

The Parable Of The Soils

Mark 4:1-20

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¹ Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”” ¹³ And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

The title for today’s sermon is “The Parable Of The Soils”.

As disciples, as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, do you ever wonder why you believe in Jesus Christ and why some don’t (no matter how compelling the Gospel presentation might be)?

Well, Jesus answers for us in verse 11.

Jesus says to you has been *given* the *secret* of the kingdom of God.

Why is this a secret or a mystery and what is it?

You see when Jesus came and preached the Gospel, many followed him, many rejected him, and some opposed him because their hearts were closed from seeing the magnificent and glorious hope that is in Jesus Christ alone.

You see the Jews were expecting the kingdom of God. They were the first to be promised the kingdom but when Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, many of their hearts were hardened, their eyes closed and ears became deaf. And the news of the kingdom of God was extended and accepted by Gentiles, the nations you and I.

This is the secret - that in Jesus Christ you have forgiveness, redemption and eternal hope and future. No man has ever said “Your sin are forgiven” except Jesus Christ.

Here are a few places in the New Testament where the authors tell what the mystery is about.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will” Ephesians 1:7-9

“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” Colossians 1:27

“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” Ephesians 3:6

Jesus says you have been given this secret. Which means you have not earned but have been gifted. So your faith, your repentance, your salvation, your eternal life is all a gift. Hear what Paul says about you have been given - 2 Corinthians 4:6 *“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”*.

You see, God gave you the gift of light, the knowledge to grasp the glory of heaven in Jesus Christ.

That is why Jesus tells this parable and unpacks this parable for his disciples.

Before we try to unpack this passage, let’s define what a parable is.

What is a parable? - A story used to illustrate a spiritual lesson. A narrative used to expound a moral message.

Someone said a parable is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning”.

1. Parables were not the first to be used by Jesus. The Old Testament has parables.

In the Old Testament, one parable that is very familiar is told by the prophet Nathan to show David his sin. David takes another man's wife, commits adultery and kills Uriah the husband. So God sends the prophet Nathan to expose his sin. Nathan tells him a parable about a rich man and a poor man. The rich had many lambs and the poor had only one lamb. One day the rich man has a guest and instead of taking his own lambs for a feast, the rich man takes the poor man's *only* lamb and makes a feast for the visitor. David gets enraged but Nathan tells him he was that rich man.

2. Another parable is in Judges chapter 9. Some call this parable the parable of the trees. That parable is told by Jotham the son of Gideon who calls out Israel for appointing a leader without character.

In the parables of Jesus, you'll notice that Jesus teaches things related to the proclamation of the kingdom of God. So the parables of Jesus are stories related to the Gospel.

Why did Jesus teach using parables?

Jesus answers this question in verse 11 but Matthew's Gospel has an extended reply. *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.* ¹⁴ *Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive."* ¹⁵ *For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."* ¹⁶ *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.* ¹⁷ *For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.* Matthew 13: 10-16

The disciples have blessed eyes and ears. Your seeing Jesus and your hearing the words of Christ are a gift. Don't forget that.

Last week, we saw Jesus teaching about who constitutes his family. The family of Christ is those who do the will of God. Those who *hear* God's Word and *obey* Him belong to Jesus's family. In this passage, Jesus teaches a wider audience. He moves to the side of the sea. And because there were so many people, Jesus gets into a boat before he teaches them. The boat is like a pulpit. The acoustics were better for people to hear what Jesus taught.

We must always understand this passage in it's original context and see application for our time.

- Verses 3 through 8 is the parable itself. And Jesus begins his parable by urging the

people to HEAR!

- In verse 9, Jesus ends his parable by saying, “*he who has ears to hear, hear!*”. Faith comes by hearing the words of Christ!
- In verses 10 through 13, the disciples privately ask him about the parable. Jesus tells them the reason why some see and don’t perceive, why some hear and don’t understand is actually a fulfillment of prophecy. This is a reference to Ezekiel 12:2 or Isaiah 6:9-10 from Matthew’s Gospel.
- In verse 13, Jesus highlights this parable (of the sower, seed or soils) as the most *important* parable. This parable becomes a distinguishing passage not just for all parables but also for the teaching of Jesus as a whole.
- And then Jesus begins to explain the meaning of the parable in verses 14 through 20.

Jesus teaches in sets of three - Three bad soils. Three good soils.

The focus of this parable is on the *response* of his hearers. Jesus is the sower who spreads the good news of the kingdom of the God among the towns and villages. The seed is the word of God or the Gospel. The soil is the human heart. The emphasis of this parable is rather negative than positive.

Let’s look at verses 14 and 15.

First kind of bad soil: Unprepared hearts.

¹⁴ *The sower sows the word.* ¹⁵ *And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.*

These two verses describe the first kind of bad soil. This soil is outside the area of the prepared or cultivated soil. The seed is sown or the Gospel is preached and what happens? The rejection is immediate. In Jesus’ day the scribes and the Pharisees opposed and rejected the teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ from the beginning. We have people like that today. When the message is proclaimed, it will not take long for some people to immediately dismiss the Gospel and reject. You may know people like that. I know some people like that. Those in this category are under the deception and influence of Satan. Their hearts are so hardened that nothing will ever change it. Now, rejecting is one thing but some people, like the Pharisees, will try to find fault with the Gospel message itself. The Pharisees not only rejected Jesus’ message but attributed the power of Jesus to Satan’s power. So in that sense the Gospel is like throwing pearls to pigs. At some point you will have to move on after the proclamation of the Gospel and leave it to God for either final judgment or salvation.

Second kind of soil: Shallow hearts.

¹⁶ *And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.*

Jesus calls this soil rocky ground. Rocky ground represents a rocky faith because no real transformation has taken place in their life. This is a kind of soil that is shallow. There is no root. This kind of soil that has no root has no chance for any fruit. Those with superficial faith are as good as no faith at all. When we looked at the previous chapters of Mark, we saw people who wanted to see Jesus for the miracles and for the benefits Jesus offered. Nothing wrong with seeking Jesus for a miracle or healing but discipleship begins with self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Some people are very excited for special events.

Every Sunday is an event at Church. It's the Gospel event. Come with your worries, your troubles, your cares, your questions and take Jesus with you when you leave. Leave everything behind. Jesus says shallow soil or shallow faith causes them to "fall away" The Greek word Jesus uses for "fall away" is *skandalizo* meaning when some difficulty or some trouble comes on account of the word or the Gospel, they are easily scandalized. They fall away. Shallow hearts lead to shallow faith which leads to falling away and eventually unfruitfulness.

We see a lot of that in the world today. Superficial religion because of their shallow hearts. Only on the outside.

Third kind of bad soil: Distracted hearts.

¹⁸ *And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*

This is the third kind of soil that Jesus refers to as the "seed among thorns". Initially they seem to make good progress, but the thorns choke the word. These thorns are the distractions of life. Jesus lists three main distractions – *anxieties, deceptions* and *passions*.

- 1) First distraction: You could also call these the anxieties of life. People given to anxieties. Christians should be known for their non-anxiety. You know why? Because you have a God to put all your anxieties on. What a wonderful privilege you have! "*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you*" 1 Peter 5:6-7

- 2) Second distraction: Deceptions – Money is important in our everyday lives. You have bills to pay. Children to care for. Health to attend to. Pay for your apartment or home or car. Put food on the table. These are legitimate needs. God has given the ability to work and earn an honest living, do it with integrity and eat your bread. But the problem with running after money and having a lot of it gives us a sense of security – a false sense of security. Obsession with money is a deception, a deceit. It fails to satisfy. This is very evident in our modern society today. Prosperity Gospel is a unique American false Gospel. Why? Those preachers who advocate health, wealth and prosperity are leading their followers to choke the word or Gospel. I heard one prosperity preacher being interviewed. He was asked, “if Jesus was here today, would he drive a Rolls-Royce?” And the preacher said “Yes”. Why then did Jesus reject the devil’s offer that he would give Jesus all the kingdoms of this world? Jesus was offered not one “Rolls-Royce” but all of them. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world”. (John 8:23, 18:36).
- 3) Third distraction: Passions – Jesus sums up to say whatever desires that would choke the Gospel in our hearts. Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:2 that we no longer live for human passions but for the will of God.

Jesus gives us only one verse to describe the good soil.

Good soil: Prepared and Fruitful hearts.

²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

Jesus describes the good soil in three ways – those who yield fruit thirty times, sixty times and hundred times. Those who have the good soil are the disciples of Jesus. They are humble. They are not hard hearted. They are not shallow. They are not preoccupied or distracted by the world. They have receptive hearts. They are teachable - willing to learn the principles of the Kingdom. They desire deep rooted foundations. They are willing to walk the talk. They are willing to forgo personal preferences. They are ready to deny and pick up their crosses.

As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. Luke 8:15

When the widow of Charlie Kirk shared about her faith in Christ, she admitted that following Jesus is not easy. She forgave her husband’s murderer. Why? Because Jesus forgave her sins. Jesus asked His Father to forgive those who hated and killed him. Jesus taught us to forgive. Jesus told his disciples – “*If the world hates you, know that it has*

hated me before it hated you.” We serve a hated, rejected, crucified Savior.

So when you become disciple of Jesus Christ, you immediately become a part of a suffering fellowship. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4, “*we are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in your bodies*”.

What would you want to be known for? A love for Jesus and a hatred for your sin or a love for your sin and apathy for Jesus?

Why does Jesus spend in unpacking the bad soils? Here is why:

An unprepared, a shallow and a distracted heart produces no fruit.

Consequently, a hardened heart that never turns to Jesus is ultimately handed over to the Judge and Lord of all.

A receptive heart produces fruit. Consequently, a receptive heart is welcomed by the Lord and enters heaven.

Have you examined the root of your faith?

Is it deep rooted or shallow?

Are there things choking your walk with God?

What distractions do you need to remove to walk with Christ?

Jesus wants you to bear fruit. To multiply.

Jesus said in John 12:24 ,” *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*”

The first step to become fruitful is to die to self and then identify with Christ.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: The Parable Of The Soils. Mark 4:1-20

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Jesus teach in parables? What does Jesus say to his disciples about the *secret* of the kingdom of God? Is salvation a gift or good work?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe you are called to be fruitful as a Christian? Why or why not? Go around and share.

3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What distractions keep you from growing and being fruitful for Christ? What will you do about them?