

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: PARABLES - Part 1

Parables, and the Parable of the Sower

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Part of The Gospel of MarkParables

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*In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without
using parables....*

—Mark 4:34 (NLT)

- **A common definition of a parable: “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”**
- **A better definition of a parable: “a saying or story that seeks to drive home a point the speaker wishes to**

emphasize by illustrating it from a familiar situation of common life.” (Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible)

INSIGHTS INTO THE PARABLES OF JESUS:

1. **Jesus ____ taught using parables, and especially to the crowds.**
2. **While many of Jesus’ parables were stories, not ____ of them could be classified as a true story format.**
3. **Jesus’ parables always taught ____ lesson, drove home ____ point.**
4. **Most of Jesus’ parables were ____ allegorical.**
5. **His parables always used common, local, real-world examples and settings that his ____ could easily connect with.**
6. **His parables always pointed to the ____ and what life in the kingdom would be like.**
7. **Jesus’ parables often ____ listeners who weren’t seeking the Kingdom of God and putting their faith in Jesus.**
8. **Jesus’ parables always had a sense of ____, a calling for the listener to take ____, to make a decision or choice, that showed their commitment to Jesus and the Kingdom of God.**

Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

—Mark 4:1-2 (NLT)

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted

quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

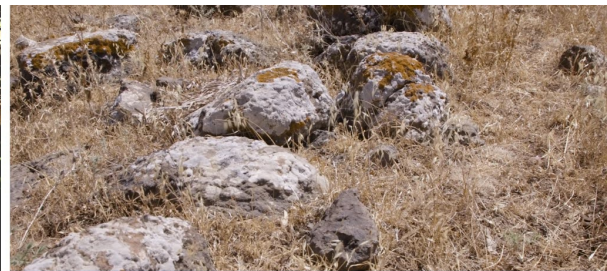
—Mark 4:3-9 (NLT)

Jesus begins and ends his parable calling for the crowd to “___” and pay careful attention to what he is saying.

The farming method Jesus is describing was ___ for Palestine, and so everyone listening would have been very familiar with the image.



Path



Stoney Ground



Thorny Ground



Good Soil

In the parable Jesus is the sower, spreading the good news of the Kingdom, but the primary focus of the parable isn't on Jesus but on the ___ of the hearers.

Throughout the Bible, fruitfulness is a common image of the person or nation who is spiritually open and ___ to the good news of the Kingdom, and being unfruitful, therefore having little or no harvest, is a sign of spiritual ___ and, ultimately,

judgment.

Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant. He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they see what I [God] do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.'" (Isaiah 6:9-10)

—Mark 4:10-12 (NLT)

"secret" = *mysterion* (Greek) = typically represents what God has revealed to human beings that wasn't otherwise known - revelation beyond humanity's ability to know or figure out on our own

This revelation is the good news that the Kingdom of God has come near in ____, and it is proclaimed to all, but only those who chose to believe, who have faith, grasp its importance.

In Isaiah 6, Israel's failure to follow and trust God is not only the reason God will judge them, but it will now also become the ____ by which His purpose is achieved of reaching more people.

The scribes and Pharisees, who had typically been considered the religious "insiders," have now become the "____" whose fate is already sealed as part of God's judgment, not only for them but as a lesson to all those who come after them.

I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say, "The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness. And this is my

covenant with them, that I will take away their sins.” Many of the people of Israel are now enemies of the Good News, and this benefits you Gentiles. Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For God’s gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the people of Israel rebelled against him, God was merciful to you instead. Now they are the rebels, and God’s mercy has come to you so that they, too, will share in God’s mercy. For God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone.

—Romans 11:25-32 (NLT)

Paul tells the Romans that the Jews’ failure to follow Jesus has opened the door for God to use the disciples through the Holy Spirit to reach out to the ____.

Until the Jews come to faith, their loss is, in effect, the Gentiles gain, and so the Jews’ ____ to believe has opened the door for God’s revelation and Kingdom to come to the Gentiles, to all those not originally part of God’s covenant.

Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much

as had been planted!”

—Mark 4:13-20 (NLT)

The disciples lack of spiritual maturity is a constant theme in Mark, and it shows all of us that we *need* the Holy Spirit living in us through placing our faith in Christ, in order to grasp the ____ meaning of what Jesus is revealing through His Word.

Mark shows Jesus warning that many who hear His Word will ____ to produce any fruit or harvest.

The first seed never even takes root, representing anyone who immediately rejects Jesus’ message, and Jesus tells us this is the work of ____.

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

—2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT)

It’s clear that we’re all in a ____ battle, for Satan is always working to keep the unbeliever from recognizing the truth about Jesus and thereby producing eternal fruit.

“The seed that fell on good soil” talks about people who are open and ____ to the Kingdom of God and Jesus - they aren’t hardened, or shallow, or preoccupied, but want Jesus, and that leads to a productive and vital life.

As Jesus spoke these parables to the disciples back then, he is also calling *us* to make a ____.

What kind of soil am I, and am I satisfied with that? If not, what do I need to do?

Next Week - Parables, Part 2 (Mark 4:21-25) (*read ahead*)