

Good Soil, Good Seed

Well, for the last five and a half weeks, we have been reading and studying the book of Acts, but last Monday, we returned to the gospels; the gospel of Mark this time. We have already finished the gospel according to Luke but once again we are going to spend some time going over the life and teachings of Jesus while he was here on earth. We will do this each time we begin a new unit of study; that is, begin a gospel study. We will do that with the exception of Unit #5, which is the last unit and during that one we will be reading and studying Revelation.

This week we began with a look at some of the introductory information concerning the gospel of Mark, and a little bit about Mark himself. We also got into the book, reading and studying chapters 1-4. And as we got into this book this week, I found something very interesting, and very curious. I mean when you think about it, how would you feel if you thought God was hiding something from you; that he was revealing it to others, but hiding it from you? I know human nature being what it is, that would bother and probably just downright offend all of us, wouldn't it?

Well, in our reading this week, that's exactly what Jesus said God is doing. In fact, he said it was what he was doing. Let's read this amazing passage together this morning and think about it for a little while. Please turn in your Bibles to **Mark, chapter 4, and we are going to read verses 1-20.**

May God bless this reading of His Word. That of course is what is often referred to as the Parable of the Sower, but it is obvious even to a casual reading, this parable is not about the sower. It is about the seed that was sown by the sower! But even more, it is about the soil into which the seed was sown by the sower.

What is truly remarkable about this passage is that each one of us are in this picture. Did you see yourself? You were there. You know how it is, some friend or family member produces a picture that was taken a long time ago, an old school picture, or a picture of when you were just a child. And they say, "Here you are." And you look to see yourself. Did you see yourself in this passage I just read? If you didn't it is just because you weren't listening, and that already spells trouble for you. Jesus said, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*"

I might suggest to you that if you didn't see yourself, that you pay attention, that you put down your smart phone, or your iPad and forget about all of those people trying to connect with you on Facebook. God is trying to connect with you in His book, and I hope you are smart enough to understand that He has the priority. Amen?

Each of us is in this picture that Jesus has painted, but that's not the reason why he painted it. Jesus told this parable but not to show us, us; we're there to illustrate to the sowers that these are the kinds of soil that are out there. You are one of those soils. I am one of those soils.

Mark tells us that afterwards, after multitude that had been there that day had gone home, that the twelve apostles came to Jesus and asked him about the parables. Matthew says, they asked him why he spoke to the people in parables. Luke says they came wanting to know what this parable meant. Look at Jesus' answer there in **verses 11 and 12**:

"And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12) so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

In other words, Jesus spoke to the people in this way because the message contained in parables was not for everybody. It was for those who would be doing His work.

Now, you might be thinking or wondering why wouldn't God want everyone to know the secret of the kingdom? Doesn't he want everyone to be saved? And of course the answer to that is "Yes, absolutely, God wants everyone to be saved." The scriptures are very clear about that.

- **2 Peter 3:9** says, *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*
- **1 Timothy 2:4** speaks of God our savior, *"who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*
- **Titus 2:11** makes it clear that the grace of God appeared in order that salvation might be available to all people.
- **John 3:16** *"For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life."*

So yes, God wants everyone to hear and know and believe and be saved. Absolutely! But of course most won't. Will they? Most haven't. Have they?

In **Romans 10**, in thinking about his fellow Jews, Paul will ask, *"have they not heard?* Is that the problem? Is that the reason why they have yet to be saved? And then he answers, *"Indeed they have"* heard, for (and quoting from Psalm 19) he says, *"Their voice has gone out to all the earth and their words to the ends of the world."*

Well then, he says, (in verse 19) *"did they not understand?"* Is that the problem? And then he answers that question: He says, *"Moses says* (quoting from Deuteronomy 32) that *"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."* And then he goes on to say, *"Then Isaiah is so bold as to say: I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."*

No, Paul says, again quoting from Isaiah, the problem is not that Israel hadn't heard; the problem is not that they couldn't understand. The problem was that *"all day long God has held out His hand to a disobedient and contrary people."*

There are none so deaf, as those who will not hear! Let me repeat that, *"THERE ARE NONE SO DEAF AS THOSE WHO WILL NOT HEAR!"*

That is the reason why Jesus spoke in parables, because there are people who will not listen; who are not listening. The sound of the words—life-saving words—simply pass through the air, enter the ear drum and then are gone. Jesus said, *"they indeed see but they do not perceive, and they indeed hear but they do not understand."*

So, if they are not going to listen, if they are not going to hear and understand, then you might as well be telling them a little story, the point of which just goes completely over their head.

But there is a point to the story. And that is what Jesus wanted the twelve and others who were following him to get. The point is, when the Word of God is preached, as it is being preached this morning, in this place as well as it is in tens of thousands of other places throughout the world, that the Word of God is going to land in four types of soil, which represents people's hearts of course. This is where you need to pay attention and make sure you know which type you are. Pay attention and you could leave here headed for heaven. Don't pay attention and you could leave here for an eternity of everlasting terror and torment.

Jesus is going to have these men, and there would be many, many more, going out to preach and teach the gospel. Some of you have tried that, and maybe you didn't have too much success. You wanted to, and you tried, but maybe you concluded that isn't your talent. Well, if you are basing that on results, maybe you are right, but if you are basing that on effort, maybe there is something you need to understand. I think that is what Jesus wanted us to get from this.

You need to understand this going in, that in some soil, even good seed is not going to be productive. Why is that? Is it because the seed is bad? No, that's not the problem. Is it because the sower is not very wise or experienced or talented? No, that's not the problem either. The problem of course is with the soil.

The seed in this parable is the Word, referring to the Word of God. God's word is powerful. The Hebrew writer (4:12) says, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* Listen, we cannot change a person's mind, or change their heart or their life. Only the Word of God can do that. The only thing we can do is to help get the Word of God into them. We have got to help them hear it, or help them see it. That's what sowers do. They sow the seed. Sowers are not responsible for the outcome. They are responsible for sowing the seed, the good seed of the Word of God.

But when they sow the good seed, Jesus wants them to know, not all of the seed that is sown is going to be productive. “Why not?”, we might ask.

Well, Jesus tells us here. Sometimes what happens is that when the good seed is sown, it isn't allowed to stay there long enough to germinate. The parable has a bird coming to eat seed sown on the hardened soil of the pathway, but that is talking about the devil coming and taking that seed away. Yes, we are not the only ones here in this auditorium this morning. Jesus said where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst also. But Satan is also present, and his goal this morning is to take away the word of God that is being read and discussed with you this morning. Do you ever find yourself going to a class or listening to a lesson, or maybe even reading the Bible for yourself, and then an hour or a day later, can't even remember what was said or read? Then you've experienced the devil coming and taking the Word away from your heart.

Now, let me make myself clear, I'm not talking about the problem of dementia or the kind of loss of memory we experience as we get older. When we have problems like that, we have a problem remembering everything, not just the Word of God. But sometimes, we have sat here and put up absolutely no defense against the devil coming and taking the Word of God out of our heart. And of course, you see if we are going to sit here and play with our smart phones, and busy ourselves with what's in our purse, or the people across the aisle, we are making it easy for the devil to do his work.

Sometimes, however, the seed does seem to be fruitful. The good seed finds its way into the mind and heart of a person, and it appears to germinate. But please listen to me on this, God isn't looking for plants. He is looking for fruit. Sometimes all we get is plants. We get the leaves but no fruit!

We have all seen it happen too many times. Someone responds to the Word of God. They become obedient to the gospel, and naturally we rejoice with the angels of heaven when that happens. Sometimes however, people make their decision too quickly. Their commitment is too shallow, and so when they begin to experience a little trouble, or persecution on account of the Word, they fall away. Sometimes that happens within days or just a few weeks, or months.

Other times the seed is sown, and again it finds its way into the mind and heart of a person and it germinates, but for various reasons it never becomes fruitful. Hear me again on this, good people: “God isn't looking for plants. He is looking for fruit.”

Jesus said the soil that some seed falls into is unproductive because stuff chokes the word. I hadn't really noticed this until I was reading this passage this week. In my mind, the plant was being choked, meaning that a person's life was being choked by what Jesus calls the “cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things.” But look at verse 19, those things “choke the word.” Back up in verse 7 it is the same thing. It is the seed that is being choked, and of course the seed is the Word of God.

So what's happening here? Jesus says that these things—what things? 1) the cares of the world, 2) the deceitfulness of riches, and 3) the desires for other things, they choke the word. The plant may continue to exist, but sadly, again there is no fruit. The Word of God brings forth no fruit in that person's life. They may be counted among this year's baptisms. They may have their name on the membership roll; picture in the directory, and they may show up for worship at every service for years and years, but there is no fruit. Jesus said that is going to happen. When you get into the seed-sowing business, be prepared; sometimes that is what happens.

On the other hand, sometimes when the seed is sown, it lands upon good soil. What makes it good soil? Well, that's a little hard to say, and it is certainly not something anyone can predict. But Jesus said there is good soil out there, and when you sow good seed in good soil, you not only get a plant, you get fruit. Now I'm sure that most of the time, that isn't immediate. It may take some time, but it will come; some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold.

Now, let's draw a couple of quick observations from what we have looked at this morning.

#1, The goal of sowing the seed is fruitfulness, not more plants.

#2, the secret to fruitfulness is in the seed and in the soil, and not in the sower.

#3, we are the soil. I am soil for the Word of God. You are soil for the Word of God, and the people we share the Word of God with are soil.

That is why I said at the beginning of this lesson that we are all in this picture. The question is, what kind of soil am I? Is the Word of God bearing fruit in my life? If not, it isn't the sower's fault. If not, it isn't the seed's fault. If the Word of God is not bearing fruit in someone's life, the problem is always with the soil. Good seed in good soil is always going to bear fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some a hundredfold.

So that's the lesson this morning. It has come to you from the Word of God, so once again the seed has been sown. It now remains to be seen if we are good soil or not.

It is almost always our custom to end the lesson with an invitation, meaning that if there is anyone here this morning who wishes to obey the gospel and become a Christian, we stand ready to welcome you and assist your obedience. If there is anyone here who has obeyed the gospel in the past but have not been living as a Christian should and they desire to repent of those things and experience God's forgiveness once more, responding is one way to make that happen. If you need to respond this morning for any reason, will you please come while we stand and sing?