

Produce a Crop – Mark 4

How many of you have a Facebook page? How many of you don't have one but wish you did? How many of you have one and sometimes wish you didn't? I enjoy Facebook sometimes. It's good to see pictures of my friends and family and we can keep up with what folks are doing. I'm afraid, though, that what Facebook has taught us more than anything is that some people have way too much time on their hands. The selfies...are out of control. I will say again that unless you are doing something absolutely amazing, there is no reason to post a selfie. And do we need any more motivational posters in this world. I mean, really? If you think that if you type "Amen" into a post that God will bless you with lots of money, you don't understand God...or money. And if you send me another request to play Candy Crush one more time, I will take your life. But there are some things on there I don't really understand. I see them every time I go on there. There are all of these little surveys you can do to find out what kind of bird you would be or what kind of potato you are. Evidently you answer some questions and it will tell you who you were in a previous life or what color your aura is. My aura? I don't think I have an aura and if I do develop one, I'm going to the doctor to have it removed. Aura!

But if Jesus were on Facebook, He might give us a survey to find out what kind of soil we are. Yes, soil. It doesn't sound very interesting at first but it is actually the most important question one can ask. We need to know what kind of soil we are because our very eternity depends on it. I guess there's nothing wrong with knowing what 60's rock anthem you are if you have that kind of time but what we really need to know is the spiritual condition of our hearts and Jesus brings that out in our passage this morning in **Mark chapter 4**. Jesus is well into His ministry and is teaching and preaching and healing as He goes around the country and He has developed quite a following as you can imagine. He has said some incredible things and done some incredible miracles including raising the dead to life and so lots of people are interested in Him, wondering what He is going to say or do next. It's life-changing for some and a pretty good show for others and Jesus sees that not all of them are going to accept His teaching and so He tells them a story - a parable - to illustrate that fact.

Turn to the second Gospel; the Gospel of Mark, and let's see what kind of soil we are in **verses 1-20**. *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." 10 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!" 13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 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 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."*

Back in the early '90's, I worked at a feed store in Arlington. One day, I watched a man pull up in front of the store in a nice, new van. He got out and walked in. He was well-dressed in slacks and a nice shirt. He was well-groomed and a big man, well over six feet and muscular. I thought he might be a salesman of some kind because he had something in his hand but I was surprised as he started to talk. He introduced himself and explained that his family had done business with this store for years (although I had never seen him before) but that times had gotten tough and he was needing to make a few bucks today. He then set this brass tea pitcher thing on the counter and asked me how much I would give him for the pitcher. Well, I looked at it and knew right off the bat it was not something I needed or wanted. I'm still not sure exactly what it is and I think it may be broken or at least missing some pieces. So, I nicely explained it was not anything I really needed and I wouldn't give him anything. He got a little closer to me and a little more forceful and said, *"I really need some money. I'm not asking for much. Just give me something."* Again, I explained I didn't want or need it but he wasn't going to settle for that. Now he leaned over the counter I was standing behind and sound in a loud voice, *"You don't understand! I need some money and I need it right now! How much are you going to give me?!"* Now, at this point I did not know what was on this man's mind. I didn't know his heart but the one thing I did know was exactly how much money I had in my wallet so I got my wallet from my pocket and opened it up and there was one 1-dollar bill in there. I opened it in front of him to show him and said, *"This is all I ha..."* and before I could finish my sentence, he grabbed the dollar bill, slammed the pitcher on the counter and screamed, *"Thank you! Have a nice day!"* and walked out of the store.

That's a true story and my mother kept this pitcher at her house until she passed to remind her to pray for me. Now, just like how I did not know this man's mind or heart, we also cannot know anyone's mind or heart when it comes to salvation, nor are we supposed to. This passage is not for you to be able to tell if somebody else is a Christian. This passage is so you will be able to tell if YOU are a Christian. Our job is not to judge somebody else's salvation but it most definitely is our job to know for sure that WE are saved. So, as we look through this passage closer, try not to think of other people that you know who might fit into each soil type or heart type but, instead, see only where you fit. There are four types of soil listed here by Jesus and they represent the conditions of the heart that people have as the Gospel is presented to them. It is the same Gospel given to each one but each one has a different reaction.

Now, I have two questions for you. "How Are We Saved?" and "Who May Be Saved?" The answer to the first question is, we are saved by grace and through faith as **Ephesians 2** tells us. The answer to the second question is, anybody can be saved, even the most sinful, vile person on the planet. Here we see that the same Gospel is given to everybody and yet there are different responses with most hearing and yet not being saved. Have you ever wondered why some people don't accept the Gospel? Do you wonder why some people are saved and others are not? How about the question of "once saved, always saved"? So many people struggle with that doctrine, yet the Bible is clear on that and Jesus explains it simply right here. All of that is in these few verses so let's look closer, starting where Jesus is explaining the parable in verse 14. *"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."*

In **Luke 22:66-71**, Luke describes the trial of Jesus and says, *"At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. 67"If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68and if I asked you, you would not answer. 69But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." 70They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You say that I am." 71Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." Yes, the chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there in front of Jesus, asking Him if He is the Messiah, the Christ and when He verifies it...they kill Him. They don't want to hear the Gospel and when it is presented, as Jesus had been doing for three years in their presence, as it says, *"the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."**

Jesus compares these men's hearts to the hard-packed ground like the paths that the farmer would walk on when he scattered his seed. In those days, the farmer would have a sack of seed on his shoulder and as he walked along the path between the fields he would just scatter it out with his hand. So, obviously, some of the seed would be wasted as it hit the hard-packed path. The birds would snatch it or it would just be trampled underfoot. When it comes to the Gospel and the fact that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man gets to the Father except through Him, do you think the chief priests and the teachers would have listened if Jesus had just explained it better? Maybe He should have told them another parable or something. No, I think that's part of the reason Jesus didn't say much during His trials. No sense wasting His breath. Their hearts had never been softened and tilled up by the realization of their sin. They had never repented or asked forgiveness, not truly.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says, *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."* There's no sense in pointing out the right direction to a blind man. That's what it's like telling the Gospel to a man with a hard heart. In **verse 16** of our passage in **Mark**, Jesus says that some of the seed fell on rocky soil. The person hears the Gospel and he receives it with joy but he has no root and it doesn't last. In **verse 17**, Jesus says that in time of testing they fall away. Sometimes you might see a flower grow in the crack of a sidewalk or somewhere strange and it will bloom faster and prettier than a flower planted in a nice flower bed but it doesn't last as long. When the sun beats down on it, it's lack of roots make it unstable and unable to handle stress. People can react to the Gospel in a similar way.

Would you say that Judas Iscariot was a true believer? Would you say he was a Christian? Of course not. But think about it. He walked with Jesus for three years. He ate with Him, ministered with Him, prayed with Him and even preached in His name. But when things got difficult, he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, doing the devil's work and is now in the devil's hell. How is that possible? It's a superficial acceptance of the Gospel that changes a person outwardly and temporarily but not down to the roots. With that person there is no real repentance, no remorse over sin, no contrition, no brokenness and no humility. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:3**, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."* Oftentimes this person came to Christ for what he thought he could get in the way of personal benefit but when he sees the price it will cost him, he won't pay it. (John MacArthur) The man with a rocky heart might have the outward appearance of being saved but falls away in times of testing. Jesus said in **Matthew 24:13**, *"He who stands firm to the end will be saved."* That person won't be perfect but he will be changed. A true believer is a changed believer and continues to allow God to change him as the years go by. I'm afraid the 21st century church is full of Judases.

In the **18th verse** of our parable, Jesus explains the third soil type and that the seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures. At the end of **2 Timothy**, Paul asks his friends to come help him quickly because his one-time friend and fellow missionary Demas has deserted him *"because he loved this world."* The rich, young ruler in **Luke 18** came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to be saved and Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor. Why did Jesus tell him that? He never told anybody else that. I thought we were saved by grace and through faith. Jesus told him that because Jesus knew that man's heart was full of thorns; thorns like worries over riches and pleasures.

I have told some of you before that when I was a kid, my dad bought this little camper trailer. With three kids, he needed a place to get away and study or maybe just get away and I don't blame him. It wasn't very big but he was proud of it, as he should have been. There's nothing shameful about having stuff. The problem was, some neighbor kids got into it and messed up some stuff and he was afraid somebody might steal it so he had to put an extra lock on it. Then it needed insurance and tags and then the lights didn't work and then it was just one thing after another and it just got to be too distracting for what it was worth.

It's easy to do that with anything, isn't it? That's the problem with having stuff. It doesn't fulfill us but only brings worry and greed and distraction and when that is in our life, Jesus goes from first in our life to well on down the list until the Gospel just gets choked out. Someone that professes to be a believer and a follower of Jesus but doesn't come to church and is not broken by the sin in their life and is not bearing fruit like a believer should obviously has a "weedy" heart. Where Jesus should be, they have the weeds of stuff, sports, entertainment, money or career and that is eternally tragic.

But Jesus wraps it up on a positive note as He explains the one good soil. Make sure you fall into this category. He says in **verse 20** that the good soil *"stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."* As I said, I hope you don't try to think of people you know who fit into these categories because we can't really know someone's heart but the Bible knows their heart and reveals those to us. When it comes to good soil; a good and noble heart, free from rocks and weeds, I think of the Apostle Peter. I know Peter wasn't perfect. Even after expressing to Jesus that he knew Jesus was the Messiah, Peter still denied Him three times. He was impetuous, violent, confused and just flat wrong at times but he had a noble and good heart, tender to the Lord and for His ministry. The good soil that Jesus is talking about doesn't mean it was perfect, it just means that it had been prepared; tilled up by trials and temptations but not distracted by worldly things. He was all of that before he met Jesus but the heart of Peter - and therefore how he acted - was changed by his relationship with the Lord.

God talks about changing our stony hearts in **Ezekiel 36:26**. I like how the New Living Version puts it. *"And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart."* That's what happened to Peter. That's what happens to everyone who hears the Word, retains it...and then what happens? They produce a crop, according to Jesus in **verse 20**. Now, what does that crop look like? What does it mean to be fruitful? Obviously, He is talking about spiritual fruit and spiritual fruit is the inevitable product of a spiritual life (MacArthur) and the fruit of the Spirit is described by Paul in **Galatians 5** where he says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* I bet some of us ought to run through those again and see how well our lives match up.

A tender, responsive heart is also obedient to God. Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commands."* (John 14:15) Obedience is fruitfulness. What was the last thing Jesus told us to do before He ascended back to Heaven? In **Matthew 28**, Jesus said, *"Go and make disciples and teach them to obey me."* (My version.) Good fruit makes more fruit. Everywhere it goes, as it goes, it plants seeds. That's the Gospel. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and in Him and through Him we have eternal life with God the Father in Heaven. We have lasting joy and peace in this life even in the difficult times but we have to be faithful and fruitful. We have to tell others. If we don't, who will? We have to be obedient to everything the Bible says. No, none of us are perfect but when we mess up; when we sin, it should pain us. We should hate that more than anything and we should immediately ask God for forgiveness and to help us never do that again.

Don't be thinking about anybody else right now. If that's not how you are living your life, then maybe the soil of your heart has never really been tilled and prepared. Maybe the weeds of materialism and stuff and the worries of this world have kept you from really putting all your faith and hope and trust in Jesus. If that is true of you today, then I would love to pray with you right now as the music plays.

Some of you may think you would be too embarrassed to come down and pray because you are just now realizing that you are not a true believer and you have said you were or assumed you were or thought you were for all these years. But there is nothing more joyful in this world than for a person to realize that and then have their lives changed. Do that today.