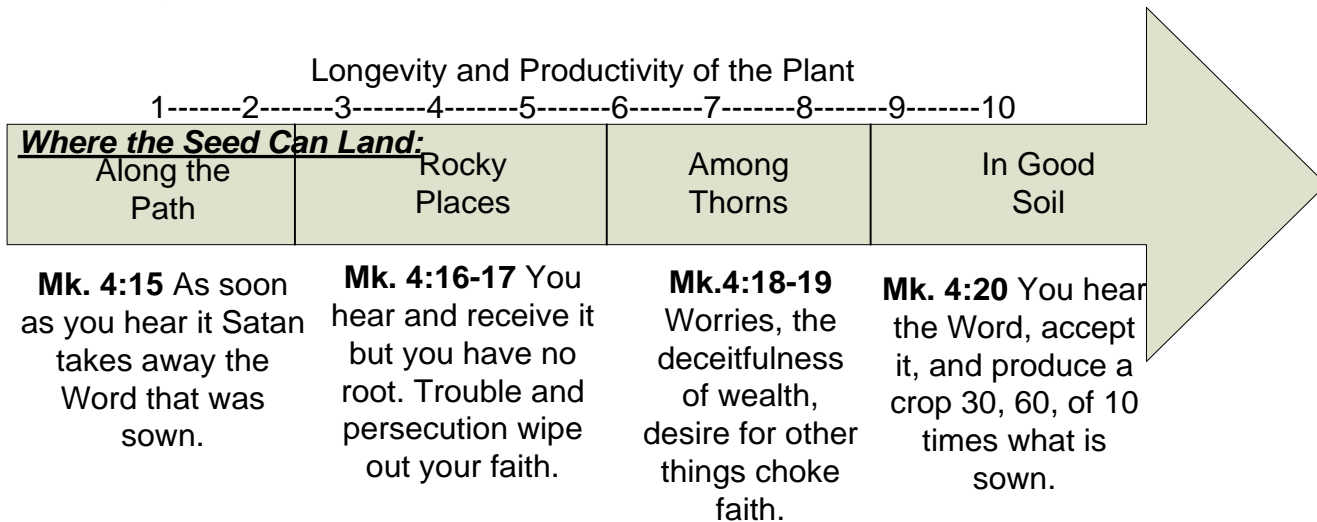


RECEIVING THE WORD OF GOD: *there's nothing wrong with the seed, so what's your problem?*

Mark 4:1-20, 26-29



1. GOD DOES THE CONVERTING--IT'S A MYSTERY. Mk 4:26-29

2. GOD COMES TO US THROUGH MEANS OF GRACE. Mt. 23:37

3. BUT, THE GRACE OF GOD CAN BE RESISTED.

1 Timothy 1:19 *1 ...so that you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.*

Galatians 5:4 *You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

4. BAD NEWS: YOU CAN BELIEVE AND THEN LOSE YOUR FAITH.

GOOD NEWS: FALLEN PEOPLE ARE NOT BEYOND GOD'S REACH.

5. BOTTOM LINE: if you fall from faith you're not a Christian and you have no promise of salvation. You can be restored by the working of the Holy Spirit using means of grace. You need to be born again AGAIN!

Monday, June 15th Read Mark 4: 1-20

There are at least two great lessons in this parable. This applies to ourselves and others.

First, there is the lesson of sowing the seed, the lesson to the messenger of God. The messenger of God or the genuine believer is to sow the seed, the Word of God, wherever s/he is—no matter the difficulty, the opposition, or the discouragement. When Jesus stood before people, He knew the kind of people who sat before Him. He knew...

- the hard, closed hearts of the religionists and others.
- the shallow, deceptive enthusiasm of the poor and needy and of others.
- the worldliness of the well-to-do and of others, how entangled they were in *things* and pleasure.

He knew that so many would never listen, but He also knew something else: if He just kept sowing the seed, some would bear fruit. Some soil would be fertile, craving for the truth of life and eternity. Therefore, they would "hear...receive...and bring forth fruit" (Mark 4:20). This is the reason Jesus continued on. He kept sowing, never giving in to discouragement—sowing that some might be saved and bear fruit. Jesus expects His followers to do the same, to continue on no matter the discouragement or opposition. There are some soils that are fertile, ploughed, and ready to receive the seed and to bear fruit.

Second, there is the great lesson on receiving the seed, the lesson to the hearers of the Word of God. The soils, that is, human hearts, vary among us. The variance ranges all the way from hard pavement-like hearts over to soft, ploughed hearts. Just what kind of heart a person has depends upon how s/he has lived and responded and conditioned themselves throughout life.

The condition of the heart determines how one will love God and neighbor, whether you will be responsive or close-minded. The point is that God holds you responsible for the condition of the heart and for how you respond to the gospel.

In this parable Jesus paints the picture of various soils (hearts) and how they receive the seed, the Word of God.

1. Jesus began a new method of teaching—the parable (v.1-2).
2. The parable: a sower sows (v.3-9).
3. The response to the parable (v.10-12).
4. The meaning of the parable (v.13-20).

In 4:1-2 Jesus began a new method of teaching. He began to teach by parables. Note the setting was "by the seashore," and there were large crowds. The word for "large" (*pleistos*) means *very great*. The multitude was so great that they overflowed the seashore, and they pressed in upon Jesus so much that He was forced into a boat. So there's initial interest.

The parable was a new form of teaching for Jesus. **Parable** (*parabolē*): literally means placing a thing by the side of something else for the purpose of comparing. The word *comparison* best describes a parable.

1. A parable is a comparison: it is an earthly event pointing out a heavenly truth. It is a comparison between the earth and heaven.
2. A parable is a comparison: the earthly story has to be delved into to discover the heavenly truth. The spiritual point is found only by active thought and effort, by actively comparing the physical world with the spiritual world. In fact, the more a man thinks and meditates upon a parable, the more he usually sees of the truth.

Jesus is the *Master User* of the parable. No man ever used the parable so effectively. Why did He use the parable so much?

Tuesday, June 16th Read Mark 4:3-9

The parable Jesus told was a simple story, yet its meaning was profound. It was not understood by most (cp. Mark 4:10-13). It concerned an event known by practically everyone who was familiar with sowing seed. Jesus said five things in this parable.

1. The farmer sows some seed that *does not take root*. There are two kinds of soil that bear no root at all. These two soils differ from the other soils in this very fact: there is never any root.
 - a. There is the seed that falls upon the path or the *wayside*, the unploughed, packed down areas right outside the ploughed field. The wayside joins the field, may even be a part of the field; but it is in the corners, the hard to reach areas that cannot be reached with the plough.
 - b. There is the seed that falls upon the rocky or *stony ground*, the rock that lies right under the surface of the ground. The rock holds the water and heat longer; therefore, the seed shoots its plant up almost immediately. But there is no root to the plant; consequently the sun scorches and kills it.
2. The farmer sows some seed that takes root, but it does not yield fruit. This is seed that falls among thorns. The thorny soil is part of the field. It has been ploughed, but it is deceptive ground. It looks good, but lying right underneath the soil is a mass of thorn roots ready to spring up. The fact that they were not destroyed in the ploughing and that they are already in the ground means that they will spring up faster and choke the seed.

3. The farmer sows seed that bears fruit. This is seed that falls upon good ground. Note two things about this "good soil." It yields fruit, and when fruit appears, it increases and grows. This is the significant fact to see in the good soil.

4. The farmer sows only a few seed that bear 100% fruit. All seed in the good ground bears fruit, but each plant varies in its degree of fruitfulness. This, too, is significant. Some fruitful plants bear only 30%. They are very weak plants, 70% unfruitful. Other plants bear only 60%. They too are weak, being 40% unfruitful. There are only a few plants that bear 100% of their potential fruit.

5. The fifth thing Jesus said stresses the importance of the parable. The message of the parable is heard only by the spiritual: "He that hath [spiritual] ears, let him hear" (Mark 4:9). Luke tells us that "He cried" (ephonei) out, shouted the words, which stressed the importance even more. The message was so important, so critical. Jesus wanted all to hear and understand; but He knew, sadly, that all would not hear.

Wednesday, June 17th Read Mark 4:10-12

The: the response to the parable is twofold.

1. The disciple hears the parable. He does not just hear the words, but he hears the message, and he hears with his heart. The disciple is receptive—willing to think and to meditate and to receive the message into his life. The disciple is willing to do exactly what the parable teaches. Thus, God reveals the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to him.

2. The unbeliever hears the parable, but not with spiritual ears. He just hears the words. Note that Jesus called unbelievers "them that are without." An unbeliever is *without*, standing on the outside; he is an *outsider*.

The *outsider* does exactly what Jesus says.

"Seeing, they see, yet do not perceive" (Mark 4:12).

"Hearing, they hear, yet do not understand" (Mark 4:12).

Why does the *outsider* not perceive or understand? Jesus gives the reason: "otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

- a. **They are unwilling to receive** what is taught into their lives and hearts, **unwilling to change** their lives, unwilling to be converted. Therefore, they shut their minds, twist the truth, and rationalize their behavior. But note: God cannot give His pearls to the swine (cp. Matthew 7:6).
- b. **They experience the law of conditioning.** The more they harden their minds and hearts to the truth, the harder they become. They become more and more conditioned against the truth. Their openness and sensitivity to spiritual truth dwindles more and more until it is gone. The law of spiritual conditioning says that the more we receive spiritual truth, the more we increase our capacity to understand and grow in spiritual truth. But the opposite is also true. The more we reject spiritual truth, the more we decrease our sensitivity and become hardened to spiritual truth.

Thought 1. There are many who are *outside*...

- who are hard-hearted against spiritual things.
- whose hearts are shallow or whose minds are superficial. They are rootless, having no depth—usually lacking depth in all areas of life.
- who are worldly-minded, interested in spiritual matters only as a little *extra* added to their lives.

Thursday, June 18th Read Mark 4: 13-20

The meaning of the parable is given by Jesus Himself. Note several facts.

The emphasis is upon the kind of ground which receives the seed, that is, the kind of person who receives the Word of God. All four grounds, that is, all four types of persons, heard the Word; but each received it in a different manner. How each received the Word depended upon the kind of *ground* they were. The following chart shows this.

| | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| The path... | ...is an unploughed heart... | ...which results in a hardened life. |
| The rocky ground... | ...is a rootless heart... | ...which results in a superficial life. |
| The thorny ground... | ...is a worldly heart... | ...which results in a strangled life. |
| The good soil. | ...is an honest & good heart... | ...which results in a fruitful life. |

1. The seed on the path: the path or wayside ground is an unploughed heart that results in a hardened life. The person by the wayside does hear the Word of God. S/he is present in church; but is off to the side, out of the way, not involved. You let your mind wander, think little and involve yourself even less. You respect Christ and the preacher, and would not miss a service, but you're missing it, paying little attention to the warnings and promises of the Word.

Note what happens: before the person believes, the devil comes and snatches the Word away. It is taken from the person; the person never applies the Word to his life, never really lives sacrificially for Christ. (Cp. Judas Iscariot and cp. Herod who enjoyed listening to John the Baptist, Mark 6:20.)

Romans 2:5 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Proverbs 29:1 *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy.*

Proverbs 28:14 *Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.*

Hebrews 3:13 *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

2. The seed on the rock: the stony ground is a rootless heart that results in a surface, superficial life. This person hears the Word, and becomes excited over it. He receives the Word, professes belief in Christ, and makes a profession of faith before the world. But he fails to count the cost, to consider the commitment, the self-denial, the sacrifice, the study, the learning, the hours and effort required. He does not apply himself to *learn Christ*; therefore, he does not become rooted and grounded in the Word. He is only a surface, superficial believer.

Again, note what happens: when trials and temptations come, he falls away. His profession is scorched and consumed, burned up by the heat of the trial and temptation. (Cp. John Mark who at first failed to endure, [Acts 13:13](#); Demas, [Philemon 1:24](#); and the men who discovered that following Christ cost too much, [Luke 9:57-62](#).)

Hebrews 10:38 *But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."*

Friday, June 19th *Read Mark 4:1-20*

3. The seed among thorns: the thorny ground is a worldly heart that results in a strangled life. This is a person who receives the Word and *honestly tries* (professes) to live for Christ. Christ and His followers and the church and its activities appeal to him. So s/he joins right in, even professing Christ as s/he walks about their daily affairs. But there is one problem: the thorns of worldliness. S/he is unwilling to cut completely loose from the world: "[to] come out from among them and [to] be...separate" ([2 Cor. 6:17-18](#)). This is living a double life, trying to live for Christ and yet still live in the worldliness of the world. You keep right on growing in the midst of the thorns, giving your mind and attention to the *cares and riches and pleasures* of this world.

Note what happens: fruit does appear, but it never ripens. It is never able to be plucked. The thorns choke the life out of it. It never lives to be used. (Compare the Rich Young Ruler, [Luke 18:18f](#); Ananias and Sapphira, [Acts 5:1f](#).)

Matthew 6:25 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"*

1 Timothy 6:9 *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

Luke 21:34 *"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.*

4. The seed on good ground: the fruitful ground is an honest and good heart which results in a fruitful life. These are they who have an honest and good heart; therefore, when they hear the Word, they keep it.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Ephesians 5:9 *(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)*

Philippians 1:11 *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.*

Colossians 1:10 *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,*