

Mark 4: 1-8, 13-20 (NIV): 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:

¹ Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around Jesus 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. ² Jesus taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching Jesus said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As the farmer was scattering the seed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some seed fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. That seed came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." ...

¹³ Then Jesus said to his followers, ... ¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. 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. ¹⁶ Other people, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Still other people, 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. ²⁰ Other people, 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."

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 Jesus is a little way out in the water, creates a kind of natural amphitheater; makes it easier to hear. So Jesus 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. *So in this story, who is the main character, and what does he do?*
 - 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 eat 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? What happens when you pull on those kinds of plants?
Really easy to pull out!*

- 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.
 - i. *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 followers ask him to. v. 14: Jesus starts by saying: "The farmer 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. Our hearts can be hard as a rock, or somewhat interested, or interested until things get tough, or receptive and willing to let God's word grow and produce fruit in our lives.
15. *What does it mean to accept or take in God's word and bear fruit? (generate as many ideas as possible)*
 - Ask for any prayer requests for today.
 - Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
 - End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

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