

# 2.1

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's Word will grow in the good ground of the heart.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will hear and faithfully obey the Word.



### FOCUS VERSES: Mark 4:2-3

<sup>2</sup> And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

<sup>3</sup> Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow.

### LESSON TEXT: Mark 4:1-20



# BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

**Lesson Text:** Mark 4:1-20

The Parable of the Sower and Jesus' subsequent explanation is found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). This parable is one of the few places where Jesus plainly explained and interpreted the parable after the fact. First, this parable is one of the most succinct explanations for God's vision for His kingdom. The seed the sower spread was not limited to one type of soil, meaning the gospel is not only for one group of people. Instead, all can have access to the gospel seeds being sown. Christ never intended to limit access to the salvation He offers.

The variable in this parable was not the seed (the gospel). The seed was the same regardless of the ground. Rather, the response of the soil to the seed was the key variable. The responsibility of the sower is simply to sow. Just as Christ freely offers salvation to all, so His followers should not restrict the gospel to others but freely lead others to Christ. How people respond is outside of our control. Our job is not to judge the quality of the soil. However, let it never be said that people were unable to respond because they never received the seed in the first place.

Second, this parable provides unique insight into the nature of Jesus' parables. Jesus wondered aloud how the disciples could understand any of His parables if they could not understand this one (Mark 4:13). Jesus freely gave an explanation for this parable when asked, so He never intended to make the gospel hard to understand or access. However, for those who did not humbly seek further explanation, they were simply relegated to having the parable alone without any clarification. Many who heard Jesus that day only heard the parable, not the explanation. But the persistent—the twelve disciples and a handful of others—received the whole picture.

This story provides a healthy model for all who seek to know Christ better. The apostle Peter recognized that some of Paul's writings were "hard to be understood" (II Peter 3:16). However, those who consistently, humbly seek more of God have an opportunity to receive greater insight, understanding, and revelation.

THE SEED THE SOWER SPREAD WAS NOT LIMITED TO ONE TYPE OF SOIL, MEANING THE GOSPEL IS NOT ONLY FOR ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE.

# DAY 1

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## Mark 4:1-2

<sup>1</sup> And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

<sup>2</sup> And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine.

## Biblical Insight

When Jesus called His first disciples, He hopped into Simon Peter's boat and taught the crowd from the boat (Luke 5:1-3). Earlier in Mark, Jesus had instructed the disciples to "have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him" (Mark 3:9, ESV).

The phrase in Mark 4 that is translated "in his doctrine" is *didaché*, translated more commonly as "teaching" in several versions. The word simply describes what is taught by an individual. The contemporary equivalent of this phrase might be when we speak generally of "the teachings of Jesus."

## Daily Devotion

This scene looked familiar. Jesus had found Himself in a boat before, and He had met with Peter by the water before. When Jesus booked the boat, Peter was glad to allow Him on board. The waters were calm and the boat was sturdy. Jesus stepped into the boat to teach others when the waters were still.

But in another instance, Jesus bid Peter to come walk with Him on the water when there was upheaval, teaching Peter a lesson in solitude and dependence. When the tempest came, things changed. Storms can test the faith of a lot of people.

Trusting God when the seas are raging is beautiful. Although a storm means something is going on outside of our control, it also means our deliverer is already in the middle of what is worrying us. He has gone before us and wants us to keep our eyes and steps toward Him, not on the waves.

Sometimes God teaches us in the calm. Other times the best lessons are learned in the times we step out of the boat into uncertainty. Storms do not last forever, but rest assured the one who controls them does.

## Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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## DAY 2

### Mark 4:3-8

<sup>3</sup> Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

<sup>4</sup> and it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

<sup>5</sup> And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

<sup>6</sup> but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

<sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

<sup>8</sup> And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

### Biblical Insight

This agricultural parable is one of Jesus' most famous parables. Almost every person in His audience would have had some experience planting and harvesting. Jesus painted a picture of a farmer who spread seeds with abandon. Jesus mentioned four types of ground the seed could land on, but only one type could bear fruit. A pathway would have been too packed down for seeds to sink into the earth before being devoured by birds; rocky soil would not allow the plant to form lasting roots; and seeds planted amongst weeds would not have the space to grow without being crowded out.

### Daily Devotion

Where we plant makes a difference. We cannot plant in areas of shallowness or unreceptive attitudes and expect a fruitful harvest. Introducing seeds of our faith into watered-down or inflexible soil will not reap bountifully. The condition of our hearts and those we are attempting to share the gospel with must be productive and ready to receive the Word. Remember, when you encounter others who do not receive the Word with gladness, pray for their hearts that they will become receptive and make a change.

Take some time to really survey the soil of your soul. Are you planting and watering upon ground that is ready to gather all God has for you?

### Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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## DAY 3

### Mark 4:9-10

<sup>9</sup> And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

<sup>10</sup> And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

### Biblical Insight

The statement “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” is found in multiple places throughout the New Testament. The Gospels record Jesus using this directive multiple times (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). John used the command eight times in the Book of Revelation. This seminal statement was used to make sure people were paying attention and engaged in contemplating what was being communicated. Jesus’ listeners apparently heeded this task. A short while later, His twelve disciples, as well as some others present, began to ask Jesus about the meaning of the parable.

### Daily Devotion

War correspondent Harry Williams picked up the phone in Paris. It was May 1918 and artillery shells were raining down around him. He expected the line would be filled with heavy static and the sound of foreign-speaking voices. To his surprise, he was greeted by a polite and professional American — a Hello Girl.

In a period when the world was undergoing an advancement of innovation, the Hello Girls became the first women soldiers to be part of the United States Army. They operated the switchboards and transmitted vital calls regarding World War I. These brave individuals changed the face of wartime communication and ushered in a new era of rights for women.

They understood the assignment and the call. They put their ears and minds to work to assist in protecting their country. We are called to lean in and listen closely to the messages God transmits to us. He has contributed a written guide, the Bible, and speaks often in various modes. It is up to us to dig deeper, listen intently, and absorb what He imparts.

Will you receive the dispatched Word that has the power to change the world?

### Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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## DAY 4

### Mark 4:11-13

<sup>11</sup> And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

<sup>12</sup> that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

<sup>13</sup> And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

### Biblical Insight

Only those who pressed for an answer received this next portion. Everyone else only heard the parable without the follow-up explanation. Perhaps Jesus recognized that sincere believers would continue to press and seek. Those who are persistent and faithful in their seeking frequently walk away with greater revelation.

Verse 12 heavily references Isaiah 6:9-10, although it is not a direct quotation. The concept of seeing and hearing without fully comprehending is a common Old Testament theme that all of Jesus' hearers would have recognized. (See Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 43:8; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2.)

### Daily Devotion

If you have ever been around a baby for a long period of time, you know when the baby wants something. Babies are adamant about what they want, especially when they have not yet mastered the art of walking. Once children have their crawl down perfectly, they are—in their minds—unstoppable. On hands and knees, they press toward their mark. They are such wonderful examples of persistence.

Much like a tenacious little one, the disciples wanted more. They had a ferocious appetite for the depths of God's goodness and His Word. They heard Jesus' teachings on the surface, but they longed for more. They sat at His feet and soaked in every drop of revelation they could retain. They had dipped their toes into the shallow, but they knew there was something more in the deep. The shallow might be safe, but it's not where the greatest blessings are.

Experiencing God is a lifelong journey that gets sweeter with each passing day. Keep pressing. The more you know Him, the more you will want to know.

### Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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## DAY 5

### Mark 4:14-20

<sup>14</sup> The sower soweth the word.

<sup>15</sup> And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

<sup>16</sup> And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

<sup>17</sup> and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

<sup>18</sup> And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

<sup>19</sup> and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

<sup>20</sup> And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

### Biblical Insight

The text is not clear whether the sower in this passage refers to God or to believers witnessing to fellow humanity. The ambiguity is perhaps purposeful so both applications can be made. God offers His salvation to all, so we believers preach of His salvation to all. Many reject God's offer, just as many cast off preaching. However, whether the sower refers to God, witnessing believers, or both, God ultimately causes growth to happen, both in the lives of individuals as well as in His church as a whole.

### Daily Devotion

Time and consistency play an important role in progression because seeds grow in darkness. They must be tended to and cultivated with care. If we are rooted and surrendered, growth will come. Aside from the cleansing and uncovering, after the rain comes the blooming. The fruit is produced in just the right time, and the beautiful results of all the pruning, drought, watering, and pain are experienced. The rain reveals what a tiny seed of faith has grown into. When the sun comes out, there will be a deeper appreciation for growth, and there will be so much to show for the season you've come through.

Sometimes growth is a singular event, but growth can—and in some instances should—also happen in unity. Redwood trees thrive in relationship. Their root systems intertwine as they mature upward. Stay consistent. Stay rooted. Growth is coming. God is not finished with you.

### Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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