## SEED SOWN ON GOOD SOIL

Mark 4: 1-20
Key Verse: 20

**“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”**

**Prayer**

In this passage we learn about a parable of a farmer who encounters four types of soil, which represent four different responses to the message of the kingdom of God. Of those four responses, only one response leads to a favorable outcome. The other 3 are not favorable. A farmer finds a favorable outcome when his plants grow, not when they wither, then he can have a profit. And same for us we want favorable outcomes in our spiritual life. So we are like farmers growing seeds, when we hear a message and we learn from it, and put it into practice. And continue to put it into practice. Jesus liked to use agriculture for many of his parables, with many illustrations using seeds, plants, and of course the product that a plant produces which is fruit, the best part of the plant. Bearing fruit in our lives is important, it is they purpose for which God made us. Some Christians are fruitful, and some are not, this passage explains why.

**First, the parable of the Sower.**  The beginning of this passage illustrates a beautiful picture. Jesus was standing lake side and teaching a large crowd of people. We see that whenever there was a crowd of people, Jesus wanted to help them, no matter where he was. In a house, in a field, or by a lake. The people were drawn to Jesus and pressed in around him because of his popularity. The message was being interrupted at this point, so he came up with a practical solution, he got into a boat and stood on the boat and taught them from there.

Jesus said in verse 3, **“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.”** Why did he first tell the people to “listen”? Weren’t they already listening, that’s why they were there? Obviously Jesus was going to teach something very important. Jesus was preparing them to open their hearts. People can hear, but they might not always listen. In fact, a lot of this passage is about listening, and what it means - versus the auditory nerve response of simply hearing sound. It was also a reminder to put away their cell phones. Jesus then told them the full parable in verses 4 to 8, **“As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path,and the birds came and ate it up. Some feel on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still others fell on good soil. It came up grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”**

Here the farmer, or sower, represents Jesus. And the seed represents God’s truth or God’s word. And soil represents the spiritual condition of the people who hear the Word. The farmer casts seeds using the broadcast method, sowing seed everywhere, even getting some on a path or in rocky areas. Likewise God’s word is for everyone to hear. He gives out his truth generously, for all types of people, without discrimination. God does not have an abundance of truth to keep it for himself, he wants us to have it. But although God’s word is free to all, there are different responses to hearing it. The four types could be summarized as 1. Pathlike soil 2. Rocky soil 3. Thorny soil 4. Good soil. (Use visual aid).

Jesus then said to the crowd in verse 9, “**Whoever has ears to hear let them hear.”** He was not talking about physical ears, but about having the ability to understand the Word. Do we need a PhD in theology then, to get special ears to understand the Word? No even little children can understand the Bible, a lot of times better than adults can.We need the humility and an open heart to hear the word of God. A lot of people are good at hearing but not listening. Jesus tells us to make a conscious effort, to “Listen” to his Word.

**Second, The meaning of the parable of the sower.**  After Jesus dismissed the crowd the disciples were alone with him. They asked him about the parable. They asked questions like this because they wanted to grow, and because they had a healthy curiosity. Jesus’ words fascinated them, and they were excited to be on their spiritual journey and their walk with the Lord. Which is why they are called disciples, which means learner. What was their reward for being disciples? In verse 11 it says that they had received the secret of the kingdom of God. What is the secret of the kingdom of God? Simply it is the way of salvation, the way to heaven. Jesus made a metaphor in Matthew chapter 7, and called the way to heaven a narrow gate. And also said that the way to destruction is a broad path, or like a highway. A highway is so easy to navigate and find our way with little effort. So the narrow gate to heaven is harder to find. This metaphor explains how the way to heaven is like a secret. But it is not a matter of God withholding information that makes the gate narrow, it is a matter of people’s heart condition that can make it harder to find.

The disciples were on this path to eternal life. But to those on the “outside” - “*they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding.”* That is why Jesus spoke in parables. To those who have an open heart, a parable is easy to understand. But to those who are hard hearted a parable is like solving a problem or a riddle, to them it might not be worth the extra effort.

But those with an open heart – there are no obstacles to them, they will seek after God as though searching for a treasure. This reminds us of the Magi in the east who came to see Jesus when he was born as a baby in a manger. It is believed these Magi came from Babylon, which is more than 900 miles away. The distance would seem to have been a barrier, or something that kept them on the “outside”. They were on the inside. They traveled for months through a desert that was very hot during the day and below freezing at night, dangerous conditions. And they arrived in Bethlehem and worshiped their newborn Savior when they found him. On the other hand, there are those on the outside. Pontius Pilate sat in close proximity to God in the flesh and asked “What is truth?” What was Jesus answer? Jesus gave no answer. Because Pilate was not really wanting an answer. His question was more rhetorical as if there is no such thing as truth. People like Pilate, who sarcastically ask “What is truth?” are on the outside. There are a lot of people who sound like that today, thinking truth is whatever they want it to be, and they blind themselves thinking this way.

Let’s now look closely at each of the four types of soil in this parable. The first type is described as a path, which is compacted earth that is so hard that the seed cannot penetrate the ground, it stays on the surface of the path. They studied the compaction of paths used by pastoral shepherds who had hundreds of sheep walk on the path everyday and found that these paths have a very high compaction almost like pavement. So they made earth moving equipment called sheepsfoot rollers to simulate a lot of sheep walking on a path, to make it very hard. These people’s hearts are so hard and stubborn that the word of God finds no entry point to get in. Some kind of pride or prejudice or bitterness has completely hardened their hearts like concrete. Or maybe a bad life experience caused this. Though they hear the word of God, they never accept it. The consequence of not accepting the word of God is serious. Satan, who is compared to the hungry bird, comes and takes away the word from their hearts. They become the prey of the devil. Even if they go to church, they can have a hard heart. There are those who come to church and expect the message alone to soften their heart, they sit down and say “*this message better move my heart*”. But going to church to hear a message requires prayer and preparation in advance, it’s not all up to the speaker. People listening should have a heart that is ready. And usually, while standing at the front, you can see by the expressions and body language who has a soft heart, and who has their arms folded. If we are not making effort we are not challenged and our hearts become hard, and the word of God just bounces off. So we are warned against becoming path- like soil in this parable.

Next lets talk about the hearts like rocky soil. (Verses 16-17). The interesting thing about this category of soil is not hardened and can grow seed, at least initially. These people study the Bible and attend worship service, many times. But, the moment trouble or persecution comes because of their faith, they fall away. Persecution, like the sun in the parable, is a necessary ingredient for growth. Throughout history the times of persecution are the times that the church grew the most. But those with shallow roots fall away during such a time. Troubles or persecution is not the problem, it seems like a problem. The problem is that the soil is rocky and shallow. Jesus encourages us to take root in his word. He said to those who had believed in him, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”** (Jn 8:31-32).

The third category is those who have hearts like thorny soil (verses 18-19). These people receive the word of God and it begins to sprout in their hearts and it even takes root. This sounds good so far. But, the problem is that the thorns and crop grow together. The thorns soak up valuable resources that should be allowing the crop to thrive. Jesus mentioned three kinds of thorns. A powerful thorn is the worries of this life. Practically speaking, living by faith means to overcome real problems in daily life by faith. When our security is threatened, we can easily fall into worry. We might worry about ourselves or our family members. We might worry about our children, or if they are safe. We might worry about how to pay the mortgage, or if we will have enough retirement income, or how to pay our child’s education. In reality, we can spend our whole lifetime worrying. In truth, worry comes from lack of faith. W hen worries attack, it is the time to entrust our lives to God and to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Mt 6:33). Another thorn is the deceitfulness of wealth. Wealth itself is not a problem. Jesus did not say money is the root of all evil, he said the “love” of money is the root of all evil. The problem comes when one assumes wealth will make them happy. Then they begin to love money, and that is when it becomes a problem. People trying to pursue money can become miserable in many different ways. They can lose all the money they have trying to make money. I made some money in the stock market once, then lost it later, and I was not happy and quite distracted from my spiritual life. Strangely I only wanted to mess around in the stock market more. Then I realized it was a thorny weed. When thorny weeds grow in our hearts, that is time to pull them out so the word of God can grow.

Finally, lets talk about hearts like good soil. Lets look at verse 20 again, it is our key verse, **“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”**  The big difference between this soil and previous soils is that this soil is fruitful. Going the full measure, from germination to fruit!! It is so fruitful that it more than compensates for all of the unfruitful soils and the farmer can still have profit. What is the secret to bearing much fruit? It is to hear the word and accept it. This is very simple, not complicated. Just hear God’s word and accept it. It means to allow the word of God to come into our hearts and to rule over us, not interpret it in our own way or change it. Also we should not read the Bible for just knowledge, but to accept the word and apply it to our life. Accepting the word of God is to surrender oneself to God. In order to do that, we must really pay attention to what it says. We need to deny ourselves and discard our own ideas and obey God’s word, not partially obey. It’s a product of having a personal relationship with Jesus. To have a personal relationship with Jesus is like a vine connected to a branch as Jesus described in John chapter 15. When we, as vines are connected to a source of life and nourishment Jesus, we can be fruitful. Then God surely blesses us and we can fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. So much of learning about God comes from revelation too, which is God’s spirit working. Sometimes, it’s ok to not understand it immediately, like the disciples did not. But then later, with God’s help we get it. Just like a plant does not grow right away, but slowly. We need to water our spiritual seeds, which is done with prayer, meditating on God’s word, attending worship service, and also journaling and writing a personal reflection.

For some, who don’t have a good soil in their heart, is it too late, are they stuck? For example if someone has a heart like a path. No, they can ask God to help them. If a person has a hard heart God can soften their heart. King David asked God for a clean heart, a good heart. I had my heart softened many times by God. This is a matter of prayer, asking God to give us hearts with good soil. In Luke chapter 17 the disciples asked Jesus, **“Lord increase our faith**.” That is a good prayer to have. Recognizing our own slow growth or our own small faith, and simply asking God to help us is a very humble thing to do, a prayer God will hear.

This passage shows us why God wants us to listen. It is so we can understand God’s word and then we are equipped to do his work. We can go out and share the gospel with our friends and family. And even into the whole world if we are called to do that. Like Danny and Nek are doing right now. They prepared their hearts a lot, and kept their relationship with Jesus very strong. The ultimate purpose is to bear fruit, because it gives glory to God. What kind of fruit do we bear? There are fruits of the Holy Spirit. We know what they are: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. These are internal fruits. Then there are external fruits as well such as fruit of evangelism, success in ministry, success in our workplace, good relationships, a beautiful Bible house, and many other things, the possibilities of fruit born from God’s spirit has no limits.

In this passage we learned that God gives his truth to all people, generously, but the response very much depends on the individual. We cannot make excuses to God, but are responsible for hearing the word, and accepting it. We do can do this by keeping our hearts right before God, humble, and open, willing to continue learning like the disciples. May God help you to do so and bear much fruit.