

Sowing and Harvest

Mark 4: 1-20

Today we come to the first parable of Jesus, recorded in Mark's gospel. This approach to teaching marks a definite shift in Jesus' teaching style. We have discussed many accounts of the intense opposition Jesus faced while expounding truth. Along with the Pharisees and scribes, many others rejected the teaching of Jesus. While He had offered truth, they refused to receive it. From this moment on, Jesus will often teach in parables when gathered with large crowds.

Most are familiar with parables. They were simply earthly illustrations that had spiritual meanings. Jesus began to use these parables with purpose. The middle portion of our text reveals a conversation He had with the disciples regarding the parables, [Vv.10-12](#). Here Jesus referred to [Isaiah 6:9-10](#). He revealed that those who genuinely desired to receive the Word would be able to understand the parables, while those who had no intention of heeding His word would not be able to comprehend. Jesus revealed that our hearts must be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit if we are to grasp the truths of God's Word. Unfortunately, those who reject the Lord and His teaching would remain in their sin.

This is likely one of the most familiar parables Jesus shared. He deals with the principles of sowing seeds and reaping a harvest. Let's examine those [principles](#) as we consider: [Sowing and Harvest](#).

I. The Sower in the Parable (3) – [Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow](#). Jesus calls their attention in consideration of one who went forth to sow. While He offered little detail, there are a couple principles we need to consider regarding the sower. Consider:

A. His Discernment – Jesus simply proclaimed that a sower went forth to sow. This reveals the sower knew if his seed was to germinate and produce a harvest, he would have to sow the seed. This was a principle the people could understand. While we may not have a college degree in agriculture, we too understand this principle. In order for seed to do any good, and if there is to be any hope of a harvest, the seed has to be sown in the ground.

B. His Diligence – While possessing the knowledge necessary to plant the seeds, the sower also knew he had to actively plant the seed. His knowledge of seeds and harvest would have been of little benefit if the seed had not be sown.

- Many understand the principles of sowing and reaping, and yet the majority are unwilling to sow the seed. We possess the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who receive Christ by faith are saved by His grace, forgiven of sin, reconciled to God, placed within the body of Christ, and guaranteed eternal life. Wouldn't you agree that everyone needs such grace? If they are to have any chance of salvation, the Gospel seed must be sown. It is not enough to know the doctrines of grace. One must receive them. It is not enough for us to simply know the way of salvation. We must be willing to do the work and sow the seed if there is to be a harvest.

II. The Soils in the Parable – As Jesus continued to teach, He specifically mentioned four different types of soil and their impact on the harvest. He mentioned:

A. The Impermeable Soil (4, 15) – And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. ^[15] And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. The first soil Jesus mentioned was that by the way side. This speaks of the areas alongside the fields of harvest where people walked. The soil in those areas would have become hard and packed down, making it impossible for the seeds to permeate the soil. As it lay on top of the ground, the fowls of the air ate it and there was never a chance for these seeds to produce a harvest. Jesus revealed that Satan likes to come and steal the seed away before it has a chance to take root in the hearts of men.

- Many hearts today are like the soil found along the way side. It has not been prepared to receive the seed and is quickly stolen away by Satan. This results from many factors. Maybe they are engaged in sin and have no desire for the Lord. Maybe their hearts are hard and cold toward the things of God. Whatever the case, the seed is removed before it has the chance to produce.

B. The Stony Soil (5-6, 16-17) – And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: ^[6] But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ^[16] And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ^[17] And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. If you have ever tried to plant a garden in this part of the country, you have likely encountered stones and rocks within the soil. In Jerusalem, large areas of limestone lay just beneath the surface of the thin layer of soil. These seeds would germinate in the thin soil, but they had no opportunity to establish deep roots. Once the sun bore down on them, they dried up and withered because they had no depth.

- Some gladly receive the Word, but there is no depth in their lives. They are not rooted in the faith, and when trials and adversity come, they quickly abandon their faith. These never make a genuine commitment to the Lord and are quickly gone with the first storm or trial.

C. The Thorny Soil (7, 18-19) – *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.* ^[18] *And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,* ^[19] *And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.* As the seed was planted, on the surface this soil looked good and well prepared to receive the seed. However, along with the good seed, thorns also lay in the soil. As the plants began to grow, the thorns also grew among them, choking them out and hindering their production. These plants likely looked strong, but they yielded no fruit. The thorns and weeds robbed the plant of sunlight, water, and rich nutrients in the soil, slowly choking the life out of the plant. It may resemble the plants around it, but it will never produce fruit.

- Jesus described these as those who are choked out by the cares of the world and the lure of riches and the flesh. They started out well, but soon fell prey to the environment around them. Their desire for the things of the world that please the flesh led to their demise. This illustrates the great importance to rid our lives of those things that hinder our relationship with Christ.

D. The Prepared Soil (8, 20) – *And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.* ^[20] *And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.* This soil pictures the heart that has been properly prepared by the Spirit to receive the seed of the Word. It isn't hard and trampled by sin. It isn't shallow and lacking in depth. It isn't competing with the cares of life. This heart receives the Word, becoming deeply rooted in the Lord, and produces much fruit. This type of heart produces genuine salvation that impacts others for the Lord. This soil results in fruit for the Kingdom.

- In order for the seed to properly germinate and produce a harvest, it must be sown in properly prepared soil. The hearts of everyone is described in this parable. I pray our hearts are properly prepared by the Spirit to receive that which the Lord has for us.

III. The Seed in the Parable (14) – *The sower soweth the word.* I am convinced we have saved the most important principle in the parable until last – the seed. Consider:

A. The Power – Jesus revealed the sower sowed the Word. The Word of God is the seed pictured in the parable. Paul declares that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. *Isaiah 55:11 – So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall*

accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. Heb.4:12 – For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is power within the Word of God; it is living and able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. God's Word has the ability to convict of sin and reveal Christ as the Savior. We don't possess that power, but we can sow the seed and allow the Spirit to work through the Word.

- We live in an impatient world. We have grown accustomed to immediate results. Anyone who knows anything about planting and harvesting knows that it takes time for the seed to germinate in the soil, producing a plant, which in time produces fruit. We don't have the ability to save; the power lies in the Word. In fact, if we do see the harvest, it will be the result of the Spirit's work over time. We cannot expect to receive an immediate harvest every time we sow the seed, but we must be faithful to sow. Once the seed is planted, it is up to the Lord to give the increase! [1 Cor.3:6 – I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.](#)

B. The Potential (8) – *And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.* A tiny seed has the potential to produce a great harvest. Every seed planted won't necessarily produce such a harvest, but the potential is always there. Jesus declares that some of the seed produced a thirty-fold harvest, some sixty-fold, and others even a hundred-fold. Doing the math, one seed has the potential to produce between a 3,000% yield all the way up to a 10,000% yield. This reveals that one tiny seed has the potential to multiply itself 10,000 times.

- We know this principle is true in regard to plants, and it is also true in a spiritual sense. Once the Word of God is planted in favorable soil, a prepared heart, it has unlimited potential. Now, we know Jesus declared we can do nothing apart from Him. He is the vine and we are the branches. The vine produces the fruit, while the branch merely holds the fruit. However, the Gospel seed planted in the right heart has the potential to produce an abundance of fruit for the glory of God and the advancement of the Kingdom. Never underestimate what the Lord is able to do with one seed being sown in the right place. *Guiding and touching just one life can impact multitudes. For example, a Sunday School teacher, a Mr. Kimball, in 1858, led a Boston shoe clerk to give his life to Christ. The clerk, Dwight L. Moody, became an evangelist. In England in 1879, he awakened evangelistic zeal in the heart of Fredrick B. Meyer, pastor of a small church. F. B. Meyer, preaching to an American college campus, brought to Christ a student named J. Wilbur Chapman. Chapman, engaged in YMCA work, employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to do evangelistic work. Billy Sunday held a revival in Charlotte, N.C. A group of local men were so enthusiastic afterward that they planned another evangelistic campaign, bringing Mordecai Hamm to town to preach. During Hamm's revival, a young man named Billy Graham heard the gospel and yielded his life to Christ.* ⁱ Do you see the exponential effect one seed sown in the right place can produce?

Conclusion: Jesus called the people to pay close attention to the words He spoke in the parable. He challenged those who had ears to hear what He had proclaimed. These challenges remain today. We have considered great spiritual truth. Our hearts are pictured in this passage. What type of heart do you have? Is it hard and impermeable; does it lack depth of faith; is it burdened and consumed with worries and the desires of this life; or is it prepared by the Spirit and ready to receive the things of God?

I pray we have been challenged to share our faith with others, planting the good seed of the Gospel. We have no way of knowing what the harvest will be, but we can rest assured that God will give the increase! I encourage you to respond to the guidance of the Spirit.

ⁱ Mattoon's Treasures - Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from The Sermon on the Mount, Volume 1.