

The Parable of the Sower and Soils

Mark 4:1-9, 13-20 New American Standard Bible (NASB) (Parallel passage in Matthew 13:3-23, Luke 8:5-15) (my emphasis in bold)

Again He began to teach by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat on the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. ² And He was **teaching them many things in parables**, and was saying to them in His teaching, ³ “Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; ⁴ as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. ⁸ Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred times as much.” ⁹ And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Explanation

¹³ And He *said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ **The sower sows the word.** ¹⁵ These are the ones who are **beside the road** where the word is sown; and when they hear, **immediately** Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown **in them** (in their hearts—kc). ¹⁶ And in a similar way these are the ones sown with seed on **the rocky places**, who, when they hear the word, immediately **receive it with joy**; ¹⁷ and **yet they have no firm root** in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown with seed **among the thorns**; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ but **the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.** ²⁰ And those are the ones sown with seed on **the good soil**; and they hear the word and **accept** it and **bear fruit**, thirty, sixty, and a hundred times as much.”

Introduction

We are doing another parable of Jesus this morning: the parable of the sower and soils. Remember, Jesus would speak to different audiences using different parables? This time He is speaking to the farmers and gardeners. He talks about planting and bearing fruit,

yet the real lesson is about God's Word and how it bears fruit in our life depending on our heart condition. In other words, the fruitfulness in our life is determined by how our heart takes God's Word.

Question for you: How does our Heavenly Father communicate with you? Through prayer, most of us would say. Through visions and dreams, for some. Through open doors and closed doors, for others. But God mainly speaks to His children and interacts with them through His Word, both spoken and written. When God's will is revealed through the Word that is proclaimed (sermon) and through the Word that is read (daily devotion), we listen, obey, and live out His will.

Please note here this: when it comes down to His Word, God is very intentional. He is never casual. He doesn't waste His Word nor send it out in vain. Instead, He sends out His Word with a clear expectation that it will prosper and bear fruit in the thing for which He sends it. Listen to Prophet Isaiah about how God sends forth His Word to us: ¹⁰ *"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, " So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11, NKJV).* God sends out His Word to us and He expects much fruit in our life.

In today's parable Jesus calls God's Word 'a seed,' and our heart 'soil,' where the seed is planted. Let's dig in.

Content

Human Heart as Soil (Mark 4:15):

We are God's field, the Scripture says (1 Corinthians 3:9). Our heart is soil (Mark 4:15—KJV, Matthew 13:19, Luke 8:12). If we are a field, what is the field for? For planting and harvesting crops, right? God plants His Word in our hearts and we the field are expected to bring forth crops—that is, to be prosperous and fruitful in our lives due to the Word of God sown in our heart. By the way, in the western philosophy, we tend to distinguish heart and mind from each other. But in the Scriptures, both heart and mind are contained in one place, we call, the heart. Heart is the innermost seat of will, emotion, and intellect. That's what Jesus is talking about here.

God's Word as Seed (Mark 4:15):

Like the seeds fall unto the ground, when we read God's Word or hear the preacher proclaim it, God's Word is sown into our heart.

- Greek word for seed: *sperma* (σπέρμα, Matthew 13:38)—sperm. In every seed, there's life hidden. Stored away from soil, the seed remains dormant yet not dead (e.g., growing cat grass experience). Once sown in the soil, the hidden life comes forth. Likewise, God's Word has life eternal in it. It remains dormant until you open the Bible or listen to the sermon. However, once sown in your heart, God's Word brings forth the life of Christ in you manifested as an abundant life.

Most of us have no idea how powerful God's Word is (e.g., the heavens and the earth were created by His spoken words. Jesus also healed so many people with His spoken words). God's Word has the wonder working power that comes from the life hidden in it: ¹²*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12). Do you want your life changed for good? Begin with God's Word, because there's life in it, there's light in it. Every time you read the Bible, and every time you hear the sermon, expect the mighty power of God's Word to transform you for good. E.g., "When I sit in darkness,
The Lord *will be* a light to me" (NKJV, Micah 7:8).

Four Types of Soil:

Each time God's Word is proclaimed, it is sown in one of the following four heart conditions:

- Roadside (No Chance)
 - Rocky (No Roots)
 - Thorny (No Fruit)
 - Good (Fruitful)
1. No Chance
 - Satan **immediately** (not wasting his time) snatches the Word of God from your heart (Mark 4:15). His intention is very clear: to steal eternal life from you and to keep you from being fruitful or prosperous in your life. Know your enemy.
 - Satan's Strategy: Distraction

- E.g., During the sermon, you are distracted with other thoughts. This is not normal or natural. It is a spiritual phenomenon. Why? Because your enemy is at work. Let's face it. You don't get distracted when you watch your favorite show on TV, do you? Satan distracts you by prompting other thoughts in your heart (John 13:2) when you try to stay focused on God's Word.
2. No Root (Short Stay)
 - ❑ **Receive** God's Word with joy for a moment, however, they don't last. When troubles or persecutions occur on account of faith, they fall away.
 - ❑ Satan's Strategy: Affliction / Persecution E.g., A sister in Christ suffered persecution from her father who, one day, threw an ashtray at her as he discovered his daughter became a Christian. Yet, she endured and overcame.
 - ❑ **Receive** (λαμβάνω---'lahm-bah-no,' Mark 4:16)---Please notice here the verb "to receive"---receive it with joy. The person merely / passively / takes it whatever is given. There's no follow up action afterward. I will speak more about it later.
 3. No Fruit (the Unfruitful)
 - ❑ Worries, deceitfulness of riches, and desires of the flesh---they kill God's Word. They **choke God's Word** and keeps you from bearing fruit. E.g., Roundup.
 - ❑ Satan's Strategy: Worries, Deceitfulness of wealth, Desires (Pleasures)
 - ❑ **Enter** (Mark 4:19): its literal meaning is to "**march in**" through eyes and ears.
 - ❑ **Choke** (Mark 4:19): **take the life out of God's Word** (literal meaning is 'to crowd around, crush.' cf. choke someone---Matthew 18:28, swine drowned---Luke 8:33).
 4. The Fruitful
 - ❑ Hear the Word, **accept** it, and bear fruit in their daily lives.
 - ❑ The fruit of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23):
 - ❑ **Accept** (παραδεχομαι, 'para-de-ko-mah-i' ---Mark 4:20)---Active choice of taking / keeping God's Word in a deeper level---that is, 'root in, anchor in.' **Welcome** and **Choose**. The proactive attitude of welcoming any opportunity to hear God's Word vs. you passively take it.

Strategies for Fruitful Life: (W-G-S---Word of God Saves).

- ❑ **Welcome:** Welcome and Embrace God’s Word with gusto. Change your attitude. Be proactive. Joyfully expect that God would speak to your heart through His Word (e.g., a strange New world appears in God’s Word--Karl Barth).
- ❑ **Guard:** Beware of the “chokers” in your heart such as worries, deceitfulness of wealth, and worldly pleasures, sensual desires, lusts, and covetousness. E.g., Guard your heart and check every thought that comes into your heart.
- ❑ **Stick:** Persevere until you see the harvest.
 - Difference between “Short Stay (No Root)” and “the Fruitful” (e.g., It took 25 years for Abraham to see God’s promise fulfilled in Isaac).

Conclusion

I am going to read a passage related to my message this morning.

*“The words of the Lord are the seed sown by the sower. Into our hearts they must fall that they may grow. **Meditation and prayer** must water them, and **obedience** keep them in the sunlight. Thus will they bear fruit for the lord's gathering.”* --- George McDonald from Life Essential.

Let us pray: O Lord, grant us the desire to accept Your Word in our heart. Open our eyes and ears to hear God’s Word. Grant us perseverance to endure. Make us the good soil that bears much fruit in our lives. Amen.