

Mark 4:1-20 – The Parable Of The Soils

Leader's Guide

January 27, 2019

1. Read Mark 4:1-20 to familiarize yourself with the passage. How did these verses change the way you think about sharing the good news of Jesus? What truth did these verses reveal that you did not know?

The Parable of the Sower

4 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ 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.’ ”

¹³ And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are

the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

2. Suffering is part of the Christian life. What do these verses teach us about why Christians suffer? (Galatians 6:12, 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, James 1:2-4, Revelations 2:10, Romans 8:17)

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Galatians 6:12 (ESV)

- Sometimes people will have bad theology because they want to avoid suffering for truth. In this case, rather than holding to the truth, which is faith in Christ alone is enough to save us, these Christians added circumcision as a necessary requirement to faith. They caved to the cultural pressure they received from the Jews in their day to add Jewish rituals to salvation rather than being willing to suffer for speaking the truth that our salvation is based on Jesus alone. Today, we see this same trend with the LGBTQ movement in the church. Many denominations ordain practicing homosexuals because they cave to cultural pressure rather than being willing to suffer for the truth of the Bible.

that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 (ESV)

- Paul reiterates that suffering is part of the Christian life, especially suffering because we hold to the truth of Jesus. Paul encourages the Thessalonians, and he encourages us, not to give up on the truth when suffering. Don't "be moved" by these afflictions

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2-4 (ESV)

- God uses a variety of trials in our life as his tool to develop spiritual maturity in our life. God ordains periods of suffering in our life not because he hates us but because he loves us and wants us mature and become more like Jesus.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10 (ESV)

- God ordains suffering in our life as a way of testing our faith. As in the parable of the soils, suffering either proves the inauthenticity of faith or it proves the genuine nature of our faith.

and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:17 (ESV)

- Since Christ suffered, we should expect to suffer. The path to glory in heaven with Christ always involves traversing the road of suffering on earth traveled by Christ.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)

- Just as Christ learned obedience to God the Father through suffering, we also learn obedience to God the Father through suffering. Those who have suffered well are zealous to obey God's Word.

3. A love for this world can become more captivating than love for Jesus. What do these verses teach us about how an increasing love for the world affects our walk with Christ? (2 Timothy 4:10, Matthew 6:25-26, Luke 21:34, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Timothy 6:9-10, 1 John 2:15-17)

For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)

- A love for the things of the world may cause us to desert our Christian friends and responsibilities. Demas left Paul because things of this world were more appealing than helping Paul and being willing to suffer with him. When we fall in love with the things of this world, we will start finding excuses to neglect meeting with other believers. We will consistently fail in our commitments to serve in the church and love others outside the church.

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Matthew 6:25-26 (ESV)

- A love for this world can lead to anxiety about life. Instead of remaining confident that God knows our needs and promises to provide everything we need, a desire to keep up with our neighbors' status produces anxiety.

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. Luke 21:34 (ESV)

- It is easy to have the cares of this life become such a preoccupation so we neglect living for Christ and preparing for his return. We forget life does not go on forever. We need to make choices now that will prepare us to stand before Jesus having made good use of the life God gave.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 (ESV)

- A desire for riches leads us into a trap that leads to ruin and destruction. The love of money leads many people away from Christ and results in much pain.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

- We can not claim to love Jesus, yet live like everyone else constantly focusing on fleshly desires, gaining more possessions and living for more power. A love for the things of this world and a love for Christ are incompatible. One will always win over the other.

4. EXTRA CREDIT: The reality of God hardening someone's heart to the gospel after they consistently reject abundant spiritual evidence is a new thought for many of us. How does that change the way we share the gospel? What do these verses teach us about this hard truth? (John 12:37-41, John 12:37-41, Acts 28:23-27, Romans 11:8-10, 2 Corinthians 3:15, Hebrews 3:7-14)

- There are people who have heard the truth of the gospel so many times, and have hardened their hearts toward it, that they will not repent because they can not repent. This is why Paul first preached to the Jews but eventually preached to the Gentiles. The heart of many Jews was hardened against Jesus but the Gentiles hadn't heard of Jesus.

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. John 12:37-41 (ESV)

- John is referring to the same concept Mark talked about in Mark 4:12. Jesus gave abundant evidence of his identity with many signs, but many of the Jews in Jesus' day would not believe him. John quotes Isaiah noting that because the Jews would not believe, they had now come to the point that they could not believe. They had hardened their heart to the point that God was now hardening their heart. Interestingly, John 12:41 says the reason Isaiah said these things is because he saw his glory and spoke of him. The *him* in this passage refers to Jesus. While the pronoun is used in the ESV translation, the NIV translation inserts Jesus as the object of the pronoun to help make this connection clear.

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. John 12:41 (NIV)

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: " 'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' Acts 28:23-27 (ESV)

- In Rome, Paul spent an entire day showing the Jews the truth about Jesus from every part of the Old Testament Scriptures. He gave abundant evidence about the truth of Jesus, yet some still would not believe. Paul quoted Isaiah 6 to describe this situation. The reason they would not believe the clear evidence was because they could not believe. The hardness of their heart toward the gospel had now become an impenetrable heart hardened by God that was no longer able to hear the gospel.

...as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever." Romans 11:8-10 (ESV)

- Paul cites other passages from the Old Testament that teach the same truth of Isaiah 6:9-10. Those who harden their heart toward God will ultimately have hearts hardened by God (Isaiah 29:10, Psalm 69:22-23)

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 2 Corinthians 3:15 (ESV)

- Paul says the Jewish people still have a veil over their heart so they can not understand Jesus from the Old Testament. Their hearts are hardened so they can not see the obvious truth of Jesus in their own Scriptures.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.' " Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 3:7-14 (ESV)

- The Exodus generation hardened their heart toward God in the wilderness even after they saw the power of God on Mt. Sinai, the power of the plagues in Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, and numerous other miracles. The result of their hard heart was they never made it to the Promised Land. They died in the wilderness.