea It's going to be part of the disciples Who come back to Jesus and say

What do you mean? How can I follow you By your great grace And we thank you it's all by his grace And the gift that he gives us Is absolutely full and free For what he's done on the cross for us Amen