

Mark 4:1-20

Read Mark 4:1-34

I want to look today at the parable of the sower.

4:1 And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. 2 And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, 3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

耶稣又在海边教训人。有许多人到他那里聚集，他只得上船坐下。船在海里，众人都靠近海站在岸上。耶稣就用比喻教训他们许多道理。在教训之间，对他们说，你们听阿。有一个撒种的。出去撒种。

Christ's speaks to a great multitude from a boat so they can all hear. In Luke 5, He does the same, and we're told there He borrowed Peter's boat. That could've been the same occasion, but if Luke's narrative is chronological, it isn't. So maybe Christ made a habit of preaching from a boat, we don't know.

Before we look at the parable, it would be interesting to know why Christ taught in parables at all. People who don't know their Bibles very well tell us He spoke in parables so people could understand Him better. But that's not the reason at all, because we're told here exactly the opposite was the case:

11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

耶稣对他们说，神国的奥秘，只叫你们知道，若是对外人讲，凡事就用比喻。

12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

叫他们看是看见，却不晓得。听是听见，却不明白。恐怕他们回转过来，就得赦免。

Christ spoke in parables deliberately to hide the truth from the multitudes. Now that seems very strange at first, why on earth would He want to do that?

Mark 4:33, 34

"And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples."

耶稣用许多这样的比喻，照他们所能听的，对他们讲道。若不用比喻，就不对他们讲。没有人的时候，就把一切的道讲给门徒听

It says here, “*as they were able to hear it.*” So, when He spoke to the multitudes, He doesn’t come out with strong meat, “You’re all going to hell, what are you going to do about it?” He was gentle. He treated them kindly, in a manner they could accept. Isaiah prophesied about Him:

Isaiah 42:2,3

“He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”

他不喧嚷，不扬声，也不使街上听见他的声音。压伤的芦苇，他不折断。将残的灯火，他不吹灭。他凭真实将公理传开。

And also, after giving the story, without explanation, to the crowd, we’re told:

9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

又说，有耳可听的，就应当听。

He challenges them. What are you going to do with this parable? He left them thinking about it. He only spoke “*as they were able to hear it.*” He never gave them anything they were unable to understand. They were *able* to hear and understand what He said, but the question is, were they willing?

Most of the crowd only followed Him for the free healthcare. They weren’t bothered about His teaching. So those people just drifted off. But if you were there, and you wanted to know more, what would you have done? You’d have gone up to Him to ask what He meant. Christ was always approachable. He would never turn anyone away. And that’s why Christ did things like this. He only explained the parables to those who wanted to know more.

10 And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

无人的时候，跟随耶稣的人，和十二个门徒，问他这比喻的意思

“They that were about Him with the twelve.” So the word “*disciples*” doesn’t just mean the twelve. It included anybody else who wanted to know more. These were His disciples, His followers. All those went up to Him and asked.

Do any of us want to know more about God, about the Lord Jesus Christ? Has something been put on our heart to desire to know more about Him? There is something we can do. We can come to church, we can talk to the minister, we can read our Bible, these are all good things, but the best thing of all is that we can ask Christ Himself. Pray to Him. Sit at His feet. Learn of Him. He said:

Matthew 7:7,8

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

你们祈求，就给你们。寻找，就寻见。叩门，就给你们开门。因为凡祈求的，就得着。寻找的，就寻见。叩门的，就给他开门。

Matthew 11:29

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

我心里柔和谦卑，你们当负我的轭，学我的样式，这样，你们心里就必得享安息。

13 And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

又对他们说，你们不明白这比喻吗？这样怎能明白一切的比喻呢？

Christ here even challenges the disciples. Telling them that they ought to know the meaning of the parables. And so should we. So let's take a look.

3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

有一个撒种的。出去撒种。

14 The sower soweth the word. 撒种之人所撒的，就是道。

We're told the seed is the word, the word of God. But who's the sower? Ultimately, it's God. But the Lord likes to use means, and we are the usual means by which He sows His word. Wherever and whenever we witness to anyone else of the things of the Lord, whether it's in church, in open air meetings, or just in general conversation, that's the sowing process.

But we need to see our limitations. All we can do is sow. And water a bit. But we can't produce life. We can't make anything grow. The apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 3:6,7

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”

我栽种了，亚波罗浇灌了。惟有神叫他生长。可见栽种的算不得什么，浇灌的也算不得什么。只在那叫他生长的神。

We're just the instruments God uses to do the sowing. Let's not try to pretend we're anything more. So, let's look at the first type of soil, the wayside.

4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

撒的时候，有落在路旁的，飞鸟来吃尽了。

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.

那撒在路旁的，就是人听了道，撒但立刻来，把撒在他心里的道夺了去。

The first type of hearer here is compared to the seed that fell by the wayside. People hear the gospel, they come across the things of God, and there's no response, they just walk away. I'm sure we know many people like that. We should never give up witnessing to them, because we were like that once.

Ephesians 2:12

"Having no hope and without God in the world."

并且活在世上没有指望，没有神。

The only feeling we should have towards such people is pity. We were there. We know exactly what it was like. But the Lord dealt with us. He changed us, when we were least expecting Him to do so. And he can change them too.

1 Corinthians 6:11

"And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

你们中间也有人从前是这样。但如今你们奉主耶稣基督的名，并借着我们的灵，已经洗净，成圣称义了。

It says here, Satan comes and immediately takes away the word that was "sown in their hearts." This phrase "sown in their hearts" has made some think these were truly converted but fall away quickly. But that's not possible. The heart is just another metaphor for soil. That's where the seed goes. But the soil is so hard on the wayside, it just bounces off and produces nothing.

Now, in complete contrast, let's have a look at the good soil:

8 And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

又有落在好土里的，就发生长大，结实有三十倍的，有六十倍的，有一百倍的。

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.

那撒在好地上的，就是人听道，又领受，并且结实，有三十倍的，有六十倍的，有一百倍的。

The fourth type of hearer is compared to the seed that fell in good soil. If the seed falls in good soil, the root establishes itself, it grows and produces fruit. This is the true believer. A true believer is someone who has been changed by the Lord. He's been born-again, he's become a new creature in Christ. He's repented of his sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can save Him from the consequences of His sin. And now he's doing what the Lord has called Him to do – producing fruit. That's the purpose of every Christian – to produce fruit. What's the fruit we're called to produce? It's spiritual fruit:

Galatians 5:22,23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

圣灵所结的果子，就是仁爱，喜乐，和平，忍耐，恩慈，良善，信实，温柔，节制。

These are the marks of the real Christian. Before we became a Christian, we couldn't produce any of these at all. This is the fruit of the Spirit. We never had the Holy Spirit within us before we became a Christian. But the true believer has been fundamentally changed. The Holy Spirit has come to dwell within Him, and He now has the ability to produce spiritual fruit. And the fruit we produce is our witness to the world. The more fruit we produce, the more of an effective witness we can be. Christians, let's produce fruit.

There are the only two types of people in the world. Those who've been born again of the Spirit of God, and those who haven't. There's no other type. We're all one or the other. It would be a lot easier if these were the only two types of soil. We could then easily distinguish between unbelievers and believers. At least we'd know where we all stood. But life isn't that simple. Just to confuse things, there are two other types of soil, stony ground and thorny ground.

There are unbelievers who appear to be Christians but they've never been born again, and there are believers who have truly been born again, but they appear to be no different from unbelievers. And I think that's what we're talking about here with these two types of soil. First the stony ground hearer:

5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: 6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

有落在土浅石头地上的，土既不深，发苗最快。日头出来一晒，因为没有根，就枯干了。

16 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.

那撒在石头地上的，就是人听了道，立刻欢喜领受。但他心里没有根，不过是暂时的，及至为道遭了患难，或是受了逼迫，立刻就跌倒了。

The stony ground hearer hears the word and receives it with joy. He joins the church. He may be in the church for a long time. But he's never been born-again of the Spirit of God, because we're told these "*have no root in themselves.*" He's dead. But he professes to be a Christian. He's a hypocrite.

A hypocrite is someone who professes with his mouth to be a Christian but who isn't really a true Christian in his heart. He's never had a heart change. Christ had most of His opposition from hypocrites:

Matthew 15:7-9

"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

假冒为善的人哪，以赛亚指着你们说的预言，是不错的。他说，这百姓用嘴唇尊敬我，心却远离我。他们将人的吩咐，当作道理教导人，所以拜我也是枉然。

There are many warnings in the Bible to look out for hypocrites in the church.

Matthew 7:22,23

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

当那日必有许多人对我说，主阿，主阿，我们不是奉你的名传道，奉你的名赶鬼，奉你的名行许多异能吗？我就明明地告诉他们说，我从来不认识你们，你们这些作恶的人，离开我去吧。

How do we recognise a hypocrite? Well, we're told:

"by their fruits ye shall know them." Matthew 7:20.

所以凭着他们的果子，就可以认出他们来。

So if they're in the church but not producing fruit, we should be wary of them. But this isn't an infallible principle. We're going to find out in a minute that there are also some true believers in the church who don't produce fruit. So we can't judge infallibly by this means, but we can use it as a general principle.

It can be quite difficult, sometimes impossible, to discern the hypocrite. They can look so much like the true believer. They can copy fruit production quite well, they're very good actors. In the end only God knows the heart. We're not

called to judge anyone, because we can't see the heart. We're to accept an outward credible profession of faith until their hypocrisy becomes obvious.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged." Matthew 7:1.

你们不要论断人，免得你们被论断。

There is one way that hypocrites can be flushed out of the church, and that's when tribulation or persecution comes. Then they can't be seen for dust. Maybe a muslim army comes into our village and puts a sword to everyone's neck and tells us all to convert to Islam or die. A hypocrite'll have no problems about that. But the true Christian would rather die than deny His Lord.

Although we shouldn't look for persecution, that's often the reason why God sometimes brings it on a church, to purge it of hypocrites.

That's the stony ground hearer, the hypocrite. He professes belief in Christ, but he's never been born again. Now the thorny ground hearer:

7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

有落在荆棘里的，荆棘长起来，把他挤住了，就不结实。

*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.*

还有那撒在荆棘里的，就是人听了道。后来有世上的思虑，钱财的迷惑，和别样的私欲，进来把道挤住了，就不能结实。

The thorny ground hearer hears the word, and responds to it, and he also joins the church. Now for many years, I thought the thorny ground hearer wasn't a true believer either, because we're told here he doesn't produce fruit. But I've changed my mind. I now really think this does refer to a true believer, but he's a backslider, he's a disobedient Christian. That's why he's not producing fruit.

There is a root within him. He's alive, but he's being choked. Notice it says *"becometh unfruitful."* That implies he must've been producing fruit and now he's stopped. He's taken his eye off what he should've been doing, producing fruit. Other things have taken priority in his life. The *"cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in."*

Our cares and concerns, which are all genuine, take over and overwhelm us. We stop trusting in the Lord to look after us. He has told us:

1 Peter 5:7

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

你们要将一切的忧虑卸给神，因为他顾念你们。

Philippians 4:6,7

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

应当一无挂虑，只要凡事借着祷告，祈求，和感谢，将你们所要的告诉神。神所赐出人意外的平安，必在基督耶稣里，保守你们的心怀意念。

We need to unburden our cares onto the Lord, not try to think everything's on our shoulders. But we don't do that, and our cares overwhelm us.

Then there's *“the deceitfulness of riches.”* This is especially a concern in a country like ours, where we all have plenty. We quite like our nice homes, our comfortable lives. Being rich isn't wrong in itself, Abraham and Solomon were rich. But it can deceive so easily. It gets in the way of our walk with the Lord.

1 Timothy 6:10

“the love of money is the root of all evil” 贪财是万恶之根。

Matthew 6:24

“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” 玛门是财利的意思

And the *“lusts of other things”* enter in and get in the way. We want too much. We need to stop desiring things, and become like the apostle Paul, who said:

Philippians 4:11

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

我无论在什么景况，都可以知足，这是我已经学会了。

If we're truly born-again, if we're truly the Lord's people, we should make sure that none of these things get in the way. The good thing is that nothing can get so much in the way that we lose our salvation altogether. That's not possible. We've so many promises in the Bible about that. We can't be un-born again:

Romans 8:38,39

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

因为我深信无论是死，是生，是天使，是掌权的，是有能的，是现在的事，是将来的事，是高大的，是低处的，是别的受造之物，都不能叫我们与神的爱隔绝。这爱是在我们的主基督耶稣里的。

John 10:27,28

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

我的羊听我的声音，我也认识他们，他们也跟着我。我又赐给他们永生。他们永不灭亡，谁也不能从我手里把他们夺去。

Hebrews 13:5

“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

因为主曾说，我总不撇下你，也不丢弃你。

A true believer can't lose his salvation, but he can become unfruitful. That's why there are so many Bible passages calling us to be diligent, to walk worthy of our calling and so on. They're not there because if we don't, we'll lose our salvation, no. They call us to be diligent, because if we're not, we become unfruitful. We let the thorns choke us. We lose our witness to the world.

2 Peter 1:5-8

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

正因这缘故，你们要分外地殷勤。有了信心，又要加上德行。有了德行，又要加上知识。有了知识，又要加上节制。有了节制，又要加上忍耐。有了忍耐，又要加上虔敬。有了虔敬，又要加上爱弟兄的心。有了爱弟兄的心，又要加上爱众人的心。你们若充足地有这几样，就必使你们在认识我们的主耶稣基督上，不至于闲懒不结果子了。

Peter is writing to true believers, they all have faith. He calls them to add to their faith all these attributes. These are fruit. Fruit production is an active thing on our part. We don't just sit back and say to ourselves, “Now we're saved the Lord'll do everything.” No, we need to be up and doing.

The Lord has given us a new heart. That's out of sheer grace. We didn't deserve it at all. That new heart then gives us the capacity to produce fruit, which we never had before. But we then have to make an effort to be fruitful.

When we backslide, as it says here, we become barren and unfruitful. And as long as we're in a backslidden state, we're utterly miserable. The Lord makes sure of that. The Lord doesn't like to see us in that condition. So He makes us miserable so we might come back to Him. He chastises all those He loves:

Hebrews 12:6

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

因为主所爱的他必管教，又鞭打凡所收纳的儿子。

Here's another passage. This uses a different metaphor. It talks about building rather than fruit, but the message is the same:

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

因为那已经立好的根基，就是耶稣基督，此外没有人能立别的根基。若有人用金，银，宝石，草木，禾楷，在这根基上建造。各人的工程必然显露。因为那日子要将它表明出来，有火发现。这火要试验各人的工程怎样。人在那根基上所建造的工程，若存得住，他就要得赏赐。人的工程若被烧了，他就要受亏损。自己却要得救。虽然得救乃像从火里经过的一样。

This passage is talking about believers. They all have the foundation, Jesus Christ. The one who builds precious things on that foundation, things that will survive the fire, eternal things, shall receive a reward. But the one who has all his work burned up, shall suffer loss, although he will be saved in the end.

This shows there'll be people in heaven who are barely saved, *“yet so as by fire.”* They'll have done a lot of work in this world, but its all wood and hay and stubble, which is all burned up in the judgment. They won't be able to take the fruits of any of it to heaven. All that work will be for nothing. We don't want to be like that. A worldly, backslidden Christian wastes his life. And the Lord will try to wake him up from that condition. Christ taught us:

Matthew 6:19-21

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

不要为自己积攒财宝在地上，地上有虫子咬，能锈坏，也有贼挖窟窿来偷。只要积攒财宝在天上，天上没有虫子咬，不能锈坏，也没有贼挖窟窿来偷。因为你的财宝在哪里，你的心也在哪里。

Not the other way around. So many Christians misquote this and say “where your heart is, there will your treasure be.” That’s the wrong way around. Don’t follow your heart, whatever you do. That’ll be disaster. Where’s your treasure? In heaven, or on earth? Wherever it is, that’s where your heart truly is.

That’s the thorny ground hearer. A true believer. He’ll get to heaven. But he’s very disobedient. And the Lord’ll chastise him to try to bring him back.

That’s the parable of the sower. Which one of these four types of soil are we?

Do we have no interest in the things of God? Well, you can say, “I’m not interested,” and at least you’re being honest, unlike the hypocrite. But whether you’re interested or not is irrelevant. This isn’t just another hobby, to be interested in or not as we please, like stamp collecting. What do you do in your spare time? Oh, we go to church. No. This is a matter of life and death.

By nature we’re all born in sin. If you want to carry on the way you are, that’s fine, go ahead. But you’ll have to accept the consequences of your actions. Living for ourselves is a waste of time. We need to change. And only God can change us. Repent of sin, come to Jesus Christ, put your trust in Him to save you from your sins, and if you’re genuine, He’ll change your life. He’ll give you a new heart that can begin to produce spiritual fruit. That’s real life. Not concentrating on our own little selves. Be finished with self, and put your trust in eternal things. Trust in Christ for salvation, He is the only hope for all of us.

Or, are we a hypocrite? Maybe we’ve been in the church for many years. Maybe our family for five generations came here, I don’t know. But that won’t get us into heaven. All of us who profess to be Christians, need to examine ourselves to see if our heart has really been changed:

2 Corinthians 13:5

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

你们总要自己省察有信心没有。也要自己试验。岂不知你们若不是可弃绝的，就有耶稣基督在你们心里吗？

But then we have a message to the true believers here as well, those who’ve truly had their hearts changed. In the good soil, we are told that Christians:

“bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”

You can interpret this two ways, and we’re not told which. Both are true.

It could mean that we all have different capacities to produce fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty and some an hundredfold. We know there’s another parable Christ told, the parable of the talents, which seems to imply this. And what we’re expected to do is to work at full capacity, like a good factory. But it could also be saying something else. Christ said:

Matthew 5:48

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

所以你们要完全，象你们的天父完全一样。

Now, I don't know about you, but even with the Holy Spirit in my heart and the best of intentions, I can't do that. I want to, it's my aim in life, but I fail.

I've been saying all along, we should produce fruit, and that's right. But actually we can't produce fruit. Only God gives the increase. It's the Holy Spirit that produces the fruit in our lives. We're just the fruit tree. But a good gardener knows that there are things he can do to promote the fruit's growth. He can prune the tree. We know the Lord does the pruning because we're told:

John 15:2

“Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

凡结果子的，他就修理干净，使枝子结果子更多。

But there are things we can do as well. We can water it. We can dung it. And we can get rid of the weeds. And, do you know, that's the Christian's life.