

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 14TH-15TH, 2025 // GOSPEL OF MARK

THE SOWER AND THE SEED (MARK 4:1-9)

Chapter 3 begins with Jesus teaching by the sea (sea of Galilee) and creating a makeshift podium/amphitheater out of a boat.

- Jesus sits down in the boat and begins to teach a great crowd gathered on the beach (v. 1).
- Practically, a set-up like this would have worked well in terms of acoustics (sound travels well over water) and crowd control.

"HE TAUGHT THEM MANY THINGS IN PARABLES..." (V. 2)

A parable ("to cast alongside") is a story, or comparison, that is put alongside something else to help make a lesson clear.

- These parables contain what Jesus called "the secret of the kingdom of God" (v. 11).
- In the NT, a "secret" is a spiritual truth that can only be understood by divine revelation; not every heart desires to know God and His truth.

The first parable Jesus gives is about a sower who throws out seed on various types of soil.

- The other parables that follow are about the Kingdom of Heaven/God, but this parable is about why Jesus spoke through parables and why some people respond in faith to Jesus and others do not.
- If Jesus is the Messiah/Savior/God's chosen servant, why do some reject Him?

Even today, many of us struggle with the idea that Jesus isn't going to be received by everyone.

- Why doesn't God just save everyone, even if they do not receive and reject Jesus?
- God honors humanity's choice; His rejection of anyone for salvation is always consistent with their rejection of Him and His offer of salvation.
- "Hell is a door first locked from the inside." – C.S. Lewis

Jesus lamented over Jerusalem's rejection of Him as messiah—"How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks...but you WERE NOT WILLING!" (Matt. 23:37).

- To truly be saved, WE MUST BELIEVE in our hearts and confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. True faith is a surrender to the identity of Jesus as God and King (Rom. 10:9).

Jesus' first parable explains that there was no issue with the sower (messenger) or the seed (the message of the Kingdom). The problem was with the soil (the hearts of people).

- There are a variety of reasons the unbelieving and faithless avoid trusting or fall away from faith.
- The problem is not with the message or the messenger—it is that "people love darkness rather than the light" (John 3:19).

In the parable, a farmer goes out to sow seed.

- As he throws out seed, the seed falls on different types of soil and therefore responds in different ways.
- First, wild birds swoop down and devour the seed when it has barely touched the ground (v. 4).
- Next, some of the seeds fall on rocky soil, which could not sustain the plants for very long (vs. 5-6).
- Others fall on soil already choked with thorns (vs. 7).
- Finally, some of the seed falls on good soil and produces a truly amazing harvest—some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (v. 8).
- Jesus concludes this story by essentially saying, "If you don't really listen with all your heart and mind, you won't understand any of this" (v. 9).
- Do you have ears to listen?

THE SECRET (MARK 4:10-12)

ASKING ABOUT THE PARABLES (V. 10)

Parables were a commonly used teaching method among Jewish rabbis in Jesus' day.

- What seemed to set Jesus' parables apart was the depth of their meaning and the fact that they taught more than just simple moral lessons. They were often about the inner life and the Kingdom of God, and were open-ended (inviting reflection, prayer, and meditation).
- At the same time, Jesus' parables were exceptionally accessible to all people; He used illustrations from agriculture and everyday life.
- His disciples want to know why He has chosen to teach through parables in such a unique way, so they ask Him for an explanation (v. 10).

THE SECRET OF THE KINGDOM (V. 11A)

Jesus responds by telling them that "the secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you..." (v. 11a).

- The "secret" (mysterion) is not something unknowable or out of reach.
- The "secret" is something that was previously hidden but is now being revealed by God.
- What is this great secret?
- It is the surprising, unexpected nature of how God's Kingdom will arrive through Jesus.
- The Kingdom was breaking in quietly and gradually, not with political power or violence, but through Jesus' teaching, miracles, suffering, and ultimately the cross and resurrection.
- To receive the Kingdom, one must receive the King (Jesus) through repentant faith.

"BUT TO THOSE OUTSIDE..." (V. 11B)

There are those on the "outside" who are not in on the secret. They are the people who hear Jesus' teaching but do not respond with faith, repentance, openness, or attentiveness.

- To get on the "inside," you have to lean in, ask questions, and want to understand.
- But if you don't want to understand or receive with an open heart, you'll just hear a silly little story.

THE PARABLES REVEAL THE NATURE OF PEOPLE'S HEARTS.

They give light to those with trusting, searching hearts, and they bring darkness to those with indifferent, uncaring, and unrepentant hearts.

- Their purposes fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, quoted in v. 12.
- Jesus' parables would serve the same purpose as Isaiah's teaching: to further harden hearts and to bring light to those who receive the truth.

THERE IS A WAY IN WHICH WE CAN "HEAR" GOD'S WORD WITHOUT "HEARING" IT AND "SEE" GOD'S WORK WITHOUT REALLY

"SEEING" IT.

The human heart is amazing in its capacity to convince itself of falsehood and justify itself in believing lies so we don't have to change or repent (Jer. 17:9). The same sun melts ice and hardens clay, and the Word of God either humbles or hardens the human heart.

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE (MARK 4:13-20)

If we do not understand this parable, we will not be able to understand any of the other parables (v. 13).

- If we do not understand that receiving the message of Christ and the Kingdom of God is a matter of the heart and the inner self, we cannot understand who Jesus is or what He taught!
- The "sower" is Jesus or His representatives, and the "seed" is the message of the Kingdom.

The "soil" is the human heart/the inner self.

- Someone's reception of God's Word is determined by the condition of their heart. Not every seed planted will take root and grow.
- Hardened, shallow, and divided hearts WILL NOT truly receive God's Word with saving faith.
- The four kinds of soil that Jesus describes represent various kinds of hearts that will respond to His teaching.

SOIL #1: THE HARDENED HEART (V. 15)

A "path" was soil that had been packed together and become hardened by foot traffic.

- This first kind of soil on which seed fell represents a hardened heart that hears the message of the Kingdom but refuses to understand it and receive it.
- So Satan comes and snatches away what has been sown in the heart.
- There are people in this life whose minds and hearts are hardened by pride, sin, rebellion against God, and self-worship.
- So when the message of Jesus is brought to them, they reject it, and Satan then plays an active role in removing and distorting the truth.
- This makes that person even less likely to accept the truth in the future.

SOIL #2: THE SHALLOW HEART (VS. 16-17)

The seed that falls on "rocky ground" receives the message and responds to it, but there is no root enabling it to grow or develop.

- When distress, pressure, persecution, or difficulty come, that person falls away.
- Why? Because the truth of Jesus never really took hold of their heart and established roots in the first place.
- It is pretty obvious that Jesus is talking about the culture of rampant "easy believism" Christianity we have in so many places.
- Praying a prayer or getting baptized is simply an outward profession of inward faith.
- The gospel has to actually take root in our heart. An external profession of faith void of true, saving faith will be revealed over time.

SOIL #3: THE DIVIDED HEART (VS. 18-19)

The seed sown among thorns represents the heart that hears the Word but has no room for it because of the cares and wealth of the world.

- So gradually (and almost unknowingly), the thorns grow up and choke out the seed, leaving it fruitless and dead.
- There is a clear warning in this text for us as American Christians!
- The desire for and consumption of money, material possessions, entertainment, popularity, and worldly success will slowly and gradually "choke out" the message of the Kingdom of God in our lives—we are just too busy for it.
- "No one can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24); when we find ourselves caring more about the things of this world than the things of God, we are in grave danger.

SOIL #4: THE RECEPTIVE HEART (V. 20)

The hearts that "hear the word [and] welcome it" are represented by "good soil."

- This is a heart that receives the truth, lets it take root, allows it to be cultivated, and watches it grow to maturity until it bears fruit.
- The measure of that fruit differs from person to person, but there is some "fruit" nonetheless.
- Fruit is ALWAYS the test of genuine salvation (Mt. 7:16). This "fruit" Jesus is referring to is:
 - Holiness & character (Rom. 6:22; Gal. 5:22-23)
 - Good works & generosity (Col. 1:10; Rom. 15:25-26)
 - Making disciples of Christ (Rom. 1:13)
 - Worship & praise (Heb. 13:15)
- Genuine Believers will always be growing in these areas!

WE SOW AND WATER. GOD GROWS.

- There is a generous, indiscriminate way in which the message of the Kingdom is given; we're not called to judge the soil, just to sow the seed.
- God is the judge of hearts. That is never our job.
- We are to scatter the Word generously, water it with encouragement, prayer, and love, and leave the results to God (1 Cor. 3:6-7).
- Mature plants produce fruit (seed).

WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR SOIL.

- "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Prov. 4:23, NIV).
- The condition of our heart matters above ALL ELSE.
- Your ability to hear and receive God's Word is directly related to the condition of your heart.
- What is going on in your heart? Is it hardened? Shallow? Divided? Or receptive to God's truth?

SOIL CAN BE CULTIVATED AND CHANGED.

- Soil can be cultivated, cleared, and nourished. It can be made into good soil.
- Jesus is not just diagnosing your heart; He is inviting you to become good soil and get a new heart.
- Hard soil: broken through humility and repentance.
- Shallow soil: deepened through discipleship.
- Thorny soil: cleared through surrender and prioritizing your life around Him.