

## God's Word, the Good Seed

### *Mark 4:1-20*

Good Morning.

Those of you who garden, know by experience that weeds grow faster and stronger than any seeds you may plant.

Some farmers say it takes 60 pounds of wheat seed to sow an acre of wheat; but, there's 3,000 pounds of weed seed in an acre, already there because weed seeds are native to the soil.

But I read something interesting about wheat seed which said,

*“There is a big difference between **seed lots** in the number of seeds per pound. This **range** can be as many as 10,000 to as much as 20,000 seeds per pound.”* (cropquest.com)

*So it becomes quickly apparent that each lot planted at 60 pounds per acre would give vastly different plant populations.”*

When it comes to people hearing the Word of God, we can see a vast difference in how it is received by different people as well.

Please open your Bibles to **Mark 4** as we go back into that study

Before our Christmas mini-series, while in the **Gospel of Mark**, we studied the sermon on Jesus' Master Passion.

A large crowd came to Jesus and His own family thought He was crazy, so they went to forcibly take Jesus under their control and haul Him back home!

We learned about a divided house and the unpardonable sin.

We ended saying the abundant life in Christ, is a life lived passionately serving and worshipping Him.

Today, Jesus is going to teach a *parable* about different hearts receiving the same message; but, responding in different ways.

## **I. The Parable of the Sower.**

Read *Mark 4:1-9*

The crowd was so large; Jesus got into a boat and used it as sort of a stage or platform to speak from.

It would be much easier to go several feet away from the shore to be able to see over and address the entire crowd.

Jesus' voice could carry enough for the crowds to hear Him.

Sound systems did not exist then; but, in ancient times, leaders spoke to large armies in different places like coliseums.

If there was a hill behind the crowd, Jesus' voice would have carried even better for the crowds to hear Him.

Since He was God in the flesh, Jesus had special abilities. He could have spoken louder or caused the crowd to hear well.

(Notice) Jesus taught them many things using parables, which can be described as earthly stories with a **heavenly** meaning.

Word pictures are very powerful tools within teaching; they cause people to relate to the subject that is being communicated.

Jesus tells a Parable about planting seeds and yielding an increase.

In this parable, we see a farmer sowing seed as well as four different kinds of soil; as the farmer **liberally** throws out the seed in a random pattern.

Although sometimes the ground was prepared by plowing, in other cases, seed would be sown on ground without preparation.

This story resonated with the people there that day because many of them had to have gardens in order to have produce.

In this parable we notice the seed was **good** in each instance; but, we also learn there are four different types of soil.

**1. *The wayside*** was a traveled road or a walking path.

Lettuce, chard and certain beans grow in clay soil, but the wayside described here was packed down soil and very hard, so the Seeds could not grow.

The birds came and snatched up all of the seed because the ground was so hard that the seeds were never covered.

**2. *Stony places*** had very **shallow** soil on top of a rocky underlayment.

There are some shallow-rooted plants, such as grasses and ground covers, and some weeds.

On this ground the seed springs up quickly because of warm soil, but do not take root because of the rocks.

3. **Among thorns** describes good soil which has a bramble bush, brier, or a thorny plant.

Many weeds or thorn bushes are growing along side of the grain.

4. **Good ground** describes fertile soil free from any weeds growing in it. A **fruitful** crop grows in the **good ground**.

*What farmer or sower in the world would not want to plant on the Good Soil, because of the yield that seed produces?*

The parable is about God's kingdom and the Sower is Jesus; He sows "***the word of God***". For a farmer, the seeds contain the promise of a future blessing, cultivating the future crop.

Seed will produce if the soil is good. Jesus doesn't give more worth to the larger crop; He lumps together the 30/60/100.

When we look at the body of Christ, we see people who have come to saving faith come from all kinds of different backgrounds, personalities, talents, intellectual capacity, etc.

Many come to Christ differently; including the time of life they receive Him; but, all who trust in Jesus are given eternal life.

***He who has ears to hear, let him hear***; if you have spiritual ears to hear the truth of Christ, discern what the Lord is saying here.

## **II. The purpose of parables.**

Read ***Mark 4:10-12***

Once the multitude was gone, the Disciples come and ask Jesus, "***Why do You speak to them in parables?***"

1/3 of all Jesus' teachings we have were done by Parables.

We already learned *parables* use an earthly story to communicate a heavenly meaning; a *parable* is a teaching from something known to something unknown.

Jesus' parables used things which were familiar to the crowds in order to illustrate a Kingdom truth and provoke spiritual hunger

The messages we find in scripture from Jesus convey deep and central truths which deal with major Kingdom issues, revealing the status of a man's heart.

In His Grace, Jesus also used parables so that the hearts of those rejecting would not be hardened even further.

Because to whom much is given, much will be required!

Those who continually reject Jesus' message will be left in spiritual blindness to wonder about the meaning.

The *Book of Exodus* tells how Pharaoh hardened his heart towards the Lord several times, until finally we are told...

*Exodus 9:12 the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.*

Hardening of Pharaoh's heart simply **confirmed** what Pharaoh already determined, to have a hard heart against the Lord.

In *Matthew 13:12*, Jesus says, *For whoever has, to him more will be given...but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him*

Those who are hungry for the Lord's truth, more will be given; but, those who are not open will grow even colder to the truth.

In *vs. 11* Jesus mentions the *mystery of the kingdom*. The Old Testament prophets wrote about the coming Messiah; but, they did not fully understand what the New Covenant was all about.

*Colossians 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.*

*Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. NKJV*

The wonder and glory of the abiding, indwelling Spirit of God within the life of the believer was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament; not even to Moses.

This work of Jesus living in His people was a **mystery** that wasn't revealed until after the Day of Pentecost to the Apostles.

Then Jesus speaks of hearing these Kingdom truths.

There is a definite difference between auditory hearing and **spiritual** hearing, which leads to belief.

This means receiving with your heart not just your ears!

*Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. NKJV*

Faith is relying on, trusting in, and believing with full assurance; what the Lord has said in His Word.

In vs. 12, Jesus points to a prophecy from *Isaiah* and says that it was written about these people.

The **hard hearted** people will hear the parables; but, not understand and see the miracles. They won't perceive what is being taught, just as the prophet foretold.

Parables do two things: they reveal and conceal and it all depends upon the heart of the listener.

These people didn't want to know the truth so they got what they desired; but, for those who are open to the Lord's teaching, the Holy Spirit will enlighten them even more.

*Ironside, "Where people already had faith and had accepted His testimony up to a certain point, He was prepared to give more;*

*But where there was no real confidence in His message, they would become more bewildered by the parabolic form of instruction than if He had spoken in plain language."*

Jesus will never close a door on someone who truly **seeks** Him.

Jesus told the woman: *John 4:23 the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.*

*John 4:24 God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." NKJV*

### **III. The Parable explained.**

Read *Mark 4:13-20*

Jesus asked *Mark 4:13* "***Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? NKJV***

Don Steward said, "*The people who believed in Jesus as the Messiah would understand the parables and comprehend the great **truths** of the kingdom of God.*"

This parable once again mentions three things; the Sower, the Good Seed, and the **soils**.

In this parable we notice the seed (message) was the **same** in each instance; but, there are four different types of soil (hearts).

This seems to communicate that we cannot blame poor results on the sower or on the seed; but, only on the soil.

### **1. The walking path.**

The wayside represents people who hear the word **audibly**; but, fail to understand the message.

Earlier in *Mark 4:4*, we read the birds devoured the seed that fell on the wayside; or walking path.

Many times in scripture **birds represent evil**; in this parable in *Matthew 13*, the birds are interpreted as the evil one in *vs. 19*.

By interpretation we can ascertain that some people hear the word with their ears and because of their hardened hearts, the wicked one is able to come in and snatch away the sown word.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not affect them because it does not penetrate before it is stolen away.

*2 Corinthians 4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,*

*2 Corinthians 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has **blinded**, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. NKJV*

The Lord gives the understanding to those who have a desire to know Him and with knowledge and wisdom, come the ability to bear fruit.

## **2. The rocky ground.**

This is a place where the soil level is so shallow that the seed may quickly produce a plant, but it will soon die out.

This is a picture of someone who hears the Gospel and seems to be very enthusiastic; but, the **implanted** Word of God never really took root.

*James 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

*James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. NKJV*

When the first sign of trial comes, this person is not rooted in the Love of God and will fall away.

## **3. Seed among thorns.**

This kind of ground is indeed fertile and able to grow a crop; but, this type allows thorny plants to have the prominence

Some people respond to the Word and grow for a while; but, then something causes the truth to get choked out in their life.

Their spiritual growth is in competition with other things.

In *Matthew 19*, there is a wealthy young ruler who comes to Jesus and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life.

This man claims he has kept the Mosaic Law perfectly and so Jesus responds to him...

***Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."***

***Matthew 19:22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. NKJV***

The call to follow Jesus puts God **first** in all things.

Jesus has to be first in a follower's life! But some people make two mistakes with this story...

The first mistake is to believe about this story of the rich man is that it applies to *everyone*; but, Jesus never made selling off everything as a general command to all who would follow Him.

This rich man's wealth was an obstacle and an idol in his life that would get in the way of following the Lord.

God has allowed many wealthy followers of Christ to do plenty of good things in the world while remaining wealthy. It is a matter of first place within the heart of the follower.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> mistake is to believe this applies to *no one but this man*.

Some need to radically forsake the materialism ruining them because it money has first place in their hearts, instead of Jesus.

4. The **good ground**. (those who hear and accept the Word)

*vs. 20* says, some respond with a heart that wants to hear the Word and bear fruit; but, notice again, those who receive the word, bear different amounts of fruit.

We see people who come to a saving faith come from all kinds of backgrounds, personalities, talents, intellectual capacity, etc.

Different people receive and process the truth of Christ differently; including the time of life they receive Him.

The only question for us personally is: *have you embraced the truth of Christ in the Gospel?*

***He who has ears to hear, let him hear;*** if you have spiritual ears, discern what the Lord is telling you here.

The main explanation of this parable is that life is imparted to those who believe. True belief is to rely on and Trust the Lord.

***1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,***

*1 Peter 1:23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, NKJV*

The Seed is the reality of the Word of God that bears life.

#### **IV. Practical Application**

There are some things I want us to notice about this parable:

1.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the seed did not grow into fruit producing plants.

The Gospel is rejected more often than it is received by hearers.

The sower is the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we have been left here after salvation, to stand in His place and sow seeds.

2. It is our job to share the Gospel; but, the Lord gives the increase.

*1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*

*1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. NKJV*

3. A successful sower/farmer must have *faith*.

The Jewish Talmud taught that **farming** is an act of faith.

A farmer believes a seed sown, will grow and produce a crop.

*Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. NKJV*

The farmer invests a great deal of effort and expense to plow the land and prepare it for sowing. Then he casts grain into the soil, where it will rot and decompose.

*Why does he do this?* Because he believes in the Lord will make the land yield many times the quantity of his investment.

*How does the act of farming demonstrate ones faith in God;* because farming takes patience, trust, and believing the unseen will someday be visible.

4. The sower liberally throws (broadcast) the seed everywhere.

The seed fell on all different soils; there was no favoritism while planting. *But what if we are tired of waiting for fruit?*

5. The sower must have *patience*.

***James 5:7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. NKJV***

In 1921 a missionary couple from Sweden went with their 2 year-old son to Africa to take the gospel to a remote area where people never heard about Jesus.

Unfortunately, when they arrived, the chief of the tribe in Africa would not let them live in the village.

Their only contact from the village was with a young boy whom the chief allowed to come sell them food.

The wife led that young boy to faith in Jesus; but, the couple never had contact with anyone else from the village.

Soon the wife, who was pregnant and contracted malaria, died several days after giving birth.

Her husband gave his newborn baby girl to some American missionaries there and said, "*I'm going back to Sweden*".

*"I've lost my wife. I obviously can't take care of this baby. God has ruined my life."* And he took his son and left.

Missionaries adopted his baby daughter and brought her back to the United States to raise her.

The daughter was given the name Aggie and grew up in the United States with Christian parents and after she heard the story of her birth parents she traveled to Sweden to find her father.

Turns out he had remarried, fathered four more children, and basically ruined his life with alcohol.

When Aggie found him, she walked into his tiny apartment, saw empty liquor bottles everywhere, and approached the seventy-three-year-old man who had deserted her years before.

As soon as she said "*Papa?*" he began to cry and apologized profusely.

She said "It's all right, Papa. God took care of me."

The father said, "*God forgot all of us,*" he said, turning his face to the wall. "*Our lives have been like this because of Him.*"

*Aggie said, “I’ve got a story to tell you; the little boy Mama led to the Lord grew up to lead his entire village to faith in Jesus.*

*The one seed you planted just kept growing and growing. Today more than six hundred African people are serving the Lord because you were faithful to the call of God in your life.*

*You didn’t go to Africa in vain. Mama didn’t die in vain. Papa, Jesus loves you. He has never hated you.”*

Christian, we are to share the Good News of the Gospel as much as possible, as often as possible, and in as many ways as possible and leave the results to the Lord who gives the increase.

But for us personally; *do we have ears to hear what the Lord would speak to us this morning?*

May we be the **good ground** that responds with a heart wanting to hear the Lord and bear fruit for His kingdom!

The Sower, (The Lord) sows **Good Seed**, (The Word of God) very liberally and it is available to all the different soil types.

The Word of God is always good; so, when the true Word of God is sown, it is always Good Seed. The only difference is the **hearts** of the hearers.

So again, ***James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. NKJV***

When we hear and believe God’s Good Word, we will allow Jesus to have first place within our lives and through the Holy Spirit’s ministry, we will be equipped for whatever life brings.