

All Ears

Mark 4:1-20; March 7, 2021

Introduction

In our passage last week, for the first time in Mark, we were introduced to Jesus' method of teaching in *parables*.

- Read Mark 3:23: "And he called them to him and said to them in parables...
 - If a kingdom is divided against itself...
 - If a house is divided against itself...
 - But no one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man...

In our passage today Jesus tells another parable, the Parable of the Sower, or as we'll see, the Parable of the Soils.

The timing of this parable is great for us.

- The days are getting longer.
- The temps are rising (highs in the 60's Wednesday and Thursday).
- DST starts next Sunday...with an extra hour of daylight every day.
- Can I get an Amen!!!
- Then, pretty soon, the earth will spring back to life.

With all of this, pretty soon, the grass will start to green up and flowers will begin to sprout.

Here's a little nugget about me that you may not know: I love working in my yard. In fact, when we bought our house 5 years ago, Leigh really struggled in the process because the backyard wasn't very inviting (1st picture).

- This is a pre-spring picture (see the sled in the middle).
- 1st level: very little grass...almost all dirt.
- 2nd level: dead tree stump in the middle; out of control bush on the right
- 3rd level: brush pile (top left), rocks, centerblock, thorn bushes.

But I had a vision for what it could be with a little TLC.

- The first step to seeing my vision become reality required removing anything and everything that was dead, dying or useless. The ground, or might I say, the soil had to be prepared.
 - I dug up the tree stump and the dead bush.
 - My son, Owen, helped me pull out all of the thorns.
 - I raked the entire yard and removed, no lie, at least a thousand rocks.
 - I've worked hard in my yard each of the past 5 years
- Here's a picture from this past spring (2nd picture).

Just as having good soil is essential for anyone who wants to grow grass or vegetables or fruit, it

is essential for being a fruitful disciple of Jesus. The question Jesus wants you to wrestle with today is this: “What kind of soil is the soil of your heart?”

Read Mark 4:1-20.

Context:

- Jesus is teaching “beside the sea” (the Sea of Galilee).
- The crowd was so large that Jesus got in a boat and taught the crowds from the boat.
- 4:2: “And he was teaching them many things in parables...”

Structure of this Passage:

- The Parable of the Sower told (3-9).
- Interlude: Jesus teaching on the purpose of the parables (10-12).
- The Parable of the Sower explained (13-20).

We’re going to first look at the “two-edged” purpose of the parables and then we’re going to unpack the Parable of the Sower.

I. Understand the Two-Edged Purpose of Parables (1-2, 10-12).

What is a parable?

- Though parables can contain a variety of figures of speech, usually they are simply stories that teach a spiritual truth by using a comparison with something the hearers would be familiar with.
- Parables draw the listener into the story to elicit an evaluation and demand a response.

Let’s unpack what Jesus says about the purposes of parables in vv. 10-12

- Insiders vs. Outsiders.
- Insiders hear the parables and see them as teaching the “secrets of the kingdom of God.”
- Outsiders hear the parables but they don’t *hear* in them the teachings of the “secrets of the kingdom of God.”
- Do you hear the tension in this text?
 - Is Jesus intentionally teaching in parables to turn people away, so that people won’t hear and respond?

Let’s first look at this Isaiah 6:9-10 passage for keys to understanding what’s going on:

- Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 which explains the result (“so that”):
 - They will see but not perceive (*see*)
 - They will hear but not understand (*hear*)
 - If they really did see and hear, they would turn and be forgiven.
- Isaiah sees a vision of the Lord
 - “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”
 - “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst

- of a people of unclean lips”
 - “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me.’”
 - “And he said, Go, and say to this people...”
- Isaiah spends his life preaching that judgment is coming on the nation of Israel but restoration for a remnant.
- God is telling Isaiah at the very beginning of his ministry that his preaching will produce the opposite of what Isaiah desires.
 - While it will stir up faith in some...
 - It will make some more dull and unresponsive.
 - It will further harden those who were already straying from God.
- With Jesus quoting this passage, he’s saying his ministry will produce the same kind of result.
 - Don’t forget, we’ve just read a number of controversies that Jesus had with the spiritual leaders of his day.
 - Jesus is facing blatant unbelief and opposition.
 - Just as Israel faced judgment for failing to respond to the “sowed Torah,” those who fail to respond to the sowed word of Jesus will also face judgment.

Parables have a two-edged purpose:

“His point is that, just as the sun that hardens the clay also melts the wax, so the Word of the gospel offends the resistant and rebellious while it is enthusiastically received by the receptive” (Daniel Akin).

1. To the receptive, parables...

- Reveal, soften, attract, enlighten and give life.
- Some hear the parables and are convicted and repent.
- Jesus really wanted people to understand them.
 - V. 3: “Listen!”
 - V. 9: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
 - If he wanted to hide the truth from outsiders, he never would have spoken to them.
- If you are listening today and anytime you come to the Scriptures, and I mean, really listening...if you really want to understand and know Jesus, you will hear.
- These are the types of people Jesus gives the kingdom to.

2. To the resistant, parables...

- Conceal, harden, repel, reject and even bring judgment.
- Some hear the parables and they become even more hostile to Jesus.
- As one author has noted, They “...remain stories about horticulture, vineyards, fishing nets, real estate economics, traveling, or banquets—nothing more” (Greg Lanier).
- I plead and pray that this isn’t you. You can physically hear me today and hear the Word

of God but have the eyes of your heart closed. You can be sitting or listening to me today and mentally be lifting weights in the gym down the road.

- Spiritual dullness and distraction has serious consequences: you miss the kingdom of God.

“Parables are like stained glass windows in a cathedral, dull and lifeless from the outside but brilliant and radiant from within” (James Edwards).

What is it about the parables that hardens people?

- The fundamental secret to the parables concerns the one who speaks them, Jesus. It is the secret that the kingdom of God has come in the person, words and works of Jesus.
- One must have the eyes of faith to truly see who Jesus is. The person of Jesus is the secret of the kingdom of God.
- Jesus spoke in parables to challenge the reader/hearer and that’s exactly what he’s doing with you today?
 - How receptive are you to Jesus?
 - What is the soil of your heart?

In this sense, the parable of the sower is foundational to all of the other parables.

II. Identify which Soil best represents your Heart (3-9, 13-20).

A few initial observations:

- Jesus tells the parable and then he explains the parable.
- Most call this the “Parable of the Sower”
 - We can all understand and relate to this story.
 - You have a farmer who is walking through a field that has path running through it and he’s sowing seed.
 - From what I’ve read, sowing would happen sometime in the October-December timeframe with sprouting occurring in April or May and then the harvest ready by June (so NET).
- Characters in the Story:
 - The Sower
 - The sower is Jesus who proclaims the kingdom of God (but now we are sowers as we shared God’s Word with others).
 - The Seed
 - The seed is the Word of God, the message of the kingdom of God, the gospel, within which there is infinite potential for life.
 - The Soils
 - Jesus, the sower, sows in every corner of the field, as Justin Martyr once said, “in hopes that good soil might somewhere be found.”
 - Jesus’ illustration gives 4 different types of soil:
 - The Path (4)

- The Rocky Ground (5-6)
 - Thorns (7)
 - Good Soil (8)
- The soil represents varying conditions of human hearts on which the seed is tossed.
- “Parable of the Soils” is probably a better name for this parable.
- The progression of the seeds growth:
 - The first seed never germinates (indifferent).
 - The second seed germinates and dies shortly afterward (opportunistic).
 - The third seed germinates, but at harvest it does not bear fruit (very interested).
 - The fourth seed germinates, grows and bears much fruit at harvestime (fruitful).
- Of the four soils, only one is called good.
 - Three of the four soils fail to accomplish what the farmer tries to do by sowing seed.
 - What does this teach us? There are many obstacles to fruitfulness.
 - While this is discouraging odds, the parable doesn’t end on a discouraging note.
 - The good seed yields thirty-fold, sixty-fold and a hundred-fold.
 - This is exceptional. Most crops averaged about a ten-fold yield (so Bock). A hundred-fold in the OT represented the blessing of God (cf. Gen. 26:12).
- The parable is framed with the Greek word *akouo* which means “to listen.”
 - V. 3: “Listen!”
 - V. 9: *And he said, "Whoever has ears to hear had better listen!" (Mar 4:9 NET)*
 - “*Had better listen*” best captures the force of the third person imperative.
 - Foundational to a fruitful life is listening to Jesus with “all ears.”
 - Are you familiar with this saying?
 - If someone says they are “all ears,” that means they are eager and ready to listen. It means, you’ve got my full, undivided attention.
 - Can you think of a time when you were “all ears” when someone spoke?
 - Example:
 - Listening to my coaches at App State.
 - The first time I heard one of my favorite authors teach in person (John Piper; Paul Tripp).
 - Everything hangs on how well he *hear* Jesus.

1. A Hardened Heart (4, 15).

- Some people hear God’s Word, but like a hardened path, the truth doesn’t penetrate their hearts and Satan snatches it away.
- This heart is resistant and unresponsive to the gospel.
- Satan doesn’t want God’s Word to germinate in your heart and he’ll do whatever it takes to make the gospel seem foolish or irrelevant.

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4 ESV)

- How does Satan take away the Word?
 - Pride and self-reliance
 - Suffering (go read Job)
 - He wants you to give in to the lie that the gospel is not worth the trouble it brings.
 - Persecution and Trials (cf. 1 Thess. 3:5).
 - Distractions
 - The cares of this world
 - Prosperity and the deceitfulness of riches.
- While Satan is only mentioned in the first soil, he's also at work in the other soils.

2. A Shallow Heart (5-6, 16-17).

- Some people hear God's Word and initial respond with joy but since their faith is shallow, they fall away when trials come.
- Trials and persecution can crush faith or strengthen and prove faith.
- How can we endure trials and persecution and deepen our faith?
 - Understand God design for suffering:

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith-- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire-- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7 ESV)

- Suffering will drive you away from God if you think it is pointless or if you think God is not in control.
- It's crucial that you strive for faith in God's grace even in suffering:
 - Joseph: What you meant for evil, God meant for good (Gen. 50:20).
 - The Cross of Christ

3. A Distracted Heart (7, 18-19).

- From my perspective, I believe this is where Satan strives to attack most of us in America. Satan wants to crowd out spiritual things our lives by the thorns of material things.
- In the three things that Jesus mentions, the present life is more important than the life to come and stuff is more important than Jesus.
 - Catch this: D. A. Carson notes that "these 'thorns' are so subtle that one may not

be aware of the choking that is going on” (Carson).

- The Cares of the World
 - We face so many and varied distractions.
- The Deceitfulness of Riches
 - How do riches deceive us?
 - They are uncertain.
 - They can't buy internal joy and peace.
 - We'll take nothing with us when we die.

17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Tim. 6:17-19 ESV)

- The Desires for Other Things
- As one author notes, these distractions manifest itself in us “*being able to explain what Jesus means without actually doing what he says*” (Jon Bloom).

4. A Fruitful Heart (8, 20).

- There's a verb tense change in v. 20.
 - The 1st three times of *hearing* are described by Mark in the aorist tense (vv. 15, 17, 18-19).
 - In v. 20, the aorist tense is replaced by the present tense verb
 - What's the significance?
 - Continual, ongoing hearing is what produces a fruitful heart.
 - The focus isn't on a single moment or response to Jesus but on one's entire life.
 - Trials come over time.
 - Riches are pursued over time.
 - Fruit grows over time.
 - “Getting to fruitfulness takes tenacity in embracing the word and patience in cultivating it” (Bock).
- The response hear is one who consistently is attentive and receptive to Jesus and the kingdom of God. They are “all ears.”
- Although there are no commands in this explanation, what is implied is that we're to copy the seed sown on the good soil.
 - Look inward.
 - Is there fruit of the gospel at work in your heart?
 - True disciples and followers of Jesus bear fruit.

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my

disciples, (John 8:31 ESV; 14:15; 15:5)

Main Point: Cultivate a fruitful heart by being “all ears” to the Word of God.

How can you be that kind of soil?

1. Pursue humility.

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isa. 66:2 ESV)

2. Pray for eyes to see and ears to hear.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Ps. 119:18 ESV)

Read and pray through Psalm 119.

3. Prune away the obstacles to fruitfulness in your life.

Conclusion

- Here’s my prayer for RHC: May we be good soil, deeply plowed, free of thorns and rocks, moist from the rains of the Holy Spirit and eager to receive and respond to the see of God’s Word. When we are like this, our church will overflow with fruit—30 fold, 60 fold and a 100 fold.