

Roots
"The Bible Challenge"

Introduction: This scene in Mark 4 opens with a notice of Jesus' magnetic attraction on the crowds (crowd's so large that the boat previously prepared for a getaway (3:9) is used as a platform from which he can teach the multitudes.

1. The word translated "land" or "earth" and is the same word used for soil in this parable
2. The crowds on the "soil" are to be understood as recipients of Jesus "sowing the word"
3. This parable, like many, will create a separation between those who gather around to learn the mysteries of the kingdom and those who do not
4. This parable evaluates the various responses to the seed that is sown and warns of the consequences of inadequately receiving the word into one's life

I. Making some observations about the parable

- A. While there are aspects of this parable that may be subject to varying interpretations, the nature of the seed is NOT one them

The sower sows the word. Mark 4:14 NKJV

See also:

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Luke 8:11 NKJV

NOTE: It is not money, an offering, or any personal resource

- B. The harvest of 30, 60, and a hundredfold is not a spectacular harvest-it is the normal blessing for a righteous life.

Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. Genesis 26:12 NKJV

- C. The focus of this parable is not a spectacular harvest but the failure of the seed and the reasons for it.
- D. The one constant throughout the parable is that a good crop depends entirely upon the soil. The sowing of the seed reveals the nature of the soil.

II. Unpacking the interpretation of the parable

A. Traditional view-parables have one truth communicated.

1. Be careful NOT to assign to every detail absurd allegorical meaning-foreign to 1st Century Palestine.
2. Yet, too complex to be restricted to one simple idea
3. Designed to evoke multiple images

B. The things that cause the seed to fail or the word to not produce fruit are not intellectual but spiritual.

NOTE: Lack of understanding/hearing is a spiritual issue

"Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. Mark 4:3 NKJV

And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Mark 4:9 NKJV

(Parable begins/ends with "hear"-“listen”)

1. The productivity of the seed depends totally on whether or not it lands on good soil.
2. Spiritually-the reception of the word (seed) is directly related to the spiritual condition of the hearer's heart.

C. Types of soil

1. Seed by the wayside (v. 4)-“hodos”-birds of the air devoured it
 - a. Satan comes to steal, kill, destroy

And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. Mark 4:15 NKJV

- b. He is in deadly combat for our souls
- c. He tries to rob us of the word before it has a chance to take root

NOTE: Distraction when the word is preached/read. Questions about life. Why this crisis, tragedy, etc.

INTERESTINGLY-WE NEED TO BE PREPARED TO ANSWER

2. Seed in the “stony ground” (v. 5)

- a. No depth, no root
- b. Sun scorched it-withered

These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Mark 4:16-17 NKJV

c. Note this faith described in prophetic words

"O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away. Hosea 6:4 NKJV

d. When their faith is challenged-because no depth-they fall away

(ILL) Dearduffs/Alfreys/Riegles-Root of their faith so shallow-no keeping power

NOTE: Irony-disciples, will be this way with Jesus (Peter/Judas)

3. Seed among the "thorns" (v. 7)

a. Described as worldly materialistic (v. 18, 19)

Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. Mark 4:18-19 NKJV

b. Not infertile soil-but its crowded soil (rich young ruler is prime example)

c. Pursuit of wealth...more work, sports, popularity

4. Good soil-productive, good crop

But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." Mark 4:20 NKJV

- a. No long explanation-it hears the word right
- b. Accepts it and bears fruit
- c. Immediate accepting it by faith before stolen
- d. Applies it so roots grow
- e. Keeps an uncluttered life so that it bears fruit

III. Considering the implications of the parable

A. The dissemination of the word does not need to be test-marketed first. (Sower spreads it widely).

B. As sowers, we should not take credit for fruit, nor lay blame on ourselves for a lack of fruit IF we are faithfully sowing the word.

C. Sowers are not called to be successful, but faithful.

NOTE: Certainly want a harvest but even if not, we must be faithful.

D. Changing the delivery methods of the word or re-engineering the message of the word is not crucial to fruit-bearing.

1. Seeker-friendly, dramatic, visual, etc.-still the condition of the soil.
2. Removing the scandal, cross, repentance, from the message is like genetically re-working the seed.

THE ISSUE IS THE SOIL

IV. Embracing the personal application of the parable

A. Our hearts must be good soil

1. So easy to let distractions, busy-ness steal it
2. So easy to go off track by trials, struggles
3. So easy to get choked out by the cares of the world

B. God wants us to receive His word-so that fruit can be produced

CHALLENGE: January 5-8 week challenge: Read New Testament

1. Books-The Books of the Bible-New Testament
2. No chapters, verses, church chronological
3. Whole church, clusters, family, simple questions each week-5 questions
4. Roots that go deep-Sermon series

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV

5. Distribute cards
6. Video
7. Collect cards
8. Prayer