

AIM

- To show that the good news of Jesus will only change your life if you hear it properly.
- To challenge group members to consider what kind of soil they are.

EXPLORE

- Ask for any questions over last week's follow-up reading (Mark 14:1-16:8) and questions:
 1. *Mark tells us about Jesus' last night with His disciples, and His trial by the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. How do we know from Mark's account that Jesus' death was not a mistake or accident (see Mark 14:12-26, 27-31, 48-49, 61-62)?*
 - These events show that Jesus predicted and prepared for His death. He was in total control.
 - Mark 14:12-26 – Jesus knew that the Passover meal would be His last meal with the disciples, and had prepared for it in advance. He also knew that one of the disciples would betray Him.
 - Mark 14:27-31 – Jesus predicted that He would die the next day (the Passover meal was on a Thursday evening—Jesus was crucified on the Friday). He knew that the disciples would desert Him, and that Peter would disown Him.
 - Mark 14:48-49 – Jesus knew that His arrest and execution would fulfill prophecies made in the Old Testament Scriptures.
 - Mark 14:61-62 – Jesus knew that His death would not be the end. He would sit at the right hand of God the Father (“the Mighty One”) and return “on the clouds of heaven.”
 2. *Jesus knew that it was His mission to die. Does that mean that death was easy for Him (see Mark 14:33-36; 15:34)?*
 - No. Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane and His cry on the cross (“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”), show just how hard His death was. The fact that Jesus' death on the cross still happens after His prayer in Mark 14:36 (“Everything is possible for You. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”) strongly suggests that there is no other way to solve the problem: it is that serious.
 3. *At the moment that Jesus died, something happened in the temple on the other side of the city (Mark 15:38). What happened?*
 - The temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom.
- The temple curtain was like a big “no entry” sign. It showed that people were cut off from God because of their sins. Why do you think Mark records what happened to this curtain?*
- The curtain had been a symbol of the barrier between people and God. It was torn in two as a symbol of how Jesus' death opens the way to God.

4. *In Mark 14:50 we see the disciples deserting Jesus. In Mark 14:66-72 we see Peter repeatedly disowning Him. Given all that Jesus had said about His death, why do you think they responded like this?*

- They were afraid. They didn't understand that Jesus was in control of everything that happened. They still didn't understand that Jesus had to die and rise.

5. *A Roman centurion was in charge of the crucifixion. What did He say when Jesus died (Mark 15:39)?*

- The centurion said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Why did he say this—and why is it surprising?

- He said this because he saw the way that Jesus died (Mark 16:37). It is surprising because he was the Roman centurion directly responsible for Jesus' death—and yet it was His death that made clear to this man who Jesus was. (He was also a Gentile, and the Jews believed that the Gentiles would not be saved.)

6. *Grace is when God treats us in the opposite way to what we deserve. It is an undeserved gift. Peter had disowned Jesus three times (Mark 14:66-72). How do you think Peter would have felt when he was given the message of Mark 16:7? Why?*

- Peter must have felt amazed to be included, and thrilled to be forgiven. He may also have been nervous about seeing Jesus.

The grace Jesus shows to Peter is a picture of the grace now offered to us. How will you respond to the gift Jesus offers?

• Have a leader read Mark 4:1-9, 13-20.

- *A parable is a story with a deeper, sometimes hidden, meaning. What does each part of this parable represent (see Mark 4:13-20)?*
 - The farmer: those who "sow the Word" (Mark 4:14)—i.e., those who tell people the gospel message, the good news about Jesus Christ
 - The seed: "the Word" (Mark 4:14)—i.e., the Word of God, the Bible's message about Jesus (His identity, mission, and call)
 - The path: people who hear the gospel message, but "Satan comes and takes away the Word" (Mark 4:15)—i.e., they hear about Jesus but quickly forget what they have heard
 - The rocky soil: people who are full of joy at what they hear, but "last only a short time" (Mark 4:16-17)—i.e., they respond well at first but fall away when trouble comes as a result of following Jesus
 - Thorns: "worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things" (Mark 4:19)—*what might these things be for you?*
- *How would you recognize those who are good soil?* Those who are good soil hear the gospel message, accept it and continue to be transformed by it, and live fruitful lives for God.

LISTEN (DVD)

- Mark 4:9 – “Then Jesus said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”
 - Throughout Mark’s gospel, Jesus has in effect been saying, “If you come to Me, it will be truly and miraculously life-changing.” But, the good news about Jesus will only change your life if you hear it properly.
 - In Mark 4, Jesus tells a story that pictures the extraordinary, life-changing power of His Word as tiny, vulnerable seeds. What Jesus is saying is this: just as seeds will grow only if you plant them properly, so the good news about Me will only change your life if you hear it properly.
 - Every person has a walk-on part in this story—it is as if Jesus is holding up a mirror so that we can see ourselves reflected back. Although this story is usually called the Parable of the Sower, the main focus is on the soil. Jesus’ point is that each one of us is a different kind of soil—that is, each one of us receives the good news about Jesus in a different way. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “How am I responding to the gospel? What kind of soil am I?”
 - In the Parable of the Soils, Jesus explains four different responses to the good news:
 1. Verses 4, 15 – Some people are like the hardened soil—they reject or are distracted from the gospel’s message, and so Satan, like a thief, takes the gospel message from them so that they no longer consider it. But, as the rest of the parable demonstrates, you don’t have to be a victim of this.
 2. Verses 5-6, 16-17 – Some people are like the shallow soil—they show immediate excitement and growth but have no depth of commitment to the gospel, and so they give up on Jesus rather than put up with the uncomfortable cost of following Him. They didn’t count the cost, so when difficulties and opposition arises, they don’t persevere. They don’t finish what they started.
 3. Verses 7, 18-19 – Some people are like the thorny soil—they have divided hearts and let their desire for other things compete with and become stronger than their desire for Jesus. They fail to see that the security, comfort, approval, and power that come from knowing Christ infinitely outweigh any treasure the world has to offer.
 4. Verses 8, 20 – Some people are like good soil—they see Jesus for who He is and understand why He came and what it means to follow Him (i.e., they understand that Jesus is the greatest treasure in the world), and so they experience the gospel’s supernatural work in their life. This person makes the gospel of Jesus Christ his/her treasure—He becomes more valuable to them than anything else in this world. This is when we know that we’ve really heard Him.
 - A tiny acorn can powerfully break through a marble slab if it has the right kind of soil. Likewise, the gospel message has the power to break through any human heart, if we will listen and act on what we hear. The Word of God comes to us because God wants us to be in a relationship with Him—His gospel message tells us that Jesus Christ has fully paid the price of sin on the cross to open the way for us to know God and enjoy Him forever, if only we will trust Him. But Jesus wouldn’t have told us this parable if that was an easy thing to do. Jesus in effect says, “I can change your life, but are you listening?”
 - How are you responding to the gospel? What kind of soil are you?

DISCUSS

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or stuck you from the DVD?*
- *As you look back over the course, do you think that some of the Word has been taken from you? Maybe you've chosen to miss several sessions, or you've been so busy that you haven't thought about what you've heard or haven't done any of the "Follow Up" reading.*

Satan does want to take away the gospel message from people—but the devil does not have the final say. Jesus has beaten Satan by His death on the cross. So, respond properly to the things you have heard, rather than worry about the bits that you've missed.

- *Which type of soil would you say best describes you?*

FOLLOW-UP

None