

## SOWER, SOIL, SEED, OR HARVEST?

### Parable 4: The Sower

#### Sermon 4

#### Mark 4:1-20

## I. BACKGROUND ILLUSTRATION—ISAIAH 6—ISRAEL DEAF AND BLIND

## II. BIBLICAL TEXT—Mark 4:1-20—Mt 13—Lk 8

**Mk 3:31-35**—31 *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.* 32 *A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."* 33 *"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.* 34 *Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!* 35 *Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

**Mk 4:1-12**—1 *Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.* 2 *He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:* 3 *"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.* 4 *As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds came and ate it up.* 5 *Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow and it had no moisture.* 6 *But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.* 7 *Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.* 8 *Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."* 9 *Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."* 10 *When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.* 11 *He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables 12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven! "*

**Mk 4:13-20**—13 *Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word of God.* 15 *Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, as soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them, so that they may not believe and be saved.* 16 *Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy.* 17 *But since they have no root, they believe for a while but they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.* 18 *Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but they do not mature: the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.* 20 *Others, like seed sown on good soil, with a noble and good heart: hear the word, understand it, accept and retain it, and by persevering, produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."*

*21 He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.” 24 “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”*

### III. CONTEXT

1. THE FIRST SUBSTANTIVE PARABLE IN ALL THREE SYNOPTICS
  - o Parallel passages—**Matthew 13** and **Luke 8**
  - o In **Matthew** and **Mark**—this begins a series of **Kingdom** parables
2. ONE OF ONLY THREE PARABLES THAT JESUS EXPLAINED
  - o The Wheat and Tares—**Mt 13**
  - o The Fishing Net—**Mt 13**
3. THE PARABLE ABOUT PARABLES
  - o Explains their purpose—using **Isaiah 6:9-10**
4. STRUCTURE IS IMPORTANT
  - a. Bracketed by **3:31-35** and **4:21-25**
  - b. Background: Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived—**3:31-35**
  - c. Jesus teaches **everyone** from a boat—**vv1-9**
  - d. Jesus teaches his **disciples alone**—explains the parable—**vv10-25**
    - **vv21-25**—are not unrelated sayings
    - They explain **vv11-12**—and give commentary on **Is 6:9-10**

### IV. PURPOSES OF THE PARABLE

#### A. PURPOSE OF PARABLES—IN GENERAL

1. REASON FOR JESUS QUOTING ISAIAH 6—in **vv11-12**
  - a. **Isaiah 6** is a hyperbole
    - Declaring how far Israel had gone—in hard-heartedness
    - Warning Israel to wake up—to hear and see—the coming danger
    - God did **not** want Israel to remain deaf and blind
    - It was not God who thwarted their understanding—but the people
    - **Isaiah** then reversed this picture—with two promises
      1. A **remnant**—a ‘holy seed’—will be restored—**Is 6:13**
      2. *The deaf will hear and the blind will see*—**Is 29:18; 35:5**

- b. Jesus' purpose was not to hide the truth
  - He was shocking people into listening
  - Using past Israel as a warning to them
  - Giving them *that* new opportunity—to hear and see—which Isaiah had promised

2. JESUS' COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH 6—TEACHES VALUE OF PARABLES—in vv21-25

**21** *He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.*

- Nothing is hidden in the parables that will not be made clear
- He put everything in parables in order to reveal *more* things
- Not to close minds—but to prompt people to want to know *more*

**23** *If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.” 24a “Consider carefully what you hear*

- Listen carefully and understand—just as The Parable of the Sower teaches
- How we listen—determines our eternal destiny
- We must go beyond the surface of words and really hear the meaning

**24b** *With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.*

- a. We receive in proportion—to the effort we put into understanding the truth
- b. Some 'have'—because they sincerely desire to know *and obey* the truth
  - ☆ They will be given *more* understanding
  - ☆ If we are sincere—and grasp what God gives us—He will give us more
- c. Some 'do not have'—because they do not desire to know *and obey* the truth
  - ☆ They will lose the little understanding they have
  - ☆ If we are superficial—and do not grasp what God give us—we will lose it

**B. PURPOSES OF THIS PARABLE**

1. PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM

- o **The Word**—Jesus is bringing in the Kingdom—with proclamation and hearers' obedience
- o **Encouragement**—to disciples—God will bring a triumphant harvest—as He has promised
- o **Effectiveness**—of the Word—certainty of a good result—despite lack of success with some
- o **Commentary**—on **Isaiah 6**—God is working anew—giving another chance to hear/obey

2. CALLING TO SALVATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

- o To hear—understand—respond—and obey Jesus’ good news

## VI. THE PARABLE

### A. HOW IT BEGINS AND ENDS IS IMPORTANT

1. BEGINS WITH ‘LISTEN’—ENDS WITH ‘ANYONE WHO HAS EARS’
2. JUST LIKE THE ‘LOST’ PARABLES—THEY FOLLOW [LK 14:35](#) CALL TO HEAR
3. IT IS FOR THOSE WHO DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND—AND OBEY—WHAT I SAY

### B. FOCUS

1. FOUR ASPECTS—SOWER, SEED, SOIL, HARVEST
  - o Two constants = sower and seed
  - o Two variables = condition of soil and harvest
2. MAIN FOCUS—TYPES OF SOIL
  - a. **Receptivity** of each kind of **soil**—represents the heart of the hearer
  - b. First three types
    - Do not *really* listen and understand completely
    - They are on the **outside**—do **not understand** the kingdom of God
    - Like **Jesus’ own family**—who thought he was out of his mind
  - c. The last type listens and understands—to the point of obedience
    - Real hearing—true listening— leads to obedience
    - Like the parable of the **two builders**—*whoever hears and does these words of mine*
    - And the SOM previous story—good trees bear good fruit—[Mt 7:16-19](#)
    - They are fruitful—**karpophous**

### C. FOUR TYPES OF HEARTS

1. WAYSIDE GROUND
  - a. Situation
    - Common ground divided into rows without fence, each cultivating his own strip
    - Divided by right-of-way strips 3 feet wide—beaten hard as stone by constant walking
  - b. Hearers’ Heart—is **hardened**
    1. Matthew says—*they do not understand*
      - a. This is not just innocent ignorance—but willful resistance or rejection
      - b. Root cause is—**lack of godly fear**—little reverence for God
        - ☆ **Pr 9:10**—*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*
      - c. Reverent fear of God is a prerequisite to understanding His truth

2. Types of **hardened** hearts

- Mental pride and rebellion—self-centered skeptics—like **David Hume**
- Mental laziness—lulled into complacency by slothfulness
- Mental arrogance—like the **Pharisees**
- Mental fear—afraid of the demands and consequences of the gospel

c. Satan's role—the 'word snatcher'

- **I Pe 5:8**—he *roams about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*
- **II Cor 4:4**—*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving*

2. ROCKY GROUND

a. Situation

- Skin of earth over limestone shelf—no depth or water—but looks fertile from the top

b. Hearer's Heart—is **irresolute**

1. Initially enthusiastic and compliant—at first sincere—but only temporarily

- Shallow emotionalism—superficial joy
- It's easy to be a Christian at the start—but not for the long haul

2. Do not count the cost—**Mt 10—Lk 14**

- Fast—premature commitment, without considering consequences

3. Types of **irresolute** hearts

- Follow the crowd—conformists
- Intimidated—pressured by others
- Self-focused—self-indulgent—self-satisfying
- Timid in the face of adversity
- Blaming God—Why did God let this happen?

3. THORNY GROUND

a. Situation

- Tilled earth with seeds of weeds/thorns in it
- Proverb—one year's seeds make seven years' weeds
- Weeds grew more rapidly/strongly than good seeds

b. Hearer's Heart—is **worldly**

1. Misplaced priorities—not seeking first the Kingdom

2. Anxious—worried—not trusting God for provision

3. Types of worldliness

- Materialism
- Hedonism—pleasure

- Legalism—depending on men’s rules
- Prosperity gospel
- Making gods of—work—recreation—money—power—position

#### 4. GOOD GROUND

##### a. Situation

- Soil is receptive—deep—cleared of entanglements—nutritious—prepared

##### b. Hearer’s Heart—is **yielded**

##### 1. Explained by the 3 synoptic passages

- **Mt 13:23**—*understands* the word—not just hears—but *thinks*
- **Mk 4:20**—*accepts* the word—*embraces*—really owns it
- **Lk 8:15**—*holds fast* the word—*obeys* it in all circumstances

##### 2. The word becomes part of our very being

##### 3. We **yield** ourselves—and become fruitful—**karpophous**

## VII. APPLICATION

### 1. SALVATION IS NOT JUST EMOTIONAL FROTH

- Receiving the gospel message with joy is not enough
- People can receive the word with joy and still be hard-hearted

### 2. TEMPORARY-UNPRODUCTIVE FAITH IS NOT ‘SAVING’ FAITH

- a. Faith that does not result in productive living for the Father is not valid faith
- b. Churches should not be complicit in this—to attract more members
  - Letting people think that ‘just believing’ without producing fruit is enough
- c. Not everyone who makes a profession of faith is saved—though they may look like it
- d. Don’t be surprised if a person doesn’t persevere—this parable shows that this does happen

### 3. COUNT THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

- Consider the hardship and unpopularity—**Mt 10**
- **Building a tower—going into battle—Lk 14**

### 4. A NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL IS NOT NECESSARILY PERMANENT

- Persons might understand now—but when the Word is sown again it might ‘take’
- But they do not have to remain ‘outside’
- **Look at Jesus’ family**—they were ‘outsiders’ who became ‘insiders’!

### 5. THIS IS A MULTI-LAYERED PARABLE

- a. It does not refer only to reaching the lost
- b. The first three situations can happen to a saved person—without losing salvation

- **Robbed** of spiritual blessings
  - **Intimidated** by opposition—**swayed** by others
  - **Overcome** by worries of the world
6. SOW THE WORD INDISCRIMINATELY
- o **Share the gospel with everyone everywhere—Christ died for everyone**

## VIII. INVITATION

### COME, ALL CHRISTIANS, BE COMMITTED

**Come, all Christians, be committed  
To the service of the lord;  
Make your lives for him more fitted,  
Tune your hearts with one accord.  
Come into His courts with gladness,  
Each his sacred vows renew,  
Turn away from sin and sadness,  
Be transformed with life anew.**

**Of your time and talents give ye,  
They are gifts from God above;  
To be used by Christians freely  
To proclaim His wondrous love.  
Come again to serve the Savior,  
Tithes and off'rings with you bring.  
In your work, with Him find favor,  
And with joy His praises sing.**

**God's command to love each other  
Is required of every one;  
Showing mercy to one another  
Mirrors His redemptive plan.  
In compassion He has given  
Of His love that is divine;  
On the cross sins were forgiven;  
Joy and peace are fully thine.**

**Come in praise and adoration,  
All who in Christ's name believe;  
Worship Him with consecration,  
Grace and love you will receive.  
For His grace give Him the glory,  
For the Spirit and the Word,  
And repeat the gospel story  
Till mankind His name has heard.**