

“The Key to Bearing Spiritual Fruit” - Mark 4: 1-20

TODAY we mark the words of Jesus in Mark 4:3 where he says:

“Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow.”

The Setting

1. He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.
2. And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching,

The Story

3. **"Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow;**
4. as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.
5. "Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil.
6. "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.
7. "Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.
8. "Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."
9. And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The Purpose

10. As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables.
11. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,
12. so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN, AND BE FORGIVEN." [Isaiah 6:9]

The Meaning

13. And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?
14. "The sower sows the word.
15. "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

16. "In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy;
17. and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.
18. "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,
19. but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.
20. "And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Re: The Setting (v. 1, 2)

- "Tell me a story!" People love stories and people relate to stories.
- God loves people and God wants to relate to people.
- Therefore, Jesus who is God in flesh, tells stories.
- God is creative in His approach – by the sea, in a boat, with stories
- The greatest sermon is from life, not a pulpit - probably a sower was within sight

Re: The Story (v. 3-9)

- People must HEAR before they can receive and apply - v. 3 "Listen"; v. 9 "hear"
- A parable is a story - literally, something "thrown beside" something else; to illustrate
- Parables were well known to a Jewish audience, used often in the OT and by rabbis
- A parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" – to teach a deeper principle
- This story is about A SOWER, SEED and VARIOUS SOILS
- Parables are TOLD more than STUDIED – they aim for an immediate impact
- This story's immediate impact is:
 - Seeds are scattered, falling on many kinds of soil
 - Many soils will not yield a lasting crop (hard, shallow, weedy)
 - There will be good soil that will bear various degrees of crop

Re: The Purpose (v. 10-12)

- There is a close relationship between heaven and earth
- "Mysteries" of God are not supernatural secrets that are meant to be hidden, but rather disclosure of God meant to be discovered by any who "has ears to hear"
- Jesus refers to Isaiah 6:9 at the call of Isaiah the prophet. It would seem at first reading that Isaiah and Jesus would teach in such a way to KEEP some from hearing and understanding their message. When the OT was translated into Greek (called the Septuagint) the translators felt that Isaiah 6:9 was saying the people had made themselves so dull that they could not understand so they translated it as follows:

Isaiah 6:9 [Septuagint] And He said, God and say to this people, "Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive." For the heart of this people has become gross, and with their ears they hear heavily, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

So, the purpose of a parable was:

1. To make people listen with a story they could relate to
2. To make people think for themselves
3. To hide the truth from those whose hearts were hardened

This coincides with Mark's words later in this chapter, v. 33-34

And with many such parables He was speaking the word to them as they were able to hear it; and He was not speaking to them without parables; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

Re: The Meaning (v. 13-20)

Oh, the depths of the meaning of this simple, yet profound parable!

It is the only parable interpreted in Scripture (though all were explained to the disciples v. 34) – making it the “template” for our understanding of all parables. They are about heaven and spiritual principles, told in stories of everyday life

- Sower = Jesus (and His followers – us!)
- Seed = Word of God, the message of salvation = Jesus Himself
- Soil = People with whom we share God's message
- Fruit = spiritual receptivity and growth, including reproduction of other disciples

The 3 Spiritual Hindrances to Spiritual Fruit (v. 15-19)

- a. Satan – who takes away the Word, when sown on a hardened heart
- b. Self – who falls away from enthusiasm about the Word when difficulty arises
- c. “Stuff” – that chokes the Word from priority

The 3 Things That Keep People Too Busy for the Word (v. 19)

- a. Worries (pride of life)
- b. Riches (lust of the eyes)
- c. Desires (Lust) (lust of the flesh)

The 4 Kinds of Hearts (=soil)

- a. UNRESPONSIVE (hardened)
- b. IMPULSIVE (shallow)
- c. PREOCCUPIED (busy)
- d. PREPARED (receptive)

The 3 steps to receiving the Word (seed) (v. 20)

- a. Hear it (so as to understand and let it change us - repent) (also 4:3, 9)
- b. Accept it (make it our belief and make it our own)
- c. Do it (put it into action)

Degrees of Spiritual Productivity (fruit): 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold

A PARABLE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

There will be an ultimate harvest whenever we share the Word (sow the seed)

Isaiah 55: 10, 11 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so, shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

A PARABLE OF CHALLENGE - as we mark the words of Mark 4:3 for our life

- “Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow.”
- We are the sower. We sow the message of God in word and deed.
- Let us go out to sow God’s love everywhere and anywhere –
 - Knowing that some will reject and ignore
 - Knowing that some will receive but later fall away
 - Knowing that some will hear, receive and bear spiritual fruit

THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL FRUIT IS TO SOW THE WORD!