

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 10, Parable of the Sower
Speaker: Kevin Norcross
Passage: Mark 4.1-20
Big idea: To produce a good crop, regular gardening is required.



Let's make one thing clear, I am not a gardener. I can keep my grass at home alive, but that is about it

Kylie and I we have five kids three dogs and the last thing we need is another thing to take care of or try to keep fed and alive.

We have ventured out a little bit and have some plants, but they are the ones that don't need watering and they come up every year on their own. The biggest commitment we have made is 2 palm trees, because it makes us feel like we are living somewhere tropical.

In this passage in Mark, we see Jesus sharing a story using 4 different types of soil, to share people's response and receptivity to the gospel. Dirt with a path in it, dirt with rocks, dirt with thorns, and good soil.

¹Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ²He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." ⁹Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." ¹⁰When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables¹² so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

¹³Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? ¹⁴The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word;¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

Mark 4.1-20

BIG IDEA
To produce a good crop,
regular gardening is required.



We are going to go through each of these verses and dive into it and pull some great truth out of this text. There are some really good truths that we are going to discover.

Mark 4.1-2, “Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said”

The setting is by the lake in Galilee, because the crowds were so large, he went out into a small boat to be able to teach them.

That fact that there were large crowds shows Jesus’ popularity as a teacher. He wanted to teach in a setting where all people from all walks of life could hear and learn. Jesus also taught them in parables, which is how Jesus often taught because of these reasons:

- Creates intrigue
- Easy to remember
- Illustrate the Truth
- Reengages the crowd

Mark 4.3, “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.”

Jesus says “listen” even though it is obvious they were listening because they had gathered there. However, listen implies here that not everyone is going to understand the message. Only an alert mind can comprehend it. Jesus is also drawing attention to the importance of what he is about to say. So, Jesus is saying “Listen”, pay close attention, listen up or you are going to miss what I am saying.

Sometimes when communicating with the kids especially when they are little, it involves getting down to their level. Kneeling so we are eye level, putting their head in my hands, helping them focus their eyes and saying “listen to the words that are coming out of my mouth” - stop hitting your sister.

And in response to their loving and caring parent they know that they need to tune in, listen up, soften their hearts, because their mom or dad had something important to say

We need to have this approach when it comes to listening to God’s teaching, reading the Word, in prayer, and in our worship. Softening our hearts so that we can hear the important truths God has to say.

The backdrop to this parable is rural Palestine where there is lots of farming, so the people listening would understand farming very well. Farmers did not hand sow and cover each seed, rather, they would spread seed by scattering it over every surface. So, the seed would land on all these various places, path, rocky places, and thorns. The next step in the process would be to plow, but if that part was delayed a few days it would result in what Jesus shares in this parable.

Mark 4.-8, “As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

Path - the seed is eaten up by birds.

Rocks - the seed produces a sprout but is withered by the sun.

Thorns - the seed cannot take root because it is choked out by thorns.

Good Soil - the seed takes root and produces a multiplying crop.

In this parable we see 2 different aspects to spreading the Gospel.

1. The perspective of those spreading the gospel
There are various types of soil, symbolizing the various conditions of people's hearts.
2. The perspective of those receiving the gospel
The Unbeliever - receives the gospel for the first time
The Believer - the ongoing truth of the gospel

As Christ followers, we continue to learn and grow. At the point of our salvation, Christ accepts us and forgives us, and we are a work in progress. Throughout our lives we are challenged by God to make changes and go deeper in our walk with Him.

Throughout this parable we are reminded of the importance of sharing the Gospel truth with others. A main thought found here is that the Gospel must be proclaimed to all people, no matter whether they accept it or not.

Mark 4.9, "Then Jesus said, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'" When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"

Jesus and his disciples had retreated to a place where they could be alone after a long day teaching the crowds. It might be similar to a football team getting in the locker room after a game, or a group of leaders debriefing after an event.

At your first glance of these verses you might think that this does not make sense, or you might be reading this and making a 'squinty face of confusion'.

You might think, why would Jesus want them to perceive the truth, but not understand it? I thought Jesus wanted people to understand what he is saying. I thought that Jesus wanted people to be forgiven, isn't that the whole point here?

I want to first acknowledge that it is okay to ask questions when reading scripture. It is okay to say "hmmmm", it is okay to wonder and think "this doesn't sit right with me - I need to dig a little deeper to find the truth".

So, let's do that together, let's dig deeper and find the truth.

First of all, it is important to understand terminology and the meaning of a few words in their original language.

Secret

When I hear the word secret, I think of little kids on a playground saying, "oooohh, Jonny has a secret, and he is not telling anyone". The origin of the word secret comes from the word, *mysterion*, or *mystery*. It does not mean that it is intended for only a few to understand. It is proclaimed to all, but only those who have faith will understand it.

This secret has been given to the disciples because they have believed in Jesus by faith, but to those "on the outside" who are unbelievers and who have hard calloused hearts, they do not care, they have hard hearts, they do not seek to understand. They could know this "*mysterion*" but their hearts are hardened by unbelief.

These people do not understand because:

- their minds are dull and unable to comprehend
- their hearts are hardened
- they are blinded by unbelief
- they are too focused on the evil in this world to perceive truth

It is a mystery to those who don't understand, but perfectly plain and simple to those open to understand it

Outsiders

The "outsiders" are people could be called "persistent unbelievers". People who not only do not want to hear the truth, but who want to tear the truth apart and lead others away from it. People who advocate against the gospel. Jesus is saying that there will be people who are listening to my teaching who are just "bad guys" and want to do "bad stuff" so I teach in parables so that they can stand there confused, and the people who are actually here to learn can understand!

Now, what about this statement, "otherwise they might turn and be forgiven"?

Jesus is not saying, "I'm teaching in parables so they will not turn and be forgiven". Rather, He is saying: "they have hard hearts, otherwise they would turn and be forgiven." The fact that they have not turned from their sin and been forgiven proves that their hearts are hard. It proves that they are outsiders and that they are against having an open heart to learn.

Mark 4.13-14, "Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word.'"

In the explanation of the parable, Jesus focuses on the condition of the soil which reflects the condition of the heart of people.

Again, this is about seeds sown and the mandate in scripture to share the gospel. Some think that means you hand out tracks or stand on the corner to preach a sermon. Please be careful to not be so narrow minded in your idea of what it means to share your faith. You share your faith each and every day. You sow seeds of the gospel as you carry out your daily routine of life.

People know who you are, they know something is different about you, you are on this journey together with other believers pursuing Christ, and seeds are being sown. Live your life for Christ regardless of whether people accept it or not. If you sense resistance, that is normal, and leave that with God. If you sense acceptance, lean into that, and keep nurturing that seed.

Mark 4.15, "Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them."

PATH

The seed on the path is taken by birds and eaten up. This seed does not have a chance to take root because it is so packed down and hard. It is easy for Satan to steal the word away.

Here is something to think about: How did the person's heart get to this condition? What must have happened to that person to get them to the point where their heart has been walked all over to the point where it is hard?

Difficulties in this world, effects of sin, evil all around them, being hurt by other people, hurt by the church, bad experiences in their life, believing in the lies of Satan all their life? The list of possibilities goes on.

The point here is that it has been made hard, and our job in sowing the seed is not to condemn the soil, but rather have compassion as Jesus had compassion. Perhaps God has put you in their life to be used by God to bring healing to that hard beaten path where someday they might be ready to hear the truth.

Mark 4.16-17, "Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away."

ROCKY

In this scenario, people hear the truth and are open to it. Perhaps they would say they are a Christian because their parents are, or they go to church sometimes, or they pray at dinner sometimes. Someone who has a small grasp of Christianity but does not live it. There are no roots established because their heart is like rock. So, when trouble or hardship comes along because of the gospel, they bail on it.

We have a problem and we have an opportunity in our culture today. Barna recently did a study of youth around the world and discovered that this generation of youth ages 12-17 are one of the most open generation to the gospel. Their study *Open Generation* discovered these stats:

- 47% of youth say they are Christian, while only 13% would be considered committed Christ followers
- 73% of teens in Canada are open to the Bible's teaching, whereas only 16% engage with it on a daily basis

We have an opportunity outside the church because so many teens are open to hearing the truth of the Bible. But we have a problem inside the church because so few are meaningfully engaged in Scripture.

The gospel is in the hearts of so many youth but their roots are not yet deep in the soil. We are thankful for the youth who come out on a weekly basis and who are a part of our church are growing deep in their walk with God and we are committed to giving deep biblical teaching to them. We are also excited about the many youth who are open to the gospel and open to the Bible and we want to reach them.

Mark 4.18-19, "Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

THORNS

This explains people who seem to be doing well and are open to the gospel but are choked out by the worries of this world. This is a reference to whatever distracts people from the really important things.

- Worries of life - being anxious and not trusting God
- Deceitfulness of wealth - a false sense of security and not relying on God
- Desires for other things - distractions of this world that choke out the truth

Mark 4.20, "Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

GOOD SOIL

Some seed does fall on good soil. This type of person is open a receptive to the truth. They are neither hard, shallow, or preoccupied. The message of Jesus gets through, and takes root, and produces a productive life. They live a life of dedication and service to Jesus and they take part in scattering seeds and God uses them to sow seeds in other people's lives.

Obviously, we want good soil. And like any gardening, to keep things "good" it is important to tend to the soil. It is important if you are a Christ follower to recognize that you have good soil, and to continue to nurture and care for that. We care for our soil by continuing to show up and by getting involved so we can grow and learn.

There are things that can come in your life that will make you less fruitful and take you away from God's plan and purpose for your life. Recognize that the enemy wants to stop this work of God in your life. God has a plan for your life, and it is the best life possible and it requires effort and focus and drive and sacrifice, but it is a much better life than what the lies of this world are offering you. The enemy will do anything and everything to keep you from this life and prevent God's plan from being fulfilled.

John 10.10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

You have to tend to your soil in order to keep it soft, healthy, and fruitful.

Path: Sometimes things happen that make the soil hard:

- Hurt
- Difficulty
- Sickness
- Injustice

Allow God to bring healing and stir up the soil and make it soft again.

Rocks: Sometimes Rocks get in your garden that prevent growth

- False teaching
- Laziness
- Lack of self-discipline
- Inconsistent devotional time

Recognize those behaviours and ask God to remove these rocks from your garden.

Thorns: Sometimes weeds and thorns grow in your soil:

- Worries of this world
- Wealth and consumerism
- Sin
- Distractions

Tend to your soil. Take some time right now to do an inventory of your heart.

- What is going on in your life?
- What kind of soil is your heart?

You want to be good soil, that welcomes, nurtures, protects, and multiplies God's truth in your life. The multiplication shows how God is at work in your life and can encourage others to live likewise. Your life can have that type of impact.