



## THE FOUR SOILS OF THE HEART

“...these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit.” (Mark 4:20)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible's to Mark 4. This evening we are looking again into **Introduction:** Put on your thinking caps for a moment; become an amateur pastor or theologian, if you will, and see if you can give an answer to the following three questions:

- If the Gospel is the **Power of God** - why doesn't everybody that hears the gospel become a Christian?
- If the Bible is the **Word of God** - why doesn't the Bible have the same effect on everyone who reads it?
- If Jesus is the **Son of God** - why doesn't everyone believe in Jesus?

You would imagine that since Jesus was the **perfect Son of God**, preaching the **pure Word of God**, and having the **infinite power of God** because **He is God**, that all the people that heard Him would be saved. That was not the case was it? Neither should you be surprised if all to whom you speak are not saved.

We can even narrow those questions. Why don't most people who hear the gospel become a Christian? Why don't most people read the Bible, believe it, and have it change their lives? Why don't most people believe in Jesus?

1. Thankfully Jesus told a parable to answer these questions. In fact, it is one of the most well-known parables in all of the Bible. It is known as the parable of the sower, but it could just as easily be called the parable of the **soils**. We looked this morning at how the message is not the problem. The messenger is not the problem. The soil of the hearts is the problem.
2. It is vital to understand this parable. Jesus says in **Mark 4: 13**, “And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” Why is this parable important?

Jesus gives this parable to reveal our heart! Without good ground the Word Jesus speaks is of no use to us. That's why this parable is the key parable. If you can't understand this, forget the rest. This is the parable of parables. Jesus gave us over 60 parables, and **this is the parable that all four gospel writers include**. The parable tells us the secret of getting God's Word. You must listen with your heart.

Before we look into this parable, let's pray.

[Prayer for Guidance]

3. As you listen to this parable you will find **three main components**. As you read this chapter circle the word **sower** in **verse 14**, the seed which is the “**Word**” in **verse 15**, and the word **ground** in **verse 20**. Because these are the three components of the parable - there is the **sower**, the **seed**, and the **soil**. Now we learned what each of these three represent this morning.
  - The **sower** is the Jesus Christ. How do we know that? **Verse 2** says plainly, “Jesus taught

them”, and **Matthew 13:37** says, “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man”. Now we can’t leave it there. We also are to sow the seed. We want to be like Jesus and sow the seed everywhere! Jesus said “as my father has sent me, even so send I you” (**John 20:21**). And we’re to be seed sowers. Everywhere we’re to go we’re to scatter the seed.

- What is the *seed*? The *seed* is the Scripture, and the soil is the soul. **Mark 4: 14**, “The sower soweth the word”. In **Luke 8:11** Jesus says plainly, “The seed is the word of God.” Now I understand why Jesus would compare the word of God to seed, because a seed is productive. The very purpose of a seed is to produce fruit.

The Bible is not like any other book. *You read other books, the Bible reads you*. The Bible is alive, it pulsates, it quivers with life.

- The writer of Hebrews said in **Hebrews 4:12**, “The word of God is quick and powerful.” The word quick is ζαω [zao dzah'-o]—alive!
  - Jesus said in **John 6:63**, “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”
  - Remember **Ezekiel 37**—where Ezekiel is in the valley of vision. It’s the Word that brings the dead bones to life.
  - Peter says it this way, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (**1 Peter 1:23**).
  - “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (**Romans 10:17**). The power to live and believe is in the *seed*—the Word of God itself.
4. But the real focus of this parable is not on the sower or the seed, it’s on the soil. Even the best sower, with the best seed, will never have a harvest unless he has good soil. Now the soil is the soul, or what you and I would call the HEART—or the “inner man”. The heart is not just the affections or just the mind, but it is the whole person. It is the immaterial part of us that is immortal. It is our control center. It dictates what we treasure and directs what we say and how we act. It’s who we are.
5. Jesus gives this parable to reveal our heart!
6. What we find out is that **you cannot tell by casual observation which soil will be productive**, or which heart is humble and tender and ready to soak up the Word. Yet Jesus gives us clues as to how to consider the responses people have to the Word of God. Let’s take a few minutes tonight to look at them.

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## I. **Stubborn (Wayside) Hearts Reject the Word’s Authority and Power.** (Mark 4:14-15)

**Mark 4:14-15**, “The sower soweth the word. 15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts”. This is a soil where seed cannot even get IN the ground.

- A. It's not that Jesus is talking about those who refuse to hear the word. It's that they hear it, and do not take it seriously. The cold hearted wayside hearer's rejection is often a subtle rejection. Jesus is talking about people who would have been in the synagogue all their lives. Jesus is talking about church people. And among them, there were people who heard the Word with their ears but were spiritually deaf to His teaching.
- B. When Jesus talked about the wayside He was talking about something similar to our sidewalks today. In Israel people would walk through fields, and they would basically take the same path to wherever they were going. The seed could get on the ground, but it could not get in the ground. Jesus said there are some hearts just like that.
- C. There are people who hear the message, but they are not penetrated by it. There are people that can listen to the message, and then return home and scream at their wife and think nothing of it. They go month after month without reading the Bible personally for themselves because it doesn't make sense to them. Week after week there are serious sin habits, but the Word of God has no effect. Why? Because there is a hard heart. The heart is like a roof surrounded by gutters and all the water of the word of God just washes right off of the roof into the gutters, down the drain, into the dirt, and never does them any good whatsoever.
- D. Wayside hearers are fine hearing the Word. They'll come to church. They'll be fine hearing a hundred sermons in a row. But the Word of God has no effect on them. They have hardened hearts. They have no desire to change.
- E. What is the solution? **Hosea 10:12**, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

## II. **Shallow (Stony Ground) Hearts Relinquish the Word when it gets too hard.**

**Mark 4:16-17**, "And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." The first soil would not let the Word IN. This lets the Word IN but it won't let it get DOWN.

- A. Stony hearts superficially follow Jesus as long as it is *convenient* and benefits them. But once the hard times come, their hard heart is revealed.
- B. Now the type of soil that Jesus was talking about here was very **deceptive**. If you've ever studied about the topography of Israel, you know that much of Israel is limestone and bedrock that is covered over with a thin layer of soil. Whenever you plant seed on this soil it cannot take root because although it appears to begin to grow, it runs into hard rock. You see, the first soil was soil where seed could not get in; this is soil where seed cannot get down.
- C. This person's decision for Christ is nothing more than superficial *shallow* emotionalism that does not become true salvation. Now we have all known people like this. ***They go up like a rocket, but very shortly come down like a rock.***
- D. This is what we call the "***Alka-Seltzer hearer***". Have you ever had Alka-Seltzer? There's a lot of initial fiz, but it eventually fizzes out! Initially these hearers respond with **JOY** to the Word

because it seems to benefit them. They remain self-centered, so they like the way it makes their conscience feel. Yet their heart underneath all the warm and fuzzy feelings remains unchanged.

- E. **Example:** You've heard someone give a stirring testimony, and then you find out they are living in fornication. I found this often to be the case in the Christian school where I attended. I remember hearing the stirring testimony of the "Christian Athlete of the Year" at our school. Then I went to work with him at Ponderosa Steakhouse. He had a mouth like a sailor, and he had a bad reputation at the place.
- F. The reason they fall away is because trials, troubles, and tribulations come into their life. They're like a person who wants to march in the army as a four-star general, but when the first fighting starts, and the first bullet flies, and the first bomb hits, they are the first one to desert.
- G. Every ministry has those people who walked down the aisle of a church, crying big crocodile tears, got baptized, and for a brief while came to every service of the church. You would have thought they were on fire for God, but they just flamed out and you never heard from them again.
- H. Now these people are never really saved. You say, "How do you know they are not saved?" I know it for two reasons: First of all, Jesus said in verse 21 these plants have no root. Now the source of life in any plant is a root. A plant that has a leaf, but no root, has no life. You cannot lose what you never had. Now a Christian may fall down, but he will never fall away. That is why Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." (John 8:31)
- I. **Illustration 178 Seconds:** I came across an interesting article entitled, 178 SECONDS TO LIVE. It was about the results of twenty pilots in a simulator. Each of the pilots were skilled aviators but had not taken instrument training. As long as the weather was good they were all experts in flight and had no trouble flying the plane. But these pilots were placed in a simulator and asked to keep their plane under control as they flew through simulated clouds and bad weather. All twenty of the pilots lost control of their planes and crashed in an average time span of just 178 seconds. These pilots who were very capable at keeping the plane aloft in good weather, couldn't survive three minutes in bad weather.
- J. As long as everything is going well in their life; they bring their Bible to church, Stony Ground Hearers sing the same songs we sing, attend the same Sunday School classes, but when the first trouble hits they're gone; they turn away. They say, "Jesus is not what I thought he was. Christianity is not what I thought it was." I've seen it in my brief ministry here. I spoke last year with former members of this church who are now attending the liberal Episcopalian church which ordains homosexuals. How could that happen? It's what didn't happen. Sentimentalism will not bring us into the Kingdom of God. Only sincere and unfeigned faith will.
- K. It's hard to know the difference between a stony ground hearer and a true convert. Even the Apostle John baptized some people who fell away. **1 John 2:19**, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."
- L. **Illustration (George Whitefield):** George Whitefield is one of the greatest preachers in the history of America. He had uncounted thousands and tens of thousands of people come to

Christ under his ministry. Whitefield preached more than 18,000 sermons in his lifetime. Toward the end of his ministry when somebody asked him how many converts he felt that he had seen come to Christ, and here's what he said: "**There are so many stony-ground hearers which receive the word with joy that I have determined to suspend my judgment till I know the tree by its fruits.**" He understood the phenomenon of shallow hearts that relinquish the Word when the hard times come.

### **III. Strangled or Weedy Hearts Relegate The Word as an Add on to all their other idols.**

**Mark 4:18**, "And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, 19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." Now the first soil was where seed could not get **IN**. The second soil was where seed could not get **DOWN**. But this is soil where the seed cannot get **OUT**. The reason is it is sown among thorns, weeds, briars, and brambles, and the life of it is literally choked out.

The person never experiences a clearing of his heart. He goes on with God with all the weeds of the world still ruling over the soil of his mind. He just adds Jesus on to the rest of his idols, and because of this, what ever good has come out of his life starts to choke, and he becomes unfruitful.

- A. There are three things, according to the Lord, that can literally choke the spiritual life out of a person, and can prevent them from having a true relationship with God.
  - There are the **PROBLEMS OF LIFE** that we all have, and unfortunately people don't realize that Christians have problems just like non-Christians.
  - There are the **PROSPERITIES OF LIFE**; the tendency to make this world your home, and care everything about the world that is here and nothing about the world to come.
  - Then there are the **PLEASURES OF LIFE**; the desire to make sure that you live in comfort and ease and not count the cost of following Jesus Christ.
- B. For those who receive the Word with a good heart...
  - the **problems and trials of life** make your faith stronger. So we count it all joy!
  - The **prosperities of life** are carefully managed for the glory of God, but they are counted as dung as compared to our riches in Christ.
  - The **pleasures of life** are dim compared to our pleasure in Christ. Our greatest joy is to walk in the presence of Jesus.
- C. Stony ground hearers love the health, wealth, and prosperity message. They get to have one foot in the world and one foot in Heaven. God becomes a means to get all our pleasures, and instead of our lives revolving around God, the purpose of life is not for God to meet all our earthly wants.
- D. Stony ground hearers are **terribly broken OVER their sin**, but they're never **broken FROM their sins**. They have marked change in their life. No victory over sin. They never really come to a point of salvation and repentance when they totally and truly trust the Lord Jesus Christ.
- E. Now when it says **this seed is choked out**, [**choke the word**] it's not describing a person who has lost his salvation; this is a person that never had it. This describes a heart that was

unprepared because it was so full of destructive weeds and thorns it never really allowed the seed of the gospel to bear fruit.

#### **IV. Surrendered Hearts Reproduce The Word.**

**Mark 4:20**, “And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”

What is it that makes soil ( heart) “good”? Remember we are dealing with human responsibility not the issue of God’s sovereignty, but man’s responsibility in responding to the Word.

So to be considered “good ground” there are several qualifications that must be met.

##### **A. You must be attentive. Mark 4:20, “Such as hear the word”**

Jesus said, “**He that hath ears to hear, let him hear**” (verse 9). This is one of those whosoever verses. The Gospel is to every creature. It is to whosoever will. **John 7:37**: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” If you are thirsty come to Jesus.

This would imply a readiness to listen.

Jesus further says in **Mark 4:23-26**, “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 24 And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. 25 For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

If you humbly listen, God will illuminate more to you, but if you close your heart, he’ll take away the truth. So you must be attentive. Your life and your growth in Christ depend on it.

##### **B. You must be responsive. Mark 4:20, “And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it...”**

The word receive is *paradechomai* → It means to receive, admit, ***embrace with assent and obedience*** (Acts 22:18) to receive or ***embrace*** with peculiar favor (Heb. 12:6).

This is the only ground that accompanied its reception with humble obedience. You read it till you understand it with the desire to obey it no matter what the cost. This desire comes out of the joy and awe of understanding the Word with deep conviction. How does that take place?

Look again at **Mark 4:23-26**, “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear”. But He doesn’t end there. It’s not enough to be a hearer, we must be a doer or a responder. We must attempt to do the will of God with all our heart. **Verse 24**, “And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you”.

##### **C. You must be fruitful.**

**Mark 4:20**, “And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”

→ Bring forth fruit - kept on bringing forth fruit.

This verb is a continuous actions verb. This was not a one-time “emotional high” type of experience. This was not your stony ground, quick response but short-lived scenario.

Where there is true life, there is growth and productivity → granted, some is 30, some 60 and some 100, but growth and productivity none-the-less.

**Conclusion / Illustration:** I heard about a woman who came into the house one day and said, "Honey, we've got trouble with the car; it's got water in the carburetor." The husband said, "Water in the carburetor, that's ridiculous." She said, "I'm telling you, the car has water in the carburetor." The husband said, "You don't even know what a carburetor looks like. Where is the car?" She said, "In the swimming pool."

If you fail to identify the problem you'll never find the solution. We can make all kinds of excuses, but the problem is our heart. Whenever someone says to me, "You know I read my Bible but I never get anything out of it," I immediately know the problem is not with the Bible, the problem is with the person.

Now what is the point of the parable for you and me? Simply this: the Gospel is the power of God, the Bible is the word of God and Jesus is the Son of God, and if you humbly receive the perfect message from the perfect messenger, your life will be changed. The soil of your heart will bear fruit!