

## **Mark 4:1-20**

As we begin today I want to just remind you that as we have studied the Gospel of Mark we have seen a few different responses to the ministry of Jesus. Last week in our study gave us several examples of this.

If you remember the Lord called 12 disciples to Himself and it is obvious that these men loved the Lord, that they wanted to be with Him, that they were deeply moved by the way that He spoke to others and ministered to them and they had a big hunger to hear whatever Jesus might have to say.

On the other hand there were those that simply didn't believe in Jesus. And again in our study last week we saw His own family even come to Him to try and speak with Him and to talk some sense into Him as Jesus had so many people surrounding Him that He couldn't even enjoy a meal.

We also had those that were religious who refused to believe and remember it was their job to keep things in order and so when Jesus came along and He was going against the man made traditions that had been made for the Sabbath we watched as they became more and more hardened to what the Lord was accomplishing...So much so that at one point they even told the crowds that Jesus was doing what He did by the power of Satan.

The Lord in response spoke sternly to them speaking to the fact that a kingdom that is divided against itself simply cannot stand and that the only way a kingdom like Satan's could be overpowered is if someone

more powerful and strong came in and bound up the enemy and of course Jesus is that strong man.

And so really I say all this to simply say that as Jesus spoke and ministered there were many reactions to His teachings and who He was as a person and today as we look at the text before us we'll see that the Lord had a special way of teaching that really divided those that wanted to know spiritual truth from those that didn't really have a heart to hear and to understand the things He was sharing.

So let's look at the first two verses here of chapter 4 and we'll get into our text for tonight. It says the following **And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. <sup>2</sup> Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:**

Let's work to set the stage here so we can have a picture in our minds of how this unfolded. If you remember last week in our study we were told that people were coming from all directions to get near to Jesus and there were so many that we were told that Jesus was almost crushed by the crowd as they were pressing in to be near to Him.

And as this took place Jesus came up with a solution as He told the disciples that they should make a boat ready for Him and this would have created just a little space between Himself and the crowds...and so now we see Jesus making use of this boat as we are told He began to teach by the Sea.

Now if you have been to a lake (which is actually what the Sea of Galilee is) then you know that the lake is the lowest point and that the

ground around the lake has a natural downward slope and so you can imagine Jesus is down low in the lake and the crowds are surrounding Him...and this would have created a natural amphitheater for Jesus to speak. You might notice that we are told here that Jesus sat while He spoke and this was the common way that teachings in Biblical times took place.

In verse 2 we are told that as Jesus taught many things that He did so by parables. Now a parable was an amazing tool that the Lord used to speak into the lives of others and to make it simple a parable was a story that Jesus told that used everyday common objects and situations that the people were familiar with to convey a spiritual truth. What Jesus would do is He would put something that was known before the people which when properly thought of and meditated upon would reveal a much deeper truth.

I have to say that in life there are some people that are just natural story tellers...Perhaps you know someone in your family like that and they can tell a story and they may tell the same story repeatedly but when they are telling it you just feel like you are right there in the story with them.

If you have ever heard of a man by the name of Gayle Irwin and we do have one of his books in the bookstore but Gayle used to tell stories when he taught at conferences or at churches and when he told a story he would have you laughing and you in your minds eye would just be right there with him and then all of a sudden he would take that story and he would turn and begin to apply spiritual truth and many would go from laughing to crying because of the goodness of the Lord

that you could learn through the story that was being told. A story can indeed be a powerful way to illustrate a spiritual truth.

I do want to point out that a parable was not a new idea for we do see something very similar a few times in the Old Testament.

Just for an example if you remember not that long ago in our study of the life of David there was a prophet whose name was Nathan...And David had made a huge mistake in his life, he had sinned against God and committed adultery with a woman named Bathsheba and as he did so she became pregnant and then David had tried to cover his sin by inviting her husband back from the battlefield and the hope was as this man was visiting his home that of course he would sleep with his wife and he would think that the child was his...however this man refused to sleep with his wife while the soldiers were out in the midst of the battle and as he refused to do this David eventually ended up having him killed.

For a time David hid his sin but then the Lord spoke to Nathan who was a prophet and sent him to David and he proceeded to tell David a story or a parable about a rich man who had all he could ever want and there was a poor man that had just one lamb that was like family to him and the rich man when he had a visitor came and stole the lamb from the poor man...and David as he heard the story became enraged at what had been done and said the rich man should die for his sin...and then Nathan turned and told David that he was the man! That he had taken what belonged to another man even though God had blessed him with anything he could ever want and as David heard all this he was undone and confessed his sin before the Lord...So God reached David by giving him a story or a parable through the prophet.

In the new testament I believe that Paul gave a parable of sorts to Timothy when he spoke to Timothy about three different occupations that people can have and all 3 of them were types of work that people would have been familiar with in Biblical times...He told Timothy about a soldier and an athlete and a farmer and then he said this to him in 2 Timothy 2:7 when he said **7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.** The invitation was for Timothy to consider the occupations that had been spoken of and the Lord would then give him understanding. When you stop and think about the soldier, the athlete and the farmer and you look for how these occupations might apply spiritually to our lives there are all kinds of things we can glean from it.

All that to say that parables are not a new idea and today we'll look at what is probably the most famous parable and I would think most of us here have read or heard this parable taught before.

So let's go ahead here and take a look at how this develops and I want to try not to get ahead of the text today as I think it will help bring some understanding as to how this whole situation developed...So we have Jesus in the boat and there is a multitude that is around him on the shore and Jesus now begins to share this story with those that are present.

Look at verses 3-9 which say **3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root**

it withered away. <sup>7</sup> And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. <sup>8</sup> But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

<sup>9</sup> And He said to them, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

So what Jesus shares is a story about a farmer who goes out to cast his seeds out on the ground and just for some information we should just understand that almost everyone was familiar with farming in the days that Jesus lived...Even those that lived in the city often times had a little land outside the city limits that they would go and tend to.

Being around a lake you can imagine that there were probably even fields right next to the Sea of Galilee. Even today many of the marshy lands that surround the sea have been converted into farmland.

And so Jesus begins to talk to them about a farmer that went out to cast his seeds on the ground and when a farmer in biblical times was casting seed they would come out and toss it liberally into the general area that they were trying to grow crops in and every farmer knew that some of the seed they cast out was going to land in places that it wouldn't grow all that well and Jesus as he spoke of this process then spoke of four different kinds of soil that a seed might fall on.

The first type of soil was the wayside or what we would call the path...Every field in biblical times had specific areas that animals and people would be walking on regularly and as they did so that path would become smashed and compacted so much so that when a seed fell on it that nothing would ever grow...and as it sat on the



surface it would become easy picking for the birds of the air to come and have a snack. In today's world we might think of a hiking trail and how barren it becomes the more people walk on it.

The second type of soil was the soil that was said to be the stony soil and if you have ever been to Israel and I have not but if you have then you know that everywhere you turn there are rocks and pebbles...and often times there would even be a layer of rocks maybe a few inches under the soil.

But as the seed fell on this soil and the rain came and then the sun came out the rocks would heat up quickly and the little seed would germinate and take off like a rocket but the problem was that the seeds couldn't get the roots down very far and when the sun came out for several days in a row that little root would literally cook from the heat of the stone and it would die off.

The third soil we have is the soil that was sown among thorns and that seed would begin to come up and grow but right next to it the thorns would grow up and they would actually choke out and consume the seed that was coming up...If you have ever grown any vegetables or plants then you know that the thorns and the weeds are always going to grow right next to your plants and you are going to have to constantly deal with those weeds and thorns...Eventually about half way through summer the tendency is to give up the battle and just let them both grow together.

And then finally there were the seeds that found the good ground and they when they grew would multiply and would produce 30, 60 or even 100 fold and of course every person that sowed seed had the hopes and desires that this kind of harvest would eventually take place.

If you think about it no farmer would intentionally throw the seeds in a place that they wouldn't grow but instead they toss them to the place they think they will get the most bang for their buck so to say.

And so Jesus told this story about farming and then I can just imagine Jesus looking around at those who were there and He simply said "If you have ears to hear then you should hear" and then that was it...and perhaps Jesus told other parables at this time as well but I just kind of get the idea that Jesus told this story and then He just moved on to the next topic and the people I can imagine are just looking around at each other thinking what on earth was that.

When we see that phrase "He who has an ear, let him hear" that really reminds me of what Jesus said to the churches in the book of Revelation and if you aren't familiar with the book of Revelation I would just encourage you to go and read Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and you will see that Jesus Himself had some words to say to 7 different churches in 7 different cities and as he spoke to those churches at the end of each one Jesus would say "He who has an ear, Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The reality is that God is always working to speak into our lives and reveal truth to us the question is do we have the proper ear to hear what He is saying. Not a physical ear but a spiritual ear to hear.

And so some as they heard Jesus speak they couldn't see or perceive what Jesus was actually trying to say and they didn't care to work towards understanding...Others though who were hungry and had a heart in the right place knew there was more to the story than just a farmer out sowing seeds.



Now if you remember in the crowd there were the disciples and they were the closest to Jesus and then there was the multitude and many of them really just wanted to receive a miracle from Jesus and their hearts really were not always in the right spot and then there were the religious leaders who I am sure followed Jesus almost everywhere looking for reasons to come against Him and of course they refused to listen at all to what Jesus said to them.

Most of the people we will see heard what Jesus said and just moved on with life but if you look at verse 10 we can see there were some that knew that there must be more to it and they were willing to seek Him out and ask about it...Verse 10 says <sup>10</sup>**But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.** So there was a small group of people that are seen here pressing in and asking questions and looking to understand the meaning of what Jesus said...Perhaps their hearts were burning in them as they heard Jesus speak. Has that ever happened to you? You are hearing the Word of God being taught and something just begins to burn in your heart and you have a desire to know more about that passage or learn more about what the Bible says about that topic...I know I have and it's a blessing to go and seek out the Word of God and look to understand as much as you possibly can about that passage...I kind of think that's how these people were as they sought out the Lord and questioned Him about the parable that He spoke.

Jesus responded to them in verses 11 and 12 which say <sup>11</sup>**And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, <sup>12</sup> so that**

‘Seeing they may see and not perceive,  
And hearing they may hear and not understand;  
Lest they should turn,  
And *their* sins be forgiven them.’ ”

After they ask the Lord about it Jesus lets them know that they had access to the mysteries of the kingdom of God but there were those on the outside that didn't have access to it. This tells us there are some that will be given understanding and some that won't and we might look at that and say wait a minute here why are there some that are special and some that are not...We might even think well shouldn't the truth be for everyone?

And to that I would say yes the truth is for everyone, and anyone can gain access to the understanding of the parables that Jesus spoke and we do see that Jesus as he went on said of those that didn't currently have access to understand that they also had the opportunity to turn and see their sins forgiven and then begin to understand...the idea is if they truly had the right heart the truth of what was said would be revealed...so anyone could enter in.

So really the Lord is saying that the problem is that some who hear don't really hear properly and they don't have the right attitude and because of that what Jesus was saying could not really penetrate into their hearts or minds...and really as Jesus explains the parable which we will see in a few minutes we'll see that He speaks about the conditions of the heart of a person.

For you and I today we know that The Word of God says this about spiritual truth in 1 Corinthians 2:14 when it says **14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are**

**foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.** This teaches us that man needs the Spirit of God to really understand what is being conveyed by the Lord...You might be able to relate to this if you tried to read the Bible before you gave your heart to Jesus...It made no sense and often you might have given up for lack of ability to understand but when you got your heart right with Jesus the Word came alive and it began to make sense like never before.

I believe we can learn from what Jesus said at the end of verse 12 when He said “Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.” to truly begin to hear and understand the mysteries of God’s word (and that word mystery is not the idea that something can’t be understood but instead that it is revealed to certain individuals) and when it comes to God’s mysteries you and I that believe in Jesus can enter into understanding those mysteries...but anyways if those who can’t understand would humble themselves and turn to the Lord then they would find they would begin to understand.

The real problem is so many have a hard heart and they think they have everything figured out and they refuse to humble themselves and the Bible is clear in James 4:6 when it says “**God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.**”

So really the key to understanding truth and understanding the parables and the Word of God in general is to make sure your heart is in the right place and we’ll talk about that here in just a few minutes.

Hopefully that all makes sense and to just try and sum it up Jesus is working to let the disciples know that they have a special calling in their lives and a special permission in their lives to enter into the true

understanding of the parable...You and I also can enter into spiritually understanding the truth of God's Word if we come the right way...and of course the right way is to come through humility recognizing that you are lost in your sins and you need a Savior and then recognizing that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and placing your personal trust in what He has done for you...As you do that you find that there is a whole spiritual world that is at work in you and around you and you begin to see so much more clearer than you ever have.

So let's see what Jesus does now that He has those that have this yearning in their heart to understand if you look at verse 13 which says <sup>13</sup>And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" So those that came they don't know what Jesus was saying but they had a hunch there was more to it and the Lord as He responds simply let's them know that if they can't grab hold of this parable and its meaning then they won't be able to understand any of the parables.

What this means is that this parable before us the parable of the sower and the seeds is going to be the key to understanding all the other parables...If you can grab hold of the truths that Jesus is going to share here then you can apply the same principles to the rest of what Jesus shared through parables and come to a correct understanding.

Now if you have ever looked at a map and I will just go ahead and tell you that I'm not so great at reading maps my wife on the other hand she is a professional and she can find all the symbols and figure out the exits and everything like that...Today we don't use maps so much but back when I was in my early 20's that's really all we had with

maybe some printed out directions from a web site called Map Quest...But anyways on the side of the map is the key and without that key you won't be able to understand what everything means. So it is here with this parable is what Jesus is saying.

Look at verse 14 which says <sup>14</sup>**The sower sows the word.** So now we get a significant piece of information in that the seed in the parable that Jesus told was actually representative of the Word of God...and so when the farmer was out tossing the seed into the field we can understand that Jesus was referring to how God's Word is sown into the lives of others.

Over in 1 Peter 1:23 we hear this about God's Word when it says the following about believers...it says <sup>23</sup>**having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,** So the seed of God's Word comes into our lives and as we receive it we are then born again.

This means the Word of God is powerful indeed for in the seed of God's Word we find everything that you and I need for life and eternity.

It is interesting to think about how a seed germinates and that's the process a seed goes through from hitting the ground to beginning to grow but once that seed finds the right conditions it begins to grow and part of those conditions are that the seed must have water in order to begin to grow...and so it is for you and I we must have the Seed or the gospel planted in our hearts and then so often that seed will sit dormant for a time before someone comes along and begins to water that seed and then ultimately it grows because God brings about that growth.

Now I want to point out to you that the SEED NEVER CHANGES...God's Word doesn't change but what we are going to see is that the condition of a person's heart or the soil of a person's heart can be very different from one person to another and the four different types of soil that Jesus spoke of when He told the parable are going to represent four different conditions of the human heart.

Let's look at the first type of soil or heart which is found in verse 15 which says <sup>15</sup>**And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.** In life I am sure as you have shared the truths of God's Word that you can think of those that have a heart that is so hard that the Word simply can't penetrate or produce anything in them whatsoever.

It's as if the moment the truth is shared with them there is an immediate rejection of it and Satan who is seen here as one of the birds of the air just swoops in and quickly takes away what was sown.

It's a sad place to be when you just refuse to even listen to what God might have to say to you. I would say that a good many people that we try and reach out to when we go out and evangelize in the community have this kind of heart that simply won't receive anything.

So much of the world has a hard heart to the authority and the love of God...and yet I would say that just because people are hard hearted doesn't mean the one sowing the seed should stop casting that seed out...So often I think we can run into one or two hard hearts and they refuse the truth and Satan snatches that seed and when we see that we can shut down and have the idea in our minds that no one wants to hear the truth...We must remember that though a heart is hard one



day they may not be hard the next day...The condition of a heart can change as God works to minister to that person.

Let's look at the second soil in verses 16-17 which say <sup>16</sup>**These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; <sup>17</sup> and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.**

Have you ever wondered why so many people go forward at Billy Graham and Greg Laurie crusades and yet so few of them actually follow through with following Jesus? I think a lot of them are like this seed by the stony ground...They receive the truth of God's Word with great joy and for a short time they are off and running and enjoying Jesus and yet suddenly the sun begins to come out and those seeds that have just outward superficial growth and no real root begin to wither away.

The sun in the parable is seen as the tribulations and persecutions of the world and so many people receive the Word with great joy and then when their friends begin to poke fun at them for receiving Christ or they begin to be faced with denying your flesh and persevering in the faith that person will quickly fall away.

These are those that make an emotional response to God's Word but it never moves deep enough in their heart to have sufficient and strong roots.

It's such a sad thing when someone is with the Lord one day and then the next day they are gone and so often the stony soil and the thorny soil are like that.

Look at verse 18-19 which say <sup>18</sup>**Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.** Those sown among hearts that are like thorny soil begin to grow and at the same time the thorns surround that plant and they will begin to choke out what was sown within them.

Sadly, I think there are many that simply get distracted by the things of the world. This world is certainly enticing for we are surrounded by it each day and yet we know that there is way more to life than what we see with our eyes in the here and now. Our life in this world may last 80 years if we are lucky but after we die we are faced with eternity and sadly so many are just pulled away by the things of this world and it will choke out what God wants to do in their life.

I think that sadly there are many that think that because they are blessed materially here on earth that God must be pleased with them...There is a church in Revelation that was just like this and it was the church in Laodicea and listen to what the Lord said to them in Revelation 3:15-20 which says <sup>15</sup>**“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to**

buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. <sup>19</sup> As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

This church thought they had it together but they couldn't see that they were blind and miserable and wretched and the Lord was actually outside of that church knocking on the door wanting to come in. Don't let the riches of this world or the advancement of your life in this world be what dictates your decisions for the thorns of the world and the weeds of this world will grow and choke you out.

I suppose you could say this kind of heart is caught between two kingdoms...On the one hand they want God's kingdom and on the other hand they want the kingdom of this world. To this Jesus said the following which is found in Matthew 6:24 which says <sup>24</sup> **"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."** I have to just warn you if this is you...it won't turn out well, the thorns known as the riches and worries of this world will choke you out. It's better to just be full on living for Jesus than being divided in your heart.

So I don't know about you but I don't want to be one of those first three soils we looked at I would rather be what we see in verse 20 which says <sup>20</sup> **But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some**

**sixty, and some a hundred.”** I don't think any of us would want to be anything other than the good soil that is found here...I think we would all hopefully say I want to bear much fruit for God and His kingdom in my life...I suppose we could ask ourselves **IS MY LIFE FRUITFUL FOR GOD'S KINGDOM?**

Next week when we come together I want to spend just a little more time on this good soil and how you and I can cultivate that kind of heart in our lives.

I would ask you today in closing which of these soils is the kind of heart you have?

I would also warn you today that while you might have a heart that is full of good soil today that the condition of your heart can change as you go through life. Over in the book of Proverbs 4:23 we are told the following **Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.** I believe we need to have the mentality that says Lord please keep my heart in the right place, Lord please help me to always be that good soil that will bear much fruit.

David prayed this way in Psalm 139:23-24 which says <sup>23</sup>**Search me, O God, and know my heart;**

**Try me, and know my anxieties;**

<sup>24</sup>**And see if there is any wicked way in me,**

**And lead me in the way everlasting.** I can't encourage you enough to ask the Lord to be at work in your heart, to ask Him to keep you humble in your heart and focused on His kingdom and able to receive and accomplish all that He has for you.

And I want to challenge you today that if you are here and you know that your heart is in a place that God doesn't want it that you would just come before Him and ask for help. Perhaps you are worried about all the things that are happening around you and the trials of life are working to wither the roots of your life...or maybe you are just focused on how to get ahead in this world and you are concerned about all the things that the world is worried about...or maybe you know your heart is just plain old hard...I think the solution to all of these is to cry out to Jesus to change you and help you and minister to you and as you do so I believe He will minister to you.

Let's pray.

## **Mark 4:1-20 “The Expectations of a Sower”**

Cross References

### **Verses 1-2**

2 Timothy 2:7

### **Verses 11-12**

1 Corinthians 2:14

James 4:6

### **Verse 14**

1 Peter 1:23

### **Verses 18-19**

Revelation 3:15-20

Matthew 6:24

### **Verse 20**

Proverbs 4:23

Psalms 139:23-24