

## The Parable of the Sower and the Soils / *The Gospel of Mark #15 / Mark 4:1-9, 14-20*

*For as the heavens are higher than the earth. So are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts, says the Lord.*

The City on a Hill that Cannot be Hidden. The Lamp on the Lamp Stand. The New Wine and the New Wineskins. The Wise and Foolish Builders. The Wise and Foolish Virgins. The Sower and the Soils. The Wheat and the Tares. The Mustard Seed. The Hidden Treasure. The Pearl and the Swine. The Sheep, the Gate, and the Shepherd. The Unmerciful Servant. The Good Samaritan. The Lost Sheep. The Lost Coin. The Prodigal Son. The Shrewd Manager. The Persistent Widow. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Talents. The Sheep and the Goats.

These are not the newest categories for the television gameshow “Jeopardy.” Nor are they required classes for a bachelor’s degree in Liberal Arts at Indian River State College. They are sermon titles by preachers from every tribe and tongue proclaimed from pulpits for the last 2000 years. But not one of those preachers came up with those titles on their own. That’s because those titles can only be credited to the greatest preacher who ever walked the face of this earth. His name is Jesus. And those sermon titles were his parables. The rest of “us” preachers just provide commentary to His original manuscript. Do you know what a parable is? It is a story or an illustration from everyday life that Jesus, the greatest preacher who ever walked the face of the earth, designed to do two things: (1) to teach what the Kingdom of Heaven is really like for those who really do want to know what it is like. Through his parables, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of Heaven starts here on this earth with a “mustard seed” of faith and culminates with the great sifting of the “wheat and the tares” and the great separation of “the sheep and the goats.” Using parables in such a way forced the God seeker to think about the significance of what he said. But Jesus also designed parables (2) to hide and conceal the Kingdom of Heaven from those who had no interest in following God on God’s terms. Using parables in such a way meant that He didn’t “cast pearls among the swine.” Those who were hostile – who didn’t seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness – “heard” but they didn’t “understand” (Mk 4:12). That too was part of Greatest of Teacher’s strategy.

At the beginning of chapter 4 in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins to do something he hasn’t done a lot of to this point: preaching about the Kingdom of God in parables. How it begins. How it grows. How it culminates. His parabolic sermons are opportunities for the Kingdom seekers within the ever-growing crowds to think about the significance and realities of a heavenly kingdom that will never perish, spoil, nor fade. And they are also opportunities for Jesus to conceal the Kingdom from those who have it out for him by confusing them with parables. And such an approach helped paved the way for his crucifixion. And learning what heaven is like and how we can experience it in the here and now all starts with the Parable of the Sower and the Soils. It’s one of the parables that Jesus explains privately to his disciples after he preaches it. It’s message is clear: heavenly faith begins with hearing God in the right way and responding appropriately. That’s the type of soil our divine Sower desires in our lives. But, unfortunately, that’s often not the only type of soil we see in the world and even in the church when the message of the Gospel is proclaimed. To see that, please turn with me to Mark 4:1-9. We will use it today as our main text and flesh it out with Jesus’ explanation of it in 4:14-20.

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: <sup>3</sup> “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.” <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

### Four Types of Soils:

#### 1. The Soil of a Hardened Heart (4:4)

- **The Toughest Nut to Crack:** (1) I love nuts because I am one; or so I’ve been told. (2) I like to buy peanuts in the shell because peanuts still in the shell are the only peanuts that taste like heaven when you crack the soft shell. (2) But there is a nut that you’ll hardly ever see in the grocery store with the shell still covering it. It is the macadamia nut. It’s the hardest nut on the planet to crack.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** According to Jesus in the parable, there are those in the world and in the church that hear the Word and will not respond the way God desires they respond. That’s because they are much like the Macadamia nut: hardened to the point that they refuse to allow the Spirit to crack them.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Imagery of Sowing People in His Day Would Have Been Familiar With:** (1) Israel was an agricultural society (still is). (2) Sowers walked up and down the field scattering seed and it was common for seeds to be scattered accidentally on hard paths that surrounded the field, very much like the grass seed that gets on our driveways when we seed our yards. (3) This seed doesn’t germinate because it doesn’t reach the soil. And what usually happens is birds follow right behind and eat it right there on the rocky path.
- **What Jesus Says About the Soil of a Hardened Heart (4:14):** <sup>14</sup> *The farmer sows the word.* <sup>15</sup> *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.*
- **App:** Look no further as an example of this than Gehazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha. He saw Elisha head someone of leprosy but became a leper himself because he never applied the truth of God to his life.

## 2. The Soil of a Shallow Heart (4:5-6)

- **Periwinkle:** (1) Periwinkle is one of the most beautiful plants that God saw fit to bless us with. (2) Over 30 different varieties of Periwinkle exist. You can grow them red, orange, yellow, and blue. Name the color and you can find a variety of periwinkle to plant. (3) However, when a storm comes and you leave town, the odds are great that you may return to find your Oak Trees still intact, but your Periwinkle all gone with the wind. (4) That's because Periwinkle has the shallowed of roots. (5) Since there's little growth underneath the soil, the wilt in the midst of the storm.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** According to Jesus in the parable, there are those in the world and in the church that hear the word and respond positively. However, much like Periwinkle, there is very little growth to suggest their response has made a lasting change in their lives. As a result, they fall away when their faith is tested in some way.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Unfavorable Farming Conditions in Galilee:** (1) Galilee is a mountainous region. The terrain is uneven and rocky. (2) In certain places, thin layers of soil cover over rock. (3) When that happens, seeds germinate more quickly than the seed in the deep soil. (4) It might even sprout up quickly. (5) But the lack of deep roots means that the rocks underneath the soil prevent the roots from collecting the moisture it needs. (6) As a result, the sprouting seed soon withers and dies in the hot Galilee sun.
- **What Jesus Says about the Soil of a Shallow Heart (4:16-17):** *<sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> 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.*
- **App:** Shallow soils are much like King Saul. They start out showing real promise. But since there's no depth, they wilt at the sight of Goliath, the Philistine.

## 3. The Soil of a Duplicious Heart (7)

- **Double Sided Quarter** – (1) I have a habit of taking the loose change in my pocket and putting it into a jar until it gets rather full; (2) Several years ago I was in the process of doing this when I noticed something in my hand rather unusual; (3) It was a quarter. But not just any quarter, it had heads on one side and heads on the other. (4) Thinking I was about to strike it rich, I did some internet research and found that my one-of-a-kind quarter was not so one of a kind after all. (5) Instead of the million I was hoping it was worth, it turned out to be a grand total of ten whole dollars.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** According to Jesus in the parable, there are those in the world and in the church that hear the word and respond in a way that allows it to take root in their lives. However, when their roots start getting competition from the thorns of the world that grow with them, they fall away. That's because they have a double allegiance: to God and the world.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Thorns and the World:** - (1) Thorn bushes in Israel were primarily Acaia bushes. They have green leaves with huge spikes. (2) They often grew in agricultural areas – particularly in Galilee – and robbed the soil of whatever it needed to survive. (3) As a result, the thorny plants gradually choked out the less hardy agricultural plants. (4) These seeds have the potential to develop but it has competition from the thorns – the thorn of the pursuit of wealth and the worries of life. (5) And the competition is too much.
- **What Jesus Said about the Soil of a Duplicious Heart (4:18-19):** *<sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> 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.*
- **App:** Look no further than the church at Laodicea. Their epitaph reads “of all the saddest words of mice and men, the saddest are these: what might have been.” That's what happens when spiritual potential gets choked out by the love of other things.

## 4. The Soil of a Receptive Heart (8)

- **Pecan Trees in Middle, Georgia:** (1) If you're ever board on I75 going towards Atlanta in Middle Georgia, then look to the right and left when you get to Warner Robbins. (2) You'll see Pecan Orchards as far the eye can see. (3) Not one of these orchards got this way overnight. (4) Every Pecan Tree you see producing pecans took 3 to 6 years to produce them. (5) But the reason they produce the way they do is because the soil is fertile underneath them, and they have deep roots.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** According to Jesus in the parable, there are those in the world and in the church who hear the Word of God and respond the way God wants them to. They allow the roots of the gospel to penetrate deep into their hearts to the point that it starts producing a harvest of spiritual pecans in their lives. That's what the Bible means when it tells you “faith first comes by hearing.”
- **Main Textual Emphasis: 30, 60, 100:** (1) The seeds that fall on the good soil germinate. (2) In time, it yields a crop that yields the maximum of what it was created by the Sower to yield. (3) Some crops were created by the Sower to yield 30. Some 60. Some 100. (4) But regardless of the volume – which varies from crop to crop – all were planted and created by the Sower to produce maximum yield.
- **What Jesus Says about the Soil of a Receptive Heart (4:20):** *<sup>20</sup> 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.”*
- **App:** There are people in the Bible I want to meet. Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, Zechariah and Jonah being chief among them. But there is another one in my list that might surprise you: a widow who put two mites in the offering plate. We read about her faith along with the others in the Bible. Same faith. Different yield. But all were absolutely pleasing to God because of the soil. What type of soil are you?

