

Series - On Your Mark!

Date/s - 15 April 2018

Topic - People of the Kingdom (Mark 4:1-34)

Speaker/s - Pastor Ben KC Lee

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for icebreakers suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "Reward", "King Of My Heart", "I Will Exalt", "Stay Amazed", "I Have A Song" or "Great Are You Lord".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, members will:

1. Understand the meaning of Jesus' parables, and
2. Commit to live faithfully as people of the Kingdom.

Word [45 min]

Pastor Ben continues where Pastor Ernie left off last week with his question of who we are as believers – *Fans, Followers or Disciples* (Mark 3). Likewise, Pastor Ben reminds us this week, we are also *People of The Kingdom*, as he examines Mark 4:1-34, where Jesus uses four different parables to teach the Kingdom of God. Parables are short instructive stories that use everyday word pictures to illustrate spiritual truths. The Kingdom of God is not a geographical place – it is wherever Jesus rules. If the Kingdom of God is in our hearts, it is where He rules and changes us. Wherever the Kingdom of God is – in the family, in the marketplace, in the government or in schools – transformation takes place.

Quoting from Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12, Jesus' intention with the parables is to weed out those who "have ears but do not hear," and those who "hear and obey." Speaking to the crowd this way, Jesus is drawing a line between those who belong to Him and those who are there just for His miracles or physical healings. In one form or another, the word "hear" appears 13 times in Mark 4:1-34. Jesus is speaking about hearing with spiritual discernment. To "hear" spiritual truth means to understand it and to obey it. This is the attitude we need when hearing God's Word. *Be careful how you hear* (vv. 24-25).

When we spend time with Jesus, we are influenced *by* Him, and when He sends us out, we are influential *for* Him. Jesus' ultimate purpose is to transform our hearts to match the character of God. What then are the characteristics of the people of the Kingdom?

The people of the Kingdom always...**1. Take Heed What We Hear** (vv.1-20)

The Parable of the Soils describes what becomes of the seed that is sown in four different types of soil. The seed is the good news of the Gospel. The soils are the four different heart attitudes that respond to God's Word in various ways. The different soils also represent us believers at different times in our lives. The point of this parable is that a person's reception of God's Word is determined by the condition of his heart. As people of the Kingdom, we are to:

- a. Cultivate an Open Heart (vv. 4, 15)
Do not be like *the hardened path*, which is a *defensive heart*
- b. Allocate Time to Listen (vv. 5-6, 16-17)
Do not be like *the shallow soil*, which is a *superficial heart*

- c. Eliminate Distractions (vv. 7, 18-19)
Do not be like *the thorny soil*, which is a *preoccupied heart*
- d. Cooperate with What God Says (vv. 8-9, 20)
Be like *the good soil*, which is a *responsive heart* (see also James 1:22,25).

2. Shine the Light (vv.21-25)

Consequently, a “*good soil*” person will reflect the light of Jesus to the world. He becomes a lamp placed on a stand, not under a bowl or a bed. He becomes a light-bearer, shining God’s love into dark places. The good news of the Gospel is not mere information. It is God’s revelation for a broken world. As people of the Kingdom, we are to:

- a. Manifest the Character of God
Do not let the box of disobedience or resentment cover the light of Christ in us. Like the saints painted on a stained glass window, we let His light shine through us. Our lives must be so transparent that we are ablaze with His light. (see also Matthew 5:14, 16)
- b. Reap What You Sow
When we love God’s truth and obey the revelation already given us, we will receive even more to do greater works in the Kingdom. But if we are not consistent with living out God’s truth, what little we have will be taken away. When we exercise our spiritual gifts and abilities, God increases our effectiveness. Like a muscle in our body, *if we don’t use it, we lose it*.

3. Trust the Seed (vv. 26-34)

To reap what we sow, we must trust the seed we are sowing. In two similar parables, Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as a seed – the *Kingdom seed* (vv. 26-29) and the *mustard seed* (vv. 30-34). Pastor Ben defines these seeds as the Gospel and the Word of God. Will we trust God to do what He does with the seed we sow? As people of the Kingdom, we are to:

- a. Practice Godly Patience
As we plant the *Kingdom seed*, we take the long-term perspective and not rush the bearing of fruit through our own strength or cleverness. Our part is to keep sowing daily despite not seeing any result, while God’s part is to make the Kingdom grow. *We sow, He saves*. (see also Galatians 6:9)
- b. Trust in God’s Promises
The *mustard seed* reminds us that while the Kingdom of God may have a tiny beginning, it has an enormous end – as demonstrated by Jesus’ 12 disciples. Two modern examples cited by Pastor Ben are Rick Seaward and Ravi Zacharias. We are not discouraged by any apparent lack of response. Instead, we continue to scatter seed far and wide. *Trust God’s Word to do God’s work*.

Discussion Questions

1. **Mark chapter 4 expands from the passage in Mark 3 last week where Jesus defines a true disciple as someone who does the will of the Father. How has last week been for you in regards to doing the will of the Father? Were there situations in which you believed you have participated in doing God’s will?** [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: *This is a recap for members to share what doing God’s will looks like from their personal perspectives. Encourage members to share encounters, activities or moments where God has used them “to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18). Point out that our shared experiences will edify and encourage one another as we aspire to be true disciples of Christ.*

2. **Read Mark 4:1-12.** Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Since we all have ears, how are you responding to the spiritual truth you are hearing right now? Does any of the heart conditions (the soils in Jesus’ parable) prevent you from hearing God’s Word and putting it into practice? [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: A relate and reflect question. Jesus is pointing out that even though we hear, we may not want to listen. There is a difference between having ears and having “ears to hear.” Jesus’ parable of the soils contrasts four types of hearers: those who let the Word of God pass straight through their ears and those who truly listen and seek understanding.

When Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” He is calling for people to pay careful heed. It’s another way of saying, “Listen up! Pay close attention!” Speaking in parables is one way in which Jesus seeks to gain the attention of the crowds. Some do hear the Word, but they may not let it bear fruit, for reasons listed below.

The three heart conditions that hinder us from “having ears to hear” are:

- i) the hardened path – a defensive heart that is indifferent, critical and unrepentant, and which Satan snatches away, and it remains unsaved.
- ii) the shallow soil – a superficial heart that is excited by the Gospel on first hearing, but does not allow the revelation to sink in and grow roots. At the first sign of trial and persecution, it falls away.
- iii) the thorny soil – a preoccupied heart that is crowded with the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for more. Too busy making a living and not making a life, it remains unfruitful.

The fourth and last soil is the only kind Jesus commends. The good soil – soil that produces a bountiful crop – receives and understands Jesus’ words, and becomes fruitful in the Kingdom of God. To be fruitful means to be obedient to God in everything we do. The different soils also represent us believers at different times of our lives. Members are encouraged to ask ourselves what barriers are preventing us from hearing God’s Word and putting it into practice during this season of our lives. Leaders can also ask members to ponder on what God is looking for in our lives, and whether God’s Word is having a transformative impact, producing the fruit in line with God’s calling for us!

3. **Read Mark 4:21-34.** From soil to lamp to seed, Jesus continues to paint a beautiful picture of God’s Kingdom in His parables: the light that shines unhidden, and the seed that continues to be sowed despite unobserved results. What is one or two practical steps you can take to *shine the light* for Jesus and *sow the seed* of the Gospel? [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: This is a response question. The only purpose for the existence of a lamp is to manifest light. Challenge members to boldly reflect Christ in them to others and not hide Him under the cover of disobedience, fear or difficulties. Encourage each member to continue to sow patiently, and trusting God’s promise to bring in the harvest in His time. Remind one another that the Kingdom of God begins not with the raising of a powerful army, but with the unseen and seemingly insignificant planting of the word of God in a person’s heart – a Kingdom that begins with the few, not the many. Just as the kingdom grows unseen and unnoticed in the human heart (Mark 4:27-29) as the Word takes root and the Spirit gives life, so also it gradually but inevitably increases, beginning with a handful of believers in Israel and spreading to the whole world. Kingdom seeds always seem very small at the beginning, not looking important or powerful, but they have life! Leaders can encourage members to consider some practical ways to shine a light or sow a seed:

- i) volunteer in RiverLife Community Services. (eg Participate in BLESS program, or helping in RCS tuition)
- ii) help a neighbour in need
- iii) visit a relative or acquaintance/ cell member who is hospitalised.
- iv) invite an unpopular colleague to lunch
- v) express Jesus’ love & act of kindness to the less privileged people in our midst – the foreign worker, the food court cleaner, the beggar, etc.

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. We will be people of the Kingdom – the fruitful soil, the consistent light-bearers, and the persistent seed-sowers.

Announcements

1. Confronting Your Anxiety:

A Biblical Response To Overcoming Fear & Worry

A Seminar Organised By RiverLife's Hospital Visitation Ministry

Sun, 28 Apr | 9am-12pm | Faith Chapel

Speaker: Dr Leslie Lim

Sign up at the Information Counter by Sun, 22 Apr. For more information, please contact Christine Tan at 65114141, or email her at christinetan@riverlife.org.sg.

Church Vision Statement:

"A vibrant family where sons and daughters mature and reveal the Father's glory from generation to generation."