

Parable of the Sower

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- [0 : 00] Well, it has been some time since we've been in the Gospel of Mark, but we're returning then to our study of the Gospel of Christ as the Holy Spirit inspired Mark.
- And as the Lord Jesus, what we've seen so far is that as He began His public ministry at age 30, it didn't take long to be met with opposition both from human enemies and superhuman enemies.
- We've heard our Lord's interactions with the Pharisees and even with Satan and his demons. We've seen the main thing about Jesus' ministry.
- It was a commitment to teach and preach the Word of God. That was the primary thing. Yes, there were miracles and casting out of demons that authenticated the fact that what He spoke was indeed the Word from heaven.
- And now today, we're actually given a sampling of His preaching. A sample sermon. We get to stand with that large crowd along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee and listen as our Lord teaches us from a boat.
- [1 : 13] And He's going to tell us that there are four responses to God's Word wherever it is preached and whoever is preaching it.
- These four responses were found in Jesus' own hearers in the crowds that heard Him that day. And they are found in this group of people as well.
- So it calls us in this passage to honestly examine ourselves and ask, which kind of hearer am I? What is my response to Jesus' words?
- Now before we hear our Lord's sermon, Mark tells us in verse 2 that He taught them many things by parables. A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning.
- There are two spheres here of reality. There's the earthly sphere and there's the spiritual sphere. And a parable compares the two. And when it finds a similarity between the two, it latches on to that and makes it a teaching point.
- [2 : 17] That just as this happens in the earthly sphere, so this happens in the spiritual sphere. And Jesus was the master of parables.
- He couldn't even see birds eating without thinking of His heavenly Father taking care of His own. He couldn't see the lilies of the field decorating the valley like we're seeing at this time.
- Without thinking of the way the Lord clothes the grass of the field. And how much more will He clothe you? Oh, you of little faith.
- On 119 on the way to Goshen on the north side of the road, there's a splash of color that as I drove by, I nearly went in the ditch to get a second look at it. Never seen so many brilliant flowers and crammed into one yard.
- Maybe you've driven past it. It's amazing. There are lessons in the earthly sphere that point us to the greater realities of the heavenly sphere, the spiritual, the unseen.
- [3 : 23] And that's what a parable does. Jesus' use of parables then served a two-fold purpose. This is not so well known. The first use of a parable was the obvious one.

It was to reveal truth. And that to His believers, to those who were seeking truth. But there's a second use of parables that is less obvious but very clearly revealed in our text.

And that use is to conceal or to hide the truth as a judgment upon those who are hard in their hearts toward it. Notice it in verses 10 through 12.

I hope you have your Bibles in front of you because I don't want you to think this is something that I said. Notice what Jesus says in verse 10. When He was alone, the twelve and the others around Him asked Him about the parables.

Indeed, Matthew says they asked, Why do you teach in parables? And He told them, The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. Now a secret, the word there is the word *mysterion*, mystery.

[4 : 26] And in the New Testament, a mystery is something that cannot be known without God sending further revelation to reveal it. And Jesus is giving these parables on the kingdom of God.

And He says, The secret of the kingdom, the mysterious knowledge of the kingdom of God is given to you, you twelve, and you others with them, but not to them.

So if you understand the parable, Blessed are your eyes because they see. Blessed your ears because they hear.

That's in Matthew's account of this parable. It's all of grace if you see. It's all of God if you understand. There's no room for boasting here.

Your eyes have been blessed by God. It's been given to you as a gift is the word He uses. But He carries on in verse 11 and 12.

[5 : 26] But to those on the outside, everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding, otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.

So for those on the inside, parables are given to reveal truth, to give further understanding, but for those on the outside, parables are given to conceal the truth.

Now why would Jesus want to conceal the truth? For the same reason He did in the Old Testament. Because the words that we have here are actually the words that God spoke to Isaiah when He first called him to be a prophet.

He was sent to a stubborn, rebellious, hard-hearted people who refused to hear God's word, who refused to obey what God's prophets were saying.

And so God says to Isaiah, I'm going to send you to them. They have closed their eyes. And indeed, there are none so blind as those who will not see. They don't want to see.

[6 : 30] They don't want to hear God's word. So God gave them over to their hardness of heart so that the more they heard Isaiah's preaching, the more hardened they were against God's word.

You know, the word of God never leaves you as it finds you. It either hardens you or it softens you. It leaves you harder or softer than when you came in.

And these who had hardened themselves against the word didn't want to hear it. He withholds the divine illumination by speaking in parables that will confuse them.

They will not understand and they won't care to understand enough to come and ask like His disciples do. And so even Jesus speaking in parables here is a test of our responsiveness to His word.

And it's a judgment upon those who have already closed their eyes, stopped their ears. And they were all over in the crowd that day. There were the scribes, the Pharisees, the priests, the teachers of the law.

[7 : 43] And you know why they were there. They weren't there to learn. They were there to find something to accuse Jesus, something to reject Him. And so Jesus speaks in parables. And they don't understand.

And the parable becomes a judgment, a judicial blinding of them for their desire not to see.

And so we have here a warning to all who hear the words of God. Verse 9, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Bring your ears willing to hear, wanting to know the truth of God.

Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts like they did. So the parable of the sower then. And maybe the first thing we need to do in order to understand this parable is to shed ourselves of modern farming techniques.

We see hundreds and thousands of acres perhaps of flat land that's been cleared of all stones and trees and stumps. And tractors pulling the planters back and forth, dropping seeds in the ground, something we'll see soon all around us.

[8 : 58] But farming in first century Palestine was nothing like that. Most men had a few acres. Maybe He tried his best to clear it. But there were clearly different types of soil in his little farm.

So the farmer would take his seed bag and he would go out and he'd grab seed and he'd cast it. He'd cast it on all the soil that he had in hope of a harvest. Well, let's look.

What is the seed? The seed sown. Verse 3 says, listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed. And then Jesus explains in verse 14, the farmer sows the word.

The word. So these parables are about the kingdom of God. And a summary of what Jesus was preaching is just this, that He was preaching about the kingdom.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This spiritual kingdom is the most important thing happening in the world today where God's rule is being established in the hearts of boys and girls, men and women who submit to Jesus Christ.

[10 : 15] To have Him as their Savior and their Lord. It's a growing kingdom. And it's growing all over the world even while we're here today.

How does it grow? Not with swords loud clashing or roll of stirring drums. Not like the kingdoms of this world with the weapons of this world. No, the Lord Jesus is sowing His seed.

He's sowing the seed of the word of God. The gospel that is bringing people into His kingdom. So kids, a seed.

It's an amazing thing. It's a living thing. It's a living organism. So you're standing under a huge oak tree and you reach down and you get a little acorn and you're holding that seed in your hand.

Do you know there's another tree just as big as that in that little seed? Now it needs nourishment from the earth and all the rest. But that's the seed.

[11 : 14] The living seed that will produce another tree. And even so, the word of God, the gospel, is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

Hebrews 4.12 says, the word of God is living and active. That's the kind of seed it is. It tracks us down. It searches us. It finds us. It lays hold of us.

It convicts us. It points out the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. It's alive. Jesus said, the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

They're not dead words. The gospel is called the word of life in Philippians 2.16. It's not only living, it is life-giving.

So Peter says in 1 Peter 1.23, for you have been born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God.

[12 : 17] This is the seed that God is sowing right now, that Jesus is sowing all over the world. And through this living word of God, life is being given to dead sinners, dead in sin and transgressions, and they are being added to the kingdom of God.

That's how the kingdom comes. That's how the kingdom grows. That's how the kingdom spreads through the living and life-giving word of God until Jesus comes back and consummates that kingdom with his own presence.

So what are you doing? And what am I doing with this living seed of God's word? It's to be scattered everywhere, near and far, with our mouths, with literature, with our invitation for people to come and hear it, with our money, with our prayers, adorned by our lives.

Amazing seed, this word of God. Amazing privilege to have it in our language and to have it on our lips. By it, we've been saved and others need to know it and hear it and be saved and live.

So let's get it out of the seed bag and out into the world. That's one of the lessons here in this for us. Now that's the seed then, the word.

[13 : 40] Now there's four different kinds of soil that have this seed scattered in them and these represent the hearts of people who hear the word of God. And they hear it from the word of God, whether from Jesus directly, there on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee or from his apostles or from preachers and witnesses like you and me today.

It's the same seed. It's not changed. It's still good. It still saves. But there are these four different soils. soils. And it's to be noted in the parable that all these soils have the seed scattered on them.

I do believe there is a lesson that we too are to scatter the seed on all soils. We're not to try to figure out what's good soil. Oh, she looks promising. I'll share the gospel with her.

No, we're just scattered everywhere. It's amazing what God can do with that seed and soil that doesn't look productive. That's a bit off from the parable, but it is true.

And so we scatter the seed on all soil. An unbeliever, you need this seed today. Whoever you are, whatever you've done, however long you have rejected Jesus, it is your sins that have been your downfall and have brought you under God's holy wrath and condemnation.

[15 : 02] But in love, he sent his one and only son into the world to die for sin. He raised him from the dead. And ascended him to heaven and that living Jesus now is inviting you, one and all, to turn from your own selfish way and to come and put all your trust in Jesus to save you from your sins.

And if you do, you too will be forgiven and given a new life, life in Christ, life eternal, without end, with the Lord. Well, that's the gospel and that's the seed that the farmer went out to sow.

And of the four soils, we want to note up front that only the last of the four produced a crop, showing them to be the only ones that had true saving response to that word.

The other three never had saving faith in Christ because saving faith always bears fruit in the life. some of them claim to be saved and if you'd ask them, they'd say, sure, I'm saved.

And so Jesus' parable exposes the truth that not all who say they are saved really are saved. So let's, again, examine our hearts as we proceed through the four soils.

[16 : 24] Soil number one is the path, the hard heart. It says in verse four, as he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up.

Now we've already read in Mark's gospel of Jesus and his disciples walking through the fields, remember, and plucking some grains. Well, there were paths then that were formed as people walked back and forth through the fields.

Hard packed became as hard as asphalt, perhaps. And Jesus explains in verse 15, some people are like seed along the path where the word is sown.

And as soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Now notice these people have heard the word. They heard Jesus.

They come to church. They hear sermons. The word landed on their hearts, but their hearts were hard and unresponsive to the word.

[17 : 23] They don't want it. They don't have spiritual understanding of it, confused perhaps. And they don't care enough to ask to know better. And so the word just lays exposed like a seed on the ground, on the surface, and it does them no good.

Now Jesus is going to move from what we see to the unseen. And what he tells us is that there's more happening here than meets the eye.

You don't see this, but this is the reality that's happening here this morning, there at the Sea of Galilee. That as soon as they hear the word, Satan and his hellish demons come and take away the word.

The word that was sown in them so that they may not believe and be saved. They snatch it like birds, circling around the tractor with the planter that leaves some seeds on the surface.

They snatch it up and it's gone. And once again, we're confronted with Jesus by the sobering reality of satanic activity.

[18 : 42] Satan doesn't mind you coming to church and hearing the word of God preached as long as it, that's as far as it goes. And he's here to make sure it doesn't go further.

Where do birds go? They go where the seeds are. Where does Satan go? He goes where the word is being sown. How few unbelievers ever think that when they come to church, Satan is here with his demons.

I don't mean Satan personally. He's mentioned as the leader of all his demons. They're here. They're here. Why? They're here to snatch the word up even as it's preached.

A few things reveal the diabolical hatred of Satan for all mankind that he would snatch from sinners the only good news that there is in the world of salvation in Jesus Christ.

And that seed that would save you is snatched away by the devil. For the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

[19 : 53] They can't see. Why? Because the devil is blinding them. He's snatching the word. Satan wants you damned forever.

And he shows it by snatching the word away from those who are hearing it. Maybe it's just distracting thoughts as you sit under the preaching of the word. It's the wandering mind and you never see but there are evil spirits that are involved often in such things.

Maybe twisting your understanding of it. Distorting the word of God. Or maybe you listened and you were convicted by your sin. You were made fearful by the word of God's coming punishment of his wrath forever and ever.

But your first step out of the door the demon snatched the word away and all you could think of was the activities of today and tomorrow and the next day. And the word of God was gone forever that you heard.

And you're no better for it. It has no saving effect upon you even though you heard it. Jesus remains the unknown Jesus to you.

[21 : 06] You know what Jesus says about that word that you heard? You will one day be judged by that word. It will be brought back to you on the day of judgment. You were there.

You heard the gospel. You heard of Christ. What did you do with that word? What did you do with Christ? And in that day you the one you didn't want to hear about the one you wanted to ignore the one you wanted to push out you will not be able to escape.

To whom much is given much will be required so don't let the devil rob you of eternal life of knowing Christ and the salvation that is in him. That's soil number one the hard heart and Satan's involvement in snagging the seed.

As you hear it. But there's another soil. Number two the shallow heart. Verse five some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil.

It sprang up quickly but the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up and the plants the plants were scorched because they had no root. Here in northern Indiana we have rocks that appear every spring in the fields but that's nothing like Palestine where you had a whole layer of rock just under the surface of the top soil.

[22 : 23] Maybe just a couple inches in places. And so that ground the two inches would heat up real fast in the spring summer sunlight. And so any seed dropped in there would maybe even sprout earlier than the other soil that was deeper.

But then as it sent down its root it would hit that layer of rock and it would wither under the scorching sun and die. And Jesus explains them in verses 16 and 17 others like seeds sown on rocky places hear the word and at once receive it with joy but since they have no root they last only a short time when trouble or persecution comes because of the word they quickly fall away.

I want you to notice again these people were in church they heard the word but unlike the first group these receive it and they receive it at once and they receive it with great joy.

Well there is this great emotional response a lot of excitement in what they hear. You know there are many wonderful benefits of salvation nobody wants to go to hell and my goodness forgiveness of sins to be rid of all my guilt there's a lot to draw a person to an excited response to this gospel but it's not Jesus Christ that they want it's rather what he can give them and so they make a profession of faith count me in baptize me I'll join the church but it's only a little while before they are seen to be what they really are because only in a little while do they come upon troubles and and persecutions because of the word they are now professing that this is this is the way I live now and and this is what I believe and and that brings them into conflict with the world that hates God and his his word I recently read of a young lady in a Muslim family in a country where it's illegal to convert from Islam she heard the word about Jesus she believed was baptized just a couple weeks ago as a follower of Jesus Christ her mother strongly opposes her and she found her daughter's phone and all the names of the church friends and she's now threatening her to turn them all over to the authorities if she will not renounce her faith in Jesus Christ all who live godly in Christ

Jesus will suffer persecution and when it comes it shows what's in the heart of this hearer I'm praying for this young lady that there will be real faith in the real Christ with a real power to take her through this trial and to hold true to him if we're going to be faithful to God's word to confess it to obey it then it's going to cost us something in this unbelieving world that hates our Christ and hates his word maybe popularity maybe relationships maybe you'll be shunned by some old friends ridiculed as one of those weird religious nuts maybe it's an advancement at work because you won't cheat and lie for the boss maybe it's advancement in your studies because you believe in creation because you believe that life in the womb is sacred you know it's getting harder and harder to practice medicine in our country if you hold to that truth what will happen then when there's persecution because of the word's sake well the rocky soil stands for people who quickly profess faith in Christ but do not have the root of the matter in them no new birth no saving faith or repentance no spiritual union with Christ himself no spiritual sap flowing from Christ the fruitful vine into them the branch enabling them to live a new life no love for Christ no relationship with him no Holy Spirit and so when trouble for the word comes they're out of here

[26 : 49] I didn't want it that bad easy come easy go quick in quick out and the sad thing is that so much of the so called gospel proclaimed today is deceiving hearers it's setting them up to be such shallow hearers it gives the impression if not outwardly saying it that if you come to Jesus your problems will go away you'll have kingdom power to speak a word and all troubles must flee you'll have health and wealth and prosperity all yours just for the claiming name it and claim it and all the while there's no conviction of sin there's no clear call to repent and to do a 180 you're going that way you must turn and repudiate your past life and come to Christ to be your Savior and Lord that's not being preached there's no mention of the cost of discipleship you'll have more problems in one way if you become a Christian because you live in a world that hates your Christ and his word do you know that the more the crowds increase the more Jesus preached the cost of discipleship and he thinned the crowds must have really caused those apostles to scratch their head

Lord they're all leaving maybe we should change our methods but he didn't the bigger the crowd the more he pointed to the cost cost and so often people are not told that if you follow Christ that means you're going to have to deny yourself I don't mean from a meal or something like that no you're going to have to deny your own way your own self way the whole way has got to be renounced and if you follow Christ you're going to need a cross and not the kind that you beautify yourself with around your neck but a cross to die on a cross for your way to die on your lust your evil desires your evil ways it's got to be crucified with Christ if you're going to be a follower of Christ this shallow half inch deep Christianity leaves its followers totally unprepared then you see when trials and persecutions for the word come and they're gone out the door as fast as they came in because no real root of faith and union with

Jesus Christ to sustain them in their trials do you know some people like that oh they were all excited for Jesus where are they now they're nowhere to be found in the house of the Lord worshipping him living for him bearing witness of him you know they're often the ones that are the most unresponsive to any gospel that's brought to them because they've been burned once and they're not going to let it happen again their latter end is worse than their first this is pliable in Pilgrim's Progress you remember him in Bunyan's allegory Christian setting out for the celestial city and his neighbor pliable comes along pliable means easily persuaded and he went with him and as they're walking along he says Christian what are the good things to be received in the place where we're going well he's captivated with the description of heaven promising better things than he had here and so he says come on Christian let's pick up the pace and Christian says oh I can't go as fast as I'd like because of this heavy burden on my back that was conviction of sin his guilt before God he's not yet come to Christ and conversion but pliable had no such burden he's spry and ready to go let's go faster and just then they both fell into a miry bog the slough of the spawn and there they floundered in the mud and Christian started to sink because of his heavy burden and now pliable asks oh good Christian where are you now and he says truly I do not know and at this pliable became offended and angrily criticized his fellow traveler is this the happiness you've been telling me about if we've had such miserable misfortune as this at the beginning of our journey what may we expect before we reach our journey's end if I can but get out of this mess alive you can have the heavenly country and all its glories and enjoy it all alone so far as I'm concerned and with that he gave a desperate lunge and got out of the mire on that side of the bog which was toward his own house and so he went away and Christian saw him no more he heard the word of God he rejoiced at once to receive it but since he had no root he lasted only a short time when trouble or persecution comes because of the word he quickly fell away that's the shallow rocky soil there's a third soil and it is the overcrowded heart the seed that fell among thorns that grew up and choked the plants so they did not bear fruit

Jesus explains them in verse 18 and 19 these like seeds like seeds sown among thorns hear the word but the worries of this life the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word making it unfruitful these people hear the word of God as well make some profession of faith but they never bore the proof of real faith which is always the same it's lasting fruitfulness there's always fruit from faith faith works by love it always does and they didn't have it and this Jesus said by their fruit you'll know them you'll know who are mine and who are not mine James says without works faith is dead and useless it cannot save you now this doesn't show itself as quickly as the rocky soil they quickly fell away this takes a little more time for the thorn to grow up around the plant until it finally chokes out the life so that it cannot bear fruit

Jesus identifies the thorns in three categories the worries of this life and these are just ordinary cares of life you got a job to go to debts to pay a home to maintain yard to mow kids to clothe feet and get to their dentist and sporting events you've got entertainments you've got movies you've got your phone you've got your hobbies recreations on and on the cares of life not necessarily sinful in themselves but allowed to encroach and to choke the word of God they become deadly and the word of God is choked out no time for it no heart to live for it if something else comes up the word read or preached or obeyed is just choked out not seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness beware of the ordinary cares of life just sucking the life out of you Christian it's the same cares of life that send lost people to hell for ignoring

[34 : 16] Christ that we have to fight against so guard against them pull out those thorns there's the deceitfulness of wealth falling prey to the deceitful promise that wealth will satisfy us if I just had more I'd feel more secure and so we set aside the word our time in it our hearing it our obeying it if going contrary to the word will get me more of this world's stuff and then the last is the desires for other things these are the pleasures of life that we want some good in and of themselves others evil in and of themselves evil pleasures sinful pleasures but even the good pleasures can become idols when they choke out the word this is the heart that's living for pleasure it's never satisfied never cries enough and slowly the word of God is strangled to death and bears no fruit in that life that's the effect of all these thorns they choke out the word and make it unfruitful as unfruitful as the rocky soil as unfruitful as the hard heart they have that in common well there's a third soil and thank God there is the only reason there is is because of God and that's the good soil the good heart and this is what

Jesus says about it in verse 20 others like seeds sown on good soil hear the word accept it and produce a crop some 30 some 60 and some 100 fold that's the first time we've seen a crop and that's where true religion always goes it changes the life you can't have Christ the fruitful vine in you and be united to him without bearing fruit it's impossible I'm sorry he's just that fruitful that powerful that life changing it's the same thing with this seed you see it's powerful and these people they do more than hear it they accept it they turn from their own way and they come to Jesus Christ in that sweet surrender of saving faith and cast themselves upon him to save them and to have him as their savior from sin and to have him as the new master of their life telling them how to live and they sweetly embrace him in the gospel they embrace his word now as the rule of their life they humbly put themselves under it to submit and to believe whatever it says to obey whatever it commands it's a new way of life and it's because this word of life this living life giving word is now in them it's God alone who makes a heart good otherwise we'd be one of these other three soils but God makes the heart good soil to accept the word not as the word of men but as it is in truth the word of God which is at work in you who believe you see you can't have the word of God in you without it working in you producing fruit that's the point of this this whole parable differing degrees of course some thirty some sixty some a hundredfold but all of them bearing fruit different degrees but always a faith in Christ that works always a repenting of sin always a holiness of life to be without such fruit is still to be on the broad road to hell whatever you may claim otherwise that's what

Jesus is teaching the crowd there at the shoreline that day that's what he's teaching us here in this place today some receive the word with a hard heart others with a shallow heart others with an overcrowded thorny heart but some with a good heart made good by God who takes out the stony heart and puts in a soft pliable heart to God in his ways what about you which kind of here are you then how do you respond how will you respond to the word of God that's been sown on your hearts right now today what's keeping you from accepting Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord as you care for your soul don't take these things lightly that's what Jesus is saying to the crowd of hearers do you have a hard heart do you know Jesus can make hard hearts good soil bring your heart to

Jesus you have a rocky shallow heart made a profession one time long ago and you just turned your back on it and Jesus can make shallow hearts good soil to receive his word savingly he can make hearts that have been choked out by the things of this world its cares its riches its pleasures he can make them live again he can make them good come to Jesus he is the savior believers we can get discouraged scattering the seed and seeing so few believe but Jesus told us it would be that way it was that way for him nobody scattered more seed than Jesus and he had all four of these and only one of these types of things because this is the only word that will save them and bring them into the eternal kingdom of

Jesus Christ so don't try to trim the message to make it palatable to the lost sinner that won't save him you may get a quick response of joy and happiness and then a little persecution comes and he's gone as fast as he came on no this is the seed this is how one number 317 and I trust just take take a look around you even as you get your hymnal out take encouragement from this last soil there there are many here most of us who have heard and and receive this seed and are bearing fruit by God's grace some 30 60 100 fold but it's come to us and God has made our hearts good and that should encourage us though many reject the gospel God has his people and he makes hearts to be responsive to it I leave you with the words of Jesus

[41 : 34] I am the vine you are the branches if a man abides in me and I in him he will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples amen