

A Study of Mark -Lesson 09

Mark 4:1-20 The Parable of the Sower

4¹ 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, /

A Sower Went Out to Sow



packed soil



stony ground



thorny ground



good soil

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‘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.”



Vocabulary

1. **To sow:** To plant.
2. **To scatter:** To throw out in a patterned way
3. **Soil:** Dirt, ground, land
4. **Shallow:** Not deep

5. **Scorched:** Burned.
6. **Withered:** With plants, it can be weak from lack of water. Shriveled.
7. **Root:** Underground base of a plant. The origin of something. The basic part of a word.
8. **Thorns:** Sharp point on a plant stem.

Questions

1. What is a parable?
2. How could a crowd hear and understand Jesus if he taught outside instead of in the synagogue?
3. The disciples were not reading and studying this message; they were hearing it. Why would they ask Jesus to explain it?
4. Discuss and name the four kinds of ground. What kind of “ground” do you think you are?
5. What kind of ground would you like to be?

Notes

1. Here we see Jesus teaching and preaching outside of the synagogue. He is in a field and probably could see men planting the fields. He is also using a new method of teaching, the parable.
2. A parable is a story often with a moral or religious lesson. The parables of Jesus take the ordinary happenings and duties of the people and make an unforgettable story. It can be called *An earthly story with a heavenly meaning*.
3. To set the scene, remember that Jesus was sitting in a boat, addressing a crowd on the lakeshore. The area made a natural amphitheater for the land gently slopes down to the sea. All could hear the voice of Jesus as he used stories to hold the attention of the audience.
4. Verse 11 can be difficult. The word *secret* or *mysterious* is *mysterion* in Greek. “When the New Testament talks of the mystery (secret) of

the Kingdom, it does not mean that the Kingdom is remote and abstruse and hard to understand; but it does mean that it is quite unintelligible to the man who has not given his heart to Jesus, and that only the man who has taken Jesus as Master and Lord can understand what the Kingdom of God means.” (Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 92.)

5. The disciples could see every detail of the explanation of Jesus. They could look out and see the hard ground at the side of the road, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and the good soil.
6. In hard ground, as with in negative and hard people, the story of Jesus has no way to grow or be counted as important. Often those people are simply not interested.
7. On rocky ground, the seed would fall on the shallow skin of dirt or soil. Much of Galilee is a layer of earth on the limestone rock. As with people who are shallow, they can begin something but not finish it. The call of other attractions means there was little time or nourishment to spend time learning about God. It is of passing interest to them.
8. The land of Galilee was full of weeds, bushes and thorns. It was often burned off, but the roots were still there. So, the weeds came back and choked the seedlings. Life is like that for many people. Time and other demands often leave no time for God or for Jesus. It begins to rank among the lowest of priorities.
9. The good clean soil is where the seed can really grow and flourish. We are like that. If we really listen, receive it as truth, and put that truth into action in our lives, and those who do have multiplied blessings.
10. So what is Jesus telling the disciples? *Although part of the seed never grew, the fact remained that at the end of the day there was a splendid harvest.* This is a parable to end despair. Even though Jesus was no longer welcomed into the synagogues, the harvest and the crowds would receive the message. (Barclay, p. 97.)