



Mr. GoodSoil

Mark 4:1-20

Notes: This Bible study is derived from the Priority Associates' Cross Talk First Quarter lesson number 1. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

Read Mark 4:1-20.

At church we sing the same songs, read the same Scripture, and hear the same message. Yet each interpret and apply differently what the pastor says. How do you explain this?

The effect the Word of God will have on a person depends on how prepared they are to receive it...

- If a person is truly open to what God has to say to them, they will be looking for how to apply what they hear in church.
- If a person has preconceived notions of what they expect God to say to them or what they want God to say to them, this tends to over-ride the *still small voice* of the Lord (1 Kings 12:19).

What is the seed in this parable?

The seed is the Word of God.

When the farmer sows broadly, where does the seed land?

Some on the wayside, some fell on stony ground, some seed fell among thorns, and other seed fell on good ground.

Why doesn't the seed germinate equally well in each of the soils?

Wayside – the seed did not get a chance to germinate because and the birds of the air came and devoured it.

Stony ground – the seed did not have much earth in so it immediately it sprang up but when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away.

Thorns – this seed was choked by the thorns and could not be productive.

Good ground – the seed on the good ground was successful at producing what it was intended to do because it could grow good roots and did not have competition from weeds.

Who was the originally intended audience for the parable of the sower?

It was for believers...

Mark 4:9 - "He who has ears to hear"

Why did Jesus often speak in parables?

Jesus spoke in parables because the mysteries of the kingdom of God may only be revealed to believers who are part of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:11).

Why did Jesus not want to reveal mysteries of the kingdom of God to those outside the kingdom?

Justice demands that the full penalty for a persons sins be paid, if unbelievers come to understand some of the mysteries of God and as a result make changes in their life to avoid consequences, then they are trying to thwart the order God has established... a person must be born again before sanctification has any true value.

What is the mystery revealed in the parable of the sower?

That the effect God's Word has on a believer depends on the condition of their heart when they receive it. Note that since this parable was intended for believers to understand then it is intended to be applied to believers to make them more fruitful.

Does the parable of the sower have application to the effect of God's Word on unbelievers?

Not really, unbelievers have only one type of heart when it comes to receiving God's Word... the hard-packed wayside.

In what way can the wayside be a picture of our hearts?

If we have hardened our hearts to things of God, Satan and his minions will make sure that we are sufficiently distracted to forget what God has told us.

How is it that a Christian can harden their hearts to the things of God?

Christians can reject the things of God long enough that they fall out of fellowship with God. The parable of the prodigal son is an example of such a case.

In what way can the stony ground be a picture of our hearts?

If we give the things of God a superficial treatment such that it looks good but there is no real substance to it, we may initially respond to God's Word but this will not be sustainable when our faith is tested by the difficulties of life in this world.

Why does God put us through tests of our faith?

So that we may receive all the benefits that come from waiting on Him... the testing of our faith helps us to become more patient...

James 1:2-4 - My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

What might we miss out on if we do not trust God enough to be patient?

Patience is necessary to grow in character and this gives us with hope.

Romans 5:3-4 - And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

How is hope a derivative of character?

As we see how having a good character pays us dividends in this life we know that there will be eternal rewards for living a life that is faithful to the Lord.

Matthew 25:29 - For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

In what way can thorns be a picture of our hearts?

If we allow ourselves to be too preoccupied with the cares of this world such as pursuing wealth, this will choke out the Word from doing a work in our lives and thus we can not be spiritually productive. If you put all your creative energy into worldly pursuits, you'll have nothing left to apply to the Word of God in your life. Christians who allow thorns to crowd out the Word of God in their lives is what Paul referred to as carnal Christians...

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 - And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

What do you think Paul means when he says that carnal Christians act like mere men?

Paul is saying that carnal Christians act like unbelievers, that there is no distinction between them and the world. Jesus said they are like salt that has been contaminated by its environment and thus is no longer useful...

Matthew 5:13 - You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

In what way should the good ground be a picture of our hearts?

If we are truly open to God's will, we will recognize that He is speaking to us and understand the application to our lives, repent of our thinking that is contrary to Him, and take action in obedience.

What examples can you think of where you experienced a choking thorn in your life?

For me, business travel has been choking thorn... this is a necessary part of my job but the demands of travel often cuts into my devotional time, my exercise routine, fellowship with fellow believers, and tempts me to over eat. I have learned that business travel does not have to be a choking thorn and that it can be an opportunity for growth if I adopt the right attitude... God wants us to exercise our faith outside of our comfort zones, this is how we grow...

Genesis 12:1 - Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.

How may we turn the poor wayside soil of our lives into good soil?

Do what the prodigal son did...

Luke 15:17-20 - But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father.

Consider where we are at and where we should be then repent of our sins asking God for forgiveness and take action to get back into fellowship with Him.

How may we turn the poor stony soil of our lives into good soil?

Identify the hard places in our lives that need to be dealt with so that the Word of God can take root. If we are harboring secret sins that we need to address with God, we should dig them out and toss them from the field of our hearts. If there are hard places in our lives that we are not allowing God to enter in, we should plow these up and allow the light of God to penetrate them. Involving godly Christians in keeping us accountable is a good application of this.

How may we turn the poor thorny soil of our lives into good soil?

Identify how we are allowing the world to choke out our focus on nurturing God's Word in our lives and pull out these weeds by the roots. There may be some thing in our lives that we need to get rid of. Or there may be a place that we need to avoid or a relationship that we need to sever if it is keeping us from learning and applying God's Word in our lives.

What is the fruit of the seed?

The fruit of the seed is certainly the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) but it is also that which yields more seed.

What yields more seed?

Actions believers take to plant a seed of the Word of God in someone's life will result in more opportunities to plant other seeds. A good character that comes form maturing in the faith will also present more opportunities to sow a seed of the Word of God with others.

Where is the fruit that results applicable, to this world or will it be manifest in eternity?

Both... the fruit that results not only applies to the here and now in terms of fruit of the Spirit and more opportunities to sow the Word of God, it also directly relates to the eternal rewards believers will receive for doing what God has called them to do. As we contribute to people coming to know Jesus as Lord, we will have the benefits of fellowshiping with them forever.