



THE GOSPEL OF

**MARK**



## Sermon Series Notes

### “The Parable of the Soils” (Mark 4:1-20)

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Topic: Perseverance

v.1 The crowd is so large that Jesus has to get into a boat in order to teach them. The boat becomes a floating pulpit (I like it!).

v.2a A parable is not meant to hide truth, but to make it clear enough for anyone to understand. A parable relates things to everyday life so that people can easily grasp what is being communicated.

v.3a “Listen!” Notice the exclamation point here.

vv.2b-9 Jesus often said, “He who has ears to ear, let him hear.” Why did he say that? Because some people hear but they don’t really hear. Can everyone hear me right now? Raise your hand if you can hear me? Even though everyone here can hear me, not everyone will hear me.

Luke 8:11 (and Mark 4:13 here) confirms for us that the seed in the parable is the Word of God. What I am doing here today is sowing seed, the seed of the Word of God. But not everyone I sow seed to will hear what I have to say. Now let me remind you that it’s not what I have to say that is important, but what God has to say through me.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves, do what it says.

To hear it and not do it is to not really hear. Did you hear that?

vv.10-12 This prophecy from Isaiah 6 does not mean that God is playing a deceitful trick on these people, it rather means that they are playing a trick on themselves. The prophecy refers to those who hear but don’t really hear, adding that they also see but never really see. And it makes plain that some people see many times and hear many times (“ever seeing, ever hearing”). The more someone hears without really hearing, and sees without really seeing, the more callous they become over time; See Acts 28:26-27.

v.13 I really appreciate the grace and mercy of God in dealing with our dullness.

vv.14-20. This is generally known as the “parable of the sower,” but I think it is more appropriate to call it the “parable of the soils.”

Gen.2:7; It has always been fascinating to me that God made man from dirt. Apart from the Lord breathing life into Adam, he is just a dirt-bag. This truth is especially relevant in our text today.

Let’s examine each type of soil in the parable.

#### **The soil on the path**

What happens to soil on a path. It gets walked on regularly. As a result, this soil becomes hardened over time. These are people who have repeatedly heard the truth, and because they have never responded to the truth they have heard, now the truth just goes into one ear and out the other. I think the path may

also represent situations in life where people have been repeatedly walked on, and now, due to their negative life experiences, are hardened. In either case, the only hope for this type of soil is to be broken. The soil on the path is *hardened soil*.

Jeremiah 4:3...Break up your unplowed ground...

Hosea 10:12...break up your unplowed ground, for it is time to seek the Lord.

Psalm 51:17...a broken and contrite heart, o God, you will not despise.

Psalm 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

See I Cor.11:30-32; Amos 4:6-12

Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

### **The soil on rocky places**

This is not an area with rocks on the surface that can be seen with the naked eye, but rather a thin layer of soil covering a solid ledge of limestone a few inches below the surface. The heat from the sun makes this type of soil a hotbed that produces rapid germination, then a furnace that soon scorches and withers the tender plant.

These are people who respond to the Word and start off with a bang. They may testify boldly for the Lord, lead people to the Lord, and inspire others in the church as a result of their zeal. But they do not persevere, because they have no root. So in times of testing, they fall away.

Testing comes through trials, and our perseverance proves our genuineness (see I Peter 1:6-7).

Testing is necessary for maturity (see James 1:2-4)

Testing reveals impurities of the heart that need to be purged (Deut.8:2-3)

Testing develops faith (note again Deut.8:3); Note the importance of one's response to the Word here).

### **The seed among thorns**

- Worries of this life
  - II Cor.11:28...the *care* of all the churches.
  - These are things that need to be taken care of and dealt with, but they end up causing someone to become distracted. Priorities change due to changes in life; Life gets busy - the job, the kids, so many things to do, no time any longer for kingdom priorities.
  - See Matthew 6:25-33
- Wealth deception
  - One definition of the word here = "an abundance of external possessions"; Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).
  - It was the abundance of possessions that kept the rich young ruler out of the kingdom (Matt.19:22); In contrast, it was the selling of earthly possessions that marked the genuineness of the early church (Acts 2:45; 4:32); One mark of a wealthy Christian is generosity.
  - See I Tim.6:17-19, 6-10; I am blessed financially, but it is not something I have sought. I am living out Matthew 6:25-33; I went through a period where I worried about my failure to plan for retirement, but I'm over it (at least for this message). We should be wise in regard to our finances, but we must be careful to not allow money/possessions to dictate our priorities in life.
- Worldly pursuits (desire for other things)

- The word for *desire* occurs most often in the context of a desire for things that are forbidden.
- Rom.6:12 Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.
- I Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.
- I John 2:17 The world and its desires pass away, but he who does the will of God lives forever.
- See Luke 14:16-20

### **The seed on good soil**

- Do more than simply hear the Word, they do what it says
- Persevere in times of testing
  - By so doing, they develop character (roots begin to grow, they become established in the faith; Eph.3:17; Col.2:7).
  - See Romans 5:3-4
  - Types of testing?
    - A willingness to suffer for Christ
      - See I Peter 4:1; Peter knew what it was to fail because he sought to escape suffering, but afterward repented and stood strong for Christ; years later he would fail again among Christian brothers (Gal.2), but I trust that, after he was publicly confronted by the apostle Paul, he once again repented of his cowardice; In John 21, Jesus reveals to Peter that, even later in life, he would once again have to face suffering, and this time it would be the ultimate price, death (see John 21:18-19).
    - Maintaining faith despite your failure to understand God's purpose in your personal tragedy.
      - The prophets, Job (see James 5:10-11)
    - The test of obedience
      - Jonah
      - Phillip, the desert road toward Gaza (Acts 8)
      - Abraham, following the call of God but not knowing where he was going (Heb.11:8)
    - The test of time
      - Abraham
- Priorities of the kingdom are maintained
  - Church attendance, fellowship, serving, etc.
  - This requires focus, commitment, & sacrifice
- Produce fruit

- Heb.12:11...the fruit of righteousness
- Heb.13:15...the fruit of lips that confess his name.
- Phil.4:17...I desire fruit that may abound to your account
- Rom.1:13...that I might have some fruit among you also (converts)...
- The fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22-23)
- See Psalm 1:1-6

The soil along the path obviously does not represent someone who is saved, but what about the soils on the rocky place and among thorns?

- Hebrews 10:36,39 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised...we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.
- I John 2:10 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.
- II Tim.4:10...Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.
- See Matthew 7:18-23; Could it be that these people did not persevere?
- Prov.24:16 Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.

1945 was an unbelievable year for rookie evangelists. In that year, 27 year old Billy Graham came storming out of seemingly nowhere to fill auditoriums across America, speaking to as many as 30,000 people a night. But Billy Graham wasn't the only young preacher packing auditoriums in 1945. Chuck Templeton and Bron Clifford were doing the same thing. In 1946, the National Association of Evangelicals published an article on men who were "best used of God" in Youth for Christ's at that time five-year existence. Both Graham and Templeton ministered for Youth for Christ. The article highlighted the ministry of Chuck Templeton. Billy Graham was never mentioned. Many in that day felt Templeton would be the next Babe Ruth of evangelism.

At this same time, Bron Clifford was what many considered the most gifted and powerful preacher the church had seen in centuries. He was tall, handsome, intelligent, and eloquent.

Fast forward five years. Templeton left the ministry to pursue a career as a radio and television commentator and newspaper columnist. He said he no longer believed in Christ in the orthodox sense of the term.

By 1954, Clifford had lost his family, his ministry, his health, and soon after, his life. Alcohol and financial irresponsibility ruined his life. He left his wife and two Down's syndrome children, and at age 35, died from cirrhosis of the liver in a run-down motel on the edge of Amarillo Texas.

In the Christian life, it's not how you start that matters, it's how you finish.

#### CONCLUSION

A few years ago I received an email after teaching on this parable. I'd like to read you a portion of that email: "I am an agronomist. An agronomist is a soil and plant scientist sometimes referred to as a scientific farmer. But it is this education (as well as my history, I grew up on a farm) that brings the parable of the four soils to life and I relate to so well...I have heard many others teach on this same parable...But I have yet to hear teaching about how all four soils are amendable and capable of being good soils. In all four

soils, cultivation would bring new life to the soil. The path, which suffers from compaction, a problem caused by too much “worldly traffic” ...compaction can be easily brought into good tilth (tillage, cultivation) with plowing. The rocky soil requires a little more effort but turning under the rocks and bringing more soil to the surface may help. However, the best way to keep a rocky soil producing is by allocating more water and nutrients to the soil...The weedy (thorny) soil can be turned into a productive land, not by removing the weeds, but by using the weeds as indicator plants. They indicate what is really wrong with the soil. Some weeds indicate acid soils, some alkaline, some the presence of insects and other pests that are present in the soil. And as an agronomist I have been trained to cure the cause not the symptom. It is not enough to just pull the weeds out –they’ll just spring right back, but to find the reason for the weeds and eliminate the reason...The good soil has no need, except to be maintained because foot traffic can turn into a path, erosion can easily make it a rocky soil, and without frequent regeneration and rest can become weedy from depletion (exhaustion). The analogies are numerous, but the good news is we are all redeemable!”

The question is, “What kind of dirt are you?” If not good soil, what do you need to do to alter your current condition? This whole parable comes down to very simply what kind of impact the Word of God has in your life. That’s the point of the entire parable! If I respond correctly to the Word of God, my priorities change, my sinful desires are denied in favor of godly desires, my goals are set on eternal and not temporal things, my passion is not for earthly possessions and glory but rather for eternal possessions where moth and rust do not corrupt, and thief do not break in and steal.

See II Tim.4:7, emphasize the personal pronouns in this verse.

I am so thankful I have persevered this far in the race. I have had some close calls, been tempted in many ways, and have at times taken two steps forward and three steps back. But I try to do exactly what Paul said in Philippians 3:13...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.