**THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER**

Mark 4:1-20

Key Verse 14

“The farmer sows the word.”

**Introduction**



Huge crowds followed Jesus. But Jesus was not impressed by the numbers. He knew that many people would not respond to his words. So he challenged them to pay careful attention towards his words to produce fruits. Like a farmer Jesus was eager to plant the seed of the kingdom of God to people who came to hear the word. In this parable Jesus talks about four different responses towards the secret of the Kingdom of God. May God open our hearts to hear the word and accept it and produce fruits. Bearing fruit is God’s will for us. Bearing fruit is not an option; it is the purpose for which God gave us life. So bearing fruit is very important. May we examine what kinds of heart soil we have and become good hearers of the Kingdom of God.

1. Read verses 1-9. What did Jesus do by the lake? (1-2) How many different soils are mentioned by Jesus? (3-8) What happened to the seeds fallen down on each type of soil? What does ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’ mean? (9)

1-1, Read verses 1-9.

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.2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.5 Some 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. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

9 Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

1-2, What did Jesus do by the lake? (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.***

* Jesus came to do the will of the Father preaching the kingdom of God and serving the needy people day and night but he was accused by his own family members and by the teachers of the law.
* After confronting Satan’s attack, Jesus withdrew to the lake. But 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.
* There, many people gathered around him. So he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake and taught the word of God.
* The crowds must have delighted to hear the word of Jesus. Jesus’ words are always encouraging, refreshing, and amazing. It was a beautiful scene.
* In this way Jesus taught the word of God everywhere—in a house, in the field, by the lake, in season and out of season. It was because the word of God gives life to man’s soul and solves our deepest problems from the root.

***2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:***

* Jesus spoke in parables. The word “parable” literally means setting one thing beside another in order to reveal what is hidden by comparing it to what is obvious. Jesus’ parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings.

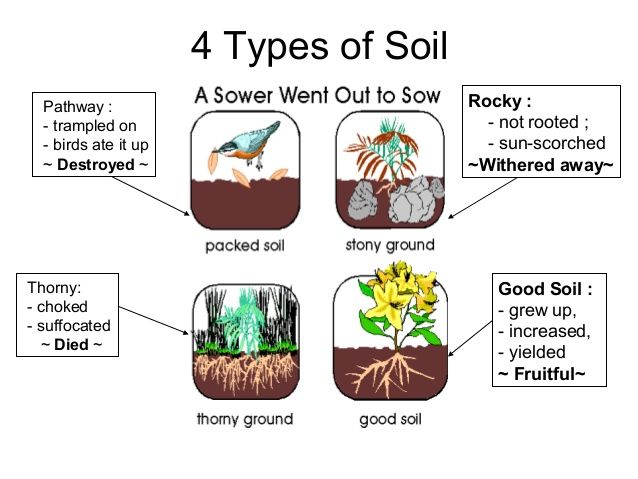
1-3, How many different soils are mentioned by Jesus? (3-8)

***3 “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.5 Some 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. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”***

* Before telling the parable, he said, “Listen!” Why did he say this? Jesus wanted them to pay attention to the life-giving word of God.
* There were many kinds of people gathered along the shore. The crowds came to Jesus with different motives. Some were only concerned about being healed. Some others were concerned about their life problems. When Jesus said “Listen!”, he wanted them to check their real motives to follow Jesus.
* Now verses 4-8 are the presentation of the parable of the sower. Emphasis in the parable is on the act of sowing the seed rather than the soils into which it is sown.
* Here a farmer or a sower is the main character because nothing happens without sowing. There are 4 types of soils Jesus described-the path, the rocky soil, thorny soil, and good soil.
* All four soils received the same seeds though the outcome was different. Jesus as the farmer sowed the seed of the kingdom of God to all kinds of people. Our Lord Jesus invited all kinds of people to his kingdom.
* Jesus sowed the seed to all types of people. Those whose heart was pure and humble heard his word and responded to his invitation and became the members of His kingdom.
* Jesus did not discriminate or eliminate any kinds of people when he sowed the seeds of the kingdom. Jesus had mercy on all kinds of people.
* Jesus had hope for all types of people. He was eager to plant hope of eternal life to all listeners like a farmer who wants to produce abundant crops from his farm.

1-4, What happened to the seeds fallen down on each type of soil?

***As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.5 Some 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. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”***



* The first three soils are those who could not bear fruit. In reality, Jesus also knew that not all who heard his words would welcome his message. Jesus experienced rejections from the religious leaders and his own family members.
* Jesus knew that only one type of the soil would bear fruits. Though many followed him now, but soon they would stop following him when their true motive in following Jesus was revealed.
* Many people follow Jesus as long as they have fun and get something from Jesus. But they fall away quickly when they are asked to give up their sinful desire to obey the word of Jesus.
* They no longer follow Jesus because they do not sacrifice anything because of the word. In spite of the outcome of no fruits Jesus still preached the kingdom of God to all people in season and out of season.
* Out of his love he reached all kinds of people in the hope of saving one soul to the kingdom of God. Jesus’ heart ran out for the crowds who would lose his word to Satan and fail to produce fruit of eternal life.

1-5, What does ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’ mean? (9)

***9 Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”***

* This verse shows how much Jesus valued each person’s heart. Jesus wants each of us to pay attention to His words like good soil to bear fruit.
* Jesus began this parable by saying “Listen!” (3) and ended with the words, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear” (9).
* Everyone has ears. But there are two kinds of ears: ears that merely hear sounds, and ears that understand the meaning of what is said.
* Beautiful music deeply moves those who understand it; but for those who don’t it is a mere sound. Likewise those who have spiritual ears to hear the words of God can experience utmost joy and find direction, and grow spiritually.
* However, to those who do not have spiritual ears to hear, the word of God seems very boring; they yawn, shift around in their seats, and finally fall asleep.
* It is vital to pay attention to the word of God when we hear it and meditate it and apply it to our daily life. Then the word of God has a great potential to enrich our souls and we can be a source of blessing to all people on earth.

2. Read verses 10-13. What can we learn from the disciples who asked Jesus about the parables? (10) How were they blessed? (11) How did Jesus challenge them? (12-13)

2-1, Read verses 10-13.

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 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 12 so that,

“‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,

and ever hearing but never understanding;

otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24336a)]”

13 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?

2-2, What can we learn from the disciples who asked Jesus about the parables? (10)

***10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.***

* After Jesus had dismissed the crowd and was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. Actually, no one understood the meaning of Jesus’ words. Yet only the disciples came to him to ask.
* They had ears to hear and acknowledged their limitation in understanding. They had humble hearts and a desire to learn from Jesus. So they remained and asked Jesus’ explanation of the parable.
* They were like the students who did not leave the classroom after the class was over and asked the professor about the topics they did not understand. They usually get good grades because they have a great learning mind.

2-3, How were they blessed? (11)

***11 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 12 so that,***

***“‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,***

***and ever hearing but never understanding;***

***otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”***

* Jesus was pleased with them. So he said, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you”. What a privilege we have! The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to us.
* Matthew 5:3 says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God belongs to those who are humble to learn from Jesus.
* In order to plant the kingdom of God in people’s hearts, Jesus was telling parables. In such a way, Jesus was knocking the door of the people’s heart to share the secret of the kingdom of God.
* But those who harden their hearts in pride, failing to acknowledge the reign of Christ, refuse to accept Jesus’ invitation. They remain under the reign of Satan. To them, the secret of the kingdom of God is hidden.
* So they are “ever seeing, but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding.” This is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10.
* The prophet Isaiah delivered the message of hope to the people of Israel but they rejected God and his message and rebelled against God by worshipping idols.
* They hardened their hearts and refused to listen to the word of God. Isaiah suffered a lot due to their rejection but God told Isaiah that they would not understand the word of God and would not turn from their wickedness to receive forgiveness of their sins.
* They would receive God’s judgment and die in their own sin. He cried out with broken heart, “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (53:1)
* Isaiah’s ministry seemed to be fruitless in spite of his hard work and nobody seemed to accept his message. But God preserved the holy seed as the remnant of God and they listened to the message of God.
* In Jesus’ time many people did not listen to his message in spite of Jesus’ repeated appeal and they failed to understand the secret of the kingdom of God. The chosen people of God rejected his message and nailed him on the cross.
* But God revealed the secret of the kingdom of God to the humble disciples. The disciples became the remnant of God and Jesus used them to expand the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.

2-4, How did Jesus challenge them? (12-13)

***13 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?***

* Though Jesus was pleased with his disciples, he also rebuked them, saying, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”

3. Read verses 14-20. What does ‘the farmer sows the word’ teach us about the nature of the kingdom of God? (14) What problem does each of the first three soils have? (15-19) Describe the secret of being fruitful like the good soil. (20)

3-1, Read verses 14-20.

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 Others, 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 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.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.”

3-2, What does ‘the farmer sows the word’ teach us about the nature of the kingdom of God? (14)

***14 The farmer sows the word.***

* Then he explained the meaning of the parable. The farmer is Jesus and also those who would preach the gospel after him.
* The seed is God’s word. The soil refers to the heart condition of those who hear the word.
* In the first parable the emphasis is on the sewing of the seed. Now in the interpretation the emphasis is on its reception.

3-3, What problem does each of the first three soils have? (15-19)

***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.***

* They made hardened reception toward the word of God. These people hear the word but they have no room to hold the message of the kingdom because their hearts are hardened like the path.
* They have no desire to learn more about the Bible or the things of God. Therefore, their heart is hardened to the message of the kingdom of God.
* Satan typified as the birds of the air comes and takes away the word from their heart. They had no chance to believe in the gospel of the kingdom.
* Majority belong to the path. These days there are many students whose hearts are like the path.
* They become slaves of Satan due to their stubborn refusal to learn the word of the truth about the eternal kingdom of God.
* Satan loves the path-like hearts because they can devour them like a roaring lion. They are easy target of Satan because their hearts are closed to the word of God.

***Others, 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.***

* These people receive the word immediately with joy when they first study the word of God. They respond immediately. They say, “Amen!” They become very emotional about Bible study.
* Bible teachers are excited and happy about the second soil students by saying,” Wow! God granted me a good sheep.” But their excitement will not last and it will be temporary.
* They never put their roots down far enough. Their root is shallow. They last only a short time. The time of test will come to them in the form of persecution or trouble. They quickly fall away when persecution comes because of the word or circumstances in their lives are difficult to deal with.
* They quickly quit Bible study and disappear and they broke the heart of their Bible teachers. The truth is that when we obey the word of God, surely persecutions and trials will come.
* Trials and persecutions are like sunshine which provides nutrition for the plant to grow. We should make the most of them to take deep root in Jesus so that our faith may shine like the rising sun.

***18 Still 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.***

* These people make good progress and are very close to bear fruits. The main problem of the thorny soil is that the unfruitfulness appears only at the harvest time.
* The thorns and the word grew together and at the last moment the thorns choked the word and made it unfruitful. Outwardly they are Christians but they have double life enjoying the world and at the same time they enjoy Christian life.
* Jesus tells us that the thorns represent worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires of other things.
* We live in the age of **anxiety**. How can we overcome worries of this life? Jesus taught his disciples not to worry about anything. Rather they should seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Then Jesus promised that all these things will be given to us as well.
* **The wealth** is deceitful because it gives to its possessor a false sense of security. Many millionaires killed themselves though they had great wealth.
* **Others** are miscellaneous things that will choke the sown word and prevent it from being productive. They are preoccupied with many desires of the pleasures of this world.
* We need to fix our eyes on Jesus. When God blessed us materially, it is easy to fall into materialism losing God’s calling for mission.
* We have to use money for advancing the kingdom of God so that we do not worry about money. Some people give up their mission after receiving material blessings.

3-4, Describe the secret of being fruitful like the good soil. (20)

***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.”***

* The good soil represents people who hear the word of the kingdom and accept it. Then they go on and produce spiritual fruit.
* Matthew added the word “understands it” (Matt. 13:23) and Luke added the words, “retain it and by persevering.” (Luke 8:15)
* The good soil goes through a process of hearing, understanding, retaining and persevering to produce a crop.
* The good soil is open and receptive to the word of the kingdom. They are not hard, not shallow and not preoccupied.
* They meditate the word of God deeply and practice the word of the kingdom in their daily life.
* They set their hearts on things above and search the Scriptures to know Jesus better and to live according to the will of God.
* They endure hardships and persecutions and tribulations because they know that they will be glorified when they suffer with Christ.
* They trust God in all things and do not worry about their future. Good heart soil reminds us of Bereans in Acts 17:11 “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”
* God may give us good and noble heart to receive the kingdom message with great eagerness and examine the word of God daily.
* Then we will grow to become mighty servant of God with unlimited potential producing fruit that will last. God is blessing us to have 20/20 vision producing crop of 30, 60 and 100 times what was sown.
* Miracle is possible when we accept the word of Jesus in our hearts. God expects us to become spiritual giants growing in our inner person becoming like Christ in our character in the years to come.

**Conclusion**

Our heart is the soil for the word of God to grow. But Jesus cleansed our hearts with his word and never left us alone. He changed our hearts from a heart of stone to a heart of good soil. I thank Jesus for filling our hearts with his word so that we can grow in his image. We should not waste the seed sown by Jesus but produce fruits for the glory of God. Heart is the center of our soul and the gate of our life. Heart is the gate of our emotions and intellectual actions. So love God with your heart. Love the word of God with your heart. Fill your heart with the word of God. The word of God as the seed has life in it and it is active and alive. But it is up to each individual hearer to let it sink in and become fruitful. The hearers’ responsibility is so vital for fruitful and rewarding Christian life, leading to have eternal life in the kingdom of God. May God bless our heart soil bearing a crop, thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”

**One word: Good Soil like Hearts!**