

"A Sower Went Forth" - Mark 4:1-20

The parable of the soils.

Before we dive into the fourth chapter of Mark, I want to remind you of a distinction we saw last week. The entire human race is separated into three groups. Those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ comprise one group. There is another group that is absolutely, stubbornly, maliciously opposed to Jesus and His Gospel. Their hearts are so ossified that they will never come to saving faith. They have committed the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, refusing to believe. Many of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus time fall into this group.

Then there are the yet-to-believers. Maybe they've never really considered their eternal state. Maybe they even think pretty highly of Jesus. There were many of these around as Jesus ministered in the First Century. They really liked the miracles. They liked what Jesus can do for them. But they were not yet willing to submit to His Lordship.

Now, if you are in the first group, if you find yourself numbered with the true disciples, then praise the Lord! You are bound for an eternity of absolute bliss. But I have to ask you, don't you find it a bit baffling that so many folks can't or won't believe? I do!

In the scripture with which we opened our worship service, Jesus says:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

And really, I think that is exactly what the parable of the soils is all about. Some folks believe this parable is focused on the sower; I don't. Some folks believe this parable is all about the seed; I don't believe that either. I strongly believe that this parable is all about the soils. It teaches a profound truth about our duty to engage in the Great Commission and what fruit we should expect.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

If you are a Christian, it is your duty to be a witness to Jesus Christ. I'm praying that the Lord will reveal His will to you as we proceed.

Let's look into the parable now.

And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. (Mark 4:1)

I can picture this in my mind's eye. Jesus, seated in a boat, is looking out over this massive crowd on the shore. I imagine that the natural elevation of the beach formed a sort of amphitheater. And Mark informs us that He began to teach again. Jesus was always teaching. These folks had every opportunity to learn from the eternal Word of God.

Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching: (Mark 4:2)

A parable is a succinct story that illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles. Jesus used parables to both illuminate and obfuscate eternal truths. In other words, He

used them to illustrate the truth, but also to hide the truth. More about this later, but He was always using parables. Let's take a look at this one:

"Listen! Behold, (Mark 4:3a)

Akouō (ἀκούω); idou (ἰδοῦ) He begins with two imperatives: Hear this! See this! Seems like Jesus really wanted to focus their attention!

"Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." (Mark 4:3-8)

There is the parable. But then Jesus made a startling statement:

And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mark 4:9)

Apparently, there were many who didn't understand what it had to do with anything. There were those present who simply didn't have ears to hear.

The story itself would have made perfect sense to them. Everyone knew about sowers. In their culture, the sower would go out with a sack of seed hanging around their neck. They would get to the fields, and scatter the seed by essentially tossing it into the wind and they were pretty indiscriminate about it. They would just throw it out everywhere but only the seed that fell on good soil had a chance to mature and bear fruit.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

That was one of Jesus' favorite catch-phrases. It was an exhortation. To those predisposed to belief, it meant "You better pay attention to this." Okay, but what great spiritual truth is being delivered?

It seems that His disciples wanted to know.

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. (Mark 4:10)

Now obviously, Mark doesn't mean that Jesus was completely alone because he had His true disciples around Him. But the massive crowds of almost-believers and unbelievers had gone home.

And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that 'SEEING THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND HEARING THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND; LEST THEY SHOULD TURN, AND THEIR SINS BE FORGIVEN THEM.' " (Mark 4:11-12)

This is a hard teaching! Jesus is talking to His true disciples. He is saying that they are supremely privileged to know the mystery of the kingdom, that is the Gospel and He is saying that He was using parables to purposely conceal the truth from the massive crowds who were listening to Him. He quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 to demonstrate that this was God's plan all along.

But doesn't God want everyone to be saved? After all, Peter says that:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Yes, that is God's prescriptive will, but the reality is that not everyone is elect. Not everyone will be saved. Not everyone has ears to hear.

There are some that would protest. "How can that be fair?" they ask. Well listen, my friends, I don't think you want fair. It would be perfectly fair and just if God sent every one of us to hell for eternity, because that is exactly the wage we have all earned. I don't want fair; I want God's grace.

So, you certainly shouldn't be asking about whether or not God is fair. You should be asking, "Do I have ears to hear?" Because if you ask the Lord to reveal the secret of the Kingdom, He's not going to turn you down.

Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:12-13)

God is not at all malicious about this. If you want to know the truth of the Gospel, He has made it available to you. If you want to understand, just ask. If you honestly seek Him, He will most certainly reveal Himself to you.

And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? (Mark 4:13)

Now, this sounds a bit like a rebuke, and I suppose it is, but it reveals a much more important truth. Jesus is saying, in essence, "If you understand this parable, then you will understand all the kingdom parables." This parable is key. I'd say it's pretty important that we understand it then! Let's see what Jesus has to say:

The sower sows the word. (Mark 4:14)

Aha! So, the seed represents the Word of God! That's the best seed ever!

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

But who is the sower? Jesus? Of course, but it's not only Jesus. It is everyone who spreads the Word of God. When I'm faithful to my ministry, I'm a sower. You should be a sower too. Does the word of God fly naturally from your lips? Are you sowing it indiscriminately?

But now we begin to focus on the soils.

And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. (Mark 4:15)

There are some folks who simply don't want to hear the truth. They listen to the word of God frivolously, if at all. It's not at all important to them. So, they are easy prey for Satan, who snatches the good seed away even before it can germinate. Jesus isn't excusing these folks. "The devil made me do it," is not an excuse that will fly before the Great White Throne of Judgment. That's soil type #1 and these folks remain reprobate.

These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or

persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. (Mark 4:16-17)

In the Middle East, there are many areas where limestone bedrock lies just beneath a thin coat of dusty soil. Seed that falls on that kind of soil can't really take root. It germinates, but the roots just sort of lie on the ground and the sun makes short work of the seedlings. Unfortunately, that's the way it is with many nominal Christians. They hear the Gospel. They respond to the Gospel, but they don't become disciples. They don't study the word of God. They don't have any root in themselves. Their faith is a fraction of an inch deep. They enjoy having a hallelujah breakdown once in a while. But they aren't interested in Bible study and so when they face the inevitable tribulation, they cry, "But I thought God loved me." "I'm out of here."

Now, on to soil type #3.

Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Mark 4:18-19)

There is no shortage of worldly Christians in the Western Church today. We have so many distractions. We are Laodicea. And Jesus says to us:

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— (Revelation 3:15-17)

Is Jesus the most important thing in your life? Do you keep Him at the center of everything you do? Or have you become distracted by the cares of this world? Are you obsessed with the deceitfulness of riches? Are the desires for other things choking out the Word of God? Then, you need to repent.

Jesus says:

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (Revelation 3:18)

You do not want to be an unfruitful Christian. James says:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:19-20)

Don't let the world choke out the Word of God. Let the Word of God transform you.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

And finally, we have the seed that falls on fertile soil.

But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." (Mark 4:20)

Three things happen to these folks: They hear the word. They accept the truth of the word. And they bear fruit. Your job, Christian, is to bear fruit for the Kingdom.

“What does that look like?” you ask. Well, first of all, the fruit of the Holy Spirit should become more and more evident in your life.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

But in a larger sense, bearing fruit for the kingdom involves replicating yourself. It involves scattering the seed, spreading God’s word, delivering the Gospel.

Indiscriminately!

Yes, some of that seed is going to fall by the wayside. Some will fall on rocky soil. Some will fall among thorns. But some will fall on fertile ground, grow and bear fruit.

Notice one more thing: Not all seed produces the same amount of fruit. Some increased by thirtyfold, some by sixty, some by 100. We won’t all bear the same amount of fruit. But if we hear the word, if we accept it as God’s perfect truth, we will bear fruit.

So, this morning, do you have ears to hear? Do you understand what Jesus has done for you?

We are all guilty of a capital crime, because, All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory and the wages of sin is death, but, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Confess Jesus as the Lord of your life. Believe that God has raised Him from the dead and you will be saved to bear fruit for the kingdom, some will increase thirty fold, some sixty, some One hundred.

Amen!