

Sower and the Seed

Series: Can You Explain That To Me?

Mark 4:1-20

July 12, 2020

Welcome again to worship. Wherever you are here in the sanctuary, in the parking lot, in a coffee shop or at home in your PJs; know that the Lord is with you. Of course, He may say you need some new pajamas. Too many holes in them.

I remember once deciding it would be nice for me to visit my brother while he was in college, at the time at Taylor University. He had decided to become a pre-med major, so we attended one of his bio-chemistry class. I can still remember how I felt. I stand here before you and testify that I didn't understand a single thing the professor was teaching. Not one. I could hear the words, but they made no sense to me. Now, I consider myself a smart man, but I was a complete idiot in that class.

We probably all have those areas that we are just as dumb as a post. Some of you cannot figure out computers, right? Some of you cannot figure out math, right? We men cannot figure out women, can I get an "Amen"? Or a honk? Or a thumbs up?

So, if we're being honest here, let's go ahead and admit something: occasionally, we don't understand Jesus either. Jesus says something, and we're like, "What? Could you go over that one more time?"

Now, I don't want you to feel too badly about that. Look through the Gospels, and you will see many times, the disciples said, "What? Could you go over that one more time?" Especially when Jesus spoke in parables.

For the next four weeks, we are going to look at some of those parables with our message entitled, "Can You Explain That To Me?" Each week, we will look at a parable of Jesus that the disciples said they needed help with.

Today, we are going to look at Mark 4:1-20.

Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore.¹

Let's stop there for a moment and take a look at the context for a moment.

The text says that Jesus was teaching by the lakeshore. I would guess that most of us could probably identify where He was at. What lake are we talking about? Of course, it was the Sea of Galilee. What most of us probably don't realize is that most of Jesus' ministry was centered around this lake and the area called Galilee.

- Capernaum: Healed Peter's mother-in-law, paralytic, centurion's servant (as Kathy talked about last week). Capernaum was His base of operations.
- Caesarea Phillipi: Confession of Peter & Jesus predicted His death
- Bethsaida: Healed blind man
- Magdela: where Jarius' daughter was raised from the dead and the woman with the issue of blood was healed.
- Nazareth: boyhood home

The Sea of Galilee was the site of many teachings and miracles, including walking on the water & calming the storm. The Sermon on the Mount, the feeding of the

¹ Mark 4:1 (NLT2)

multitudes, all around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus only went to Jerusalem and surrounding towns on rare occasions. Most of His life was spent in Galilee.

The text tells us that when crowds got too big, Jesus would use a boat as His pulpit. Mark 4:

He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."²

The picture Jesus was painting here captured the audience's attention. In an agricultural society, seeing a farmer going up the furrows of newly plowed field with a bag of seeds to sow would have been a common sight. The sower went out to sow and as he did, he threw out the seed liberally. Not all seed would germinate, so he needed to sow seeds in every bit of land he had to get the best harvest.

In verses 4-8, Jesus talks about the seed falling on four types of soil and the results on each kind of soil. Let me explain this.

Farmer's fields in ancient Palestine were in the form of long, narrow strips, divided by little paths, which became beaten as hard as pavement by the feet, hooves and wheels of those who used them. As the farmer travelled with his donkey to the fields, some of the seeds would fall on the hard pack, or sometimes a farmer might sow a little too close to the pathway. The seeds would bounce off the hard soil instead of embedding in the soil. Immediately hundreds of birds would flock around the seeds and devour them before they ever even had a chance to sprout.

There was also shallow soil. Don't think of stony ground here; such ground usually could not even be cultivated. The problem was that parts of Palestine have merely a shallow layer of 2-3 inches of soil over limestone bedrock. When the seed falls on such shallow soil, the sun quickly warms the seeds and they sprout in feverish growth. But the hot Middle East sun beats down and the plants' roots meet the bedrock, and it quickly withers and dies.

And of course, there is always the issue of weedy soil. I don't think I need to explain that.

Then finally is the good soil that produces 30, 60, even 100 times what was planted.

Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."³

An elderly man had serious hearing problems for a number of years. His family tried again and again to convince him to get a hearing aid. Finally, he relented and went to the doctor and was fitted for a set of hearing aids that allowed him to hear at 100 percent. A month later he went back to the doctor. The doctor said with a smile, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." The old

² Mark 4:2-9 (NLT2)

³ Mark 4:9 (NLT2)

man replied, "Oh, I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around listening to their conversations. I've changed my will three times!"

It's amazing what we hear when we really listen. But if we are lazy, we hear only the story and not the truth behind it. And that's what happened here. Verses 10-13:

Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant. He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.'" Then Jesus said to them, "If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?"⁴

Here is the difficult section of the passage. If we take it at its face value, it sounds as if Jesus taught in parables deliberately to hide His meaning from ordinary men and women.

Jesus was actually quoting Isaiah 6:9-10. He saw so many the eyes of dull incomprehension. He saw so many people blinded by prejudice, deafened by wishful thinking, too lazy to think. He in essence turned to His disciples and said to them: "Do you remember what Isaiah once said? He said that when he came with God's message to God's people Israel in his day, they were so dully un-understanding that you would have thought that God had shut instead of opened their minds; I feel like that today." When Jesus said this, He did not say it in anger, or irritation, or bitterness, or exasperation. He said it with the wistful longing of frustrated love, the poignant sorrow of a man who had a tremendous gift to give which people were too blind to take.

If we read this, hearing not a tone of bitter exasperation, but a tone of regretful love, it will sound quite different. It will tell us not of a God who deliberately blinded people and hid His truth, but people who were so dully uncomprehending, that it seemed no use even for God to try to penetrate the wall of their lazy incomprehension.

We see this today, folks. The tearing down of statues. The violence masquerading as peace. Over and over again in our news, people who don't have a clue what they're doing, and if you tried to tell them the truth, they would just look at you dumbfounded like you are the idiot.

God save us from hearing His truth like that!

So, Jesus used parables not to cloak His meaning or hide His truth, but to enable us to see it and to compel us to recognize it.

And here is His explanation:

The farmer plants seed by taking God's word to others. The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. And the seed that fell

⁴ Mark 4:10-13 (NLT2)

*on good soil represents those who hear and accept God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"*⁵

The seed in the parable represents the Word of God which means the soils represent the response of various hearts to the Word of God.

First, the footpath soil. Folks, Satan does not want you to get the Word in your heart. So, if your heart is hard, you only aid Satan in his effort to keep the Word from you. It says, "at once." My Sunday School class will recognize the Greek word *euthus*⁶ here. Mark uses this word *euthus* 41 times in his Gospel. Satan does not waste time in doing his work. He knows any delay can permit the Word to sink in and do damage to his work.

Next, the rocky soil. The deceptive heart looks good, but it is soon exposed. Again, Jesus says, *euthus*, "immediately". The rocky soil heart readily receives the Word of God making it look like it is very spiritual. It does who joyously, which further increases the deception that this is a good heart. But that reception was faulty. It looked sincere, but it could not survive affliction or persecution. When troubles come because of the Word, this heart recants; it does not produce spiritual fruit from the Word.

Third, the thorny soil. This heart had too many evils in it to produce fruit from the Word. Three of the most prominent evils are mentioned. First, the thorn of worries, "the worries of this world". The cares of the world may be legitimate, but they are not to become more important than spiritual matters. Second, the thorn of wealth, the "lure of wealth." Few things are as deceitful as riches, especially for the greedy and materialistic. Their passion for riches will destroy them. Third, the thorn of worldliness, or the "desire for other things." Worldliness kills the work of the Word of God in the heart, too. So many have a thorny heart which ruins them spiritually.

Finally, the good soil. The good heart is represented by the good soil. Two good things are said about this heart. First, a prepared heart. Good soil is prepared soil. The prepared heart will do well with the Word of God. Second, a productive heart. This heart produces; it replicates itself. The good heart will produce fruit from the Word of God in its heart. The fruit amount varies, for all saints do not have the same abilities. But whatever our ability, we should all endeavor to be as productive as possible.

My friends, my hope for you is that you hear and listen and heed God's Word, and then produce fruit.

Here is the message today to the person without faith. Believe me, Satan has a plan for your life, and it isn't good. He wants to snatch away the Word in your heart. He wants you to forget repentance and faith, and focus on improving your life and having a religious experience which can seem to be from God, but is only a function of your emotions. And he wants the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of wealth and materialism, to keep you so focused on the things of this world that you just never see your need for God or faith in Him.

I beg of you to turn from this world and repent of your sin and turn to Christ in faith this morning. Let no earthly thing or devilish thought or fleshly desire keep you from Christ!

There is also a message here for the believer. Everything that I said to our unsaved friends can be said to you if you have wandered away from a close walk of

⁵ Mark 4:14-20 (NLT2)

⁶ εὐθύς

fellowship with Christ. Satan wants to snatch away truth from you every time you hear truth preached or taught or read or reminded by the Holy Spirit in your life. He doesn't mind you getting hyped up all emotionally about spiritual truth as long as you don't apply it in real life. He wants you distracted by the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches and the things of this world so you don't focus on the things that really matter in life.

The answer for you is the command Jesus gave the Ephesian church in Revelation 2: don't lose your first love. You know where you went astray. Remember that and repent of it. Then start doing the works for Christ you did when you were first in love with Christ.