

Mark 4: 1-9, 13-20 (ESV): The Sower and the Seed

Main point: Different hearts receive God's word differently. What kind of heart do you have?

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus is teaching the crowds.

Focus of the study:

Again Jesus began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ²And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³"Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." ⁹And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ...

¹³And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

Questions:

1. *Why do you think Jesus got into a boat? How many people are around?*
 - a. v. 1: a "very large" crowd
 - b. If he's a little way out in the water, creates a kind of natural amphitheater; makes it easier to hear. So he really wants them all to hear this.
2. *What's a parable?*
 - a. a story that illustrates a bigger point
3. *Jesus used a lot of stories to teach. I wonder why?*
 - a. easier to remember; relatable
4. *What's a sower? What does a farmer do, and why?*
 - a. A farmer, spreading seed so that something grows
5. *Now, let's look at what happens to the various seeds ...*

- a. v. 4: *What's the first situation?* Some seed falls on path, and birds devour it. Like a sidewalk: easy to pick up the seeds. Never has a chance to take root.
 - b. v. 5: *What's the second situation?* Some seed falls on rocky ground; it springs up but has no depth of soil for roots; gets scorched by the sun and withers away. *Have you ever seen a plant growing in rocks? Really easy to pull out, right?*
 - c. v. 6-7: *What's the third situation?* Some seed falls among thorns; it grows and is looking happy ... but thorns choke it, so yields no grain. *Have you ever seen bindweed?* It looks pretty and has cute little white flowers ... but when it grows up with other plants it quickly takes over and chokes them to death. Impossible to get rid of it!
 - d. v. 8: *What's the fourth situation?* Some seed falls into good soil and produces grain – a lot!
 - i. *Why does that work? What do seeds need to thrive and grow?*
 - 1. deep, healthy, rich soil; water; sunshine
6. *What things are different in this story? What are there four of?*
 - a. soil!
 7. *What is there ONE of?*
 - a. farmer
 - b. seed! The seed is exactly the same in each case; it just falls in different places.
 8. Fortunately, Jesus then explains this particular parable because his disciples ask him to. v. 14: He starts by saying: “The sower sows the word.” *So what is the farmer's seed?*
 - a. The Word.
 9. Which word is Jesus talking about?
 - a. *God's word, teaching*
 10. The first case is the path, like a cement sidewalk: *What happens to the word when someone who hears it is hard as a rock?*
 - a. v. 15: Satan comes and immediately takes it away. *In your experience, what does this look like?*
 11. Second case, rocky ground: *What happens to these people?*
 - a. v. 16-17: Hear and receive the word with joy, but when tribulation or persecution comes, they give up. *In your experience, what does this look like?*
 12. Third case, thorns: *What happens to these people?*
 - a. v. 18-19: Hear the word, but cares of the world, riches, desires choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. *In your experience, what does this look like?*
 13. Fourth case, good soil: *What happens to these people?*
 - a. v. 20: Hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit! *In your experience, what does this look like?*
 14. So we have the seed, which is God's word, that we all hear. *What is the soil?*
 - a. How we receive it; the human heart. It can be hard as a rock, or somewhat interested, or interested until things get tough, or receptive and willing to let it grow.
 15. *What does it mean to accept or take in God's word and bear fruit? (generate as many ideas as possible)*

16. Ask for prayer requests for today.
17. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
18. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace