

WHEN PREACHING IS WASTED

(The Four Possible Soils Where Seed Is Sown)

Mark 4:3-20



Four Options

- ◆ Hard Heart
- ◆ Shallow Heart
- ◆ Distracted Heart
- ◆ Fruitful Heart

"And other seed fell on good ground and yielded fruit that increased." (V. 8)

Bill Kirk

When Preaching Is Wasted

Text: Mark 4:3-20

Subject: How The Soil Determines The Seed's Potential

Introduction

1. Mark records (in Ch.4) the first formal teaching by Jesus.
2. Up to this point, Jesus taught by His actions:
 - ◆ Calling the disciples
 - ◆ Driving out evil spirits
 - ◆ Healing on the Sabbath
 - ◆ Praying in solitude
 - ◆ Healing the sick
 - ◆ Confronting opposition

(But now Jesus begins teaching in parables)

Question: What's a parable?

Answer: A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning - with life application!

Question: What's the context of Mark 4?

Answer: (v. 1) "The crowd was so large that Jesus got into a boat and addressed all the people along the shore at the water's edge."

(v. 2) "He taught them many things and said, "**Listen.**"

Question: Why did Jesus say "listen"?

Answer: Because it underlines the importance of what He has to say.

Question: Who did Jesus say "listen" to?

Answer: There were obviously different kinds of listeners:

1. The hard hearted, closed minded religious people.
2. The shallow, emotional, non-rooted person.
3. The distracted, disconnected and unfocused listener.
4. The good ground, fertile soil prepared to "seize the moment" listener.

In Other Words

- ◆ The following parable is about soil!
- ◆ It's about the different ways to hear the Word.
- ◆ It's about your potential, future, choices and usefulness!
- ◆ It's about preparation and decision – to seize the moment or miss the moment.
- ◆ It's about your heart, my heart and what God can do in prepared soil!

Question: So what's the message to your heart and mine?

Question: How is it possible for sound teaching and preaching to be wasted?

Question: Why do some grow stronger while others get weaker?

Question: How can some accelerate and soar while others crash and burn?

(Now remember the three ingredients in the parable here)

1. The **sower** is the one who shares the Word!
 - ◆ That's why we place ourselves before the truth on every occasion we can.
2. The **seed** is the Word!
 - ◆ And the Word (like seed) has life in it. (1 Peter 1:23)
 - ◆ And the Word (like seed) is powerful. (Hebrews 4:12)
3. The **soil** is the human heart! (In other words)
 - ◆ The potential of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil.
 - ◆ The heart can be a wild jungle (or a beautiful garden).
 - ◆ The heart will either welcome or hinder the seed's potential.

So what are the "**soil secrets**" that move us forward to "Seize the Moment"?

I. **The "Hard Heart" Soil**

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

Question: What is the wayside?

Answer: The wayside is the unplowed (packed down) areas around the plowed fields.

- ◆ These foot paths were hard ground in Palestine
- ◆ They were the "right of ways" to walk on.
- ◆ It wasn't unusual for seed to fall upon these "wayside" paths around the fields.
- ◆ The birds would come and steal the seed because it stayed on the surface.

Question: What's the application? It's simple:

- ◆ Any hardness of heart on our part, gives the devil an opportunity.
- ◆ Any predisposition of stubbornness or resistance allows the enemy to snatch away the Word.
- ◆ Any refusal to be transparent or broken nullifies the power of the seed to work.
- ◆ Any pride drives away the Holy Spirit and he becomes noticeably silent!

(Notice V.15)

"The wayside hearer has Satan come immediately, and take away the Word that was sown."

Principle #1 To Seize The Moment:

- ◆ God is no respecter of persons – but He is a respecter of our preparation!
- ◆ And humility, meekness, a soft heart gives us access to God and allows the seed to radically change our heart (in fact:)
- ◆ A soft heart can quickly receive correction.

- ◆ A soft heart quickly forgives offenders.
- ◆ A soft heart never feels elite or entitled.
- ◆ A soft heart doesn't need to talk about themselves.
- ◆ A soft heart is freed from seeking approval.
- ◆ A soft heart doesn't need to be noticed.
- ◆ A soft heart gives birth to repentance.
- ◆ A soft heart doesn't resent wise counsel.
- ◆ A soft heart is the soil for a future harvest.

II. **The "Shallow Heart" Soil**

(V. 5) "And some seed fell on stony ground where there was no earth. It sprung up quickly but when the sun came up it withered away because it had no roots."

Question: What is the stony ground in Palestine?

- ◆ The soil in Palestine lies on a thick layer of limestone.
- ◆ Where the soil is thin, the roots of a germinating seed cannot go far.
- ◆ The result is, the shoot springs up quickly but there is no root system to sustain the plant.
- ◆ No roots mean no water, and no water means scorching and death.

Question: What is a shallow heart? (V. 16, 17)

Answer: "He that receives the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the Word, receives it with joy, yet has no root in himself, but endures for a while; for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, by and by he is offended."

(What's the application?)

1. The shallow heart is the emotional hearer.
2. This person loves great preaching and teaching but their response is purely emotional, shallow and temporary.
3. This hearer wants instant maturity, instant spirituality and instant fruit.
4. This listener welcomes the joy of forgiveness, but distains hardship, inconvenience or self-denial.

In fact – Jesus said in V. 17

"When facing affliction, persecution or pain, they immediately are offended." (Wow!)

(Notice)

- ◆ A shallow heart is easily offended.
- ◆ And when I'm offended – it reveals a right that I've not yet given to God!

Principle #2 To Seize the Moment:

- ◆ Any false assumption that you will be exempt from trials, tests, dents, detours, delays and disappointments in life – is a set-up for disaster!
- ◆ Any entertainment of a short-cut is a deception from Satan preparing your destruction!
- ◆ Any unfulfilled expectation that makes you angry or offended is a sign – that God wants to go deeper in your heart!

Jesus said this

- ◆ Because the soil was so shallow and could hold no nourishment or moisture – the heat of the sun withered the sprouting seed and it died.

(Why?)

- ◆ Jesus said, “Because it had no roots”.

(In Other Words)

- ◆ Roots equal capacity to endure!
- ◆ Roots equal strength to persevere!
- ◆ Roots equal an unwillingness to run and hide!
- ◆ Roots are the anchor to your destiny!
- ◆ Roots prevent you from running from your problems (they hold you in place).

III. The “Distracted Heart” Soil

(V. 7) “And some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.”

Question: What is thorny ground?

- ◆ The Palestinian farmer could get lazy.
- ◆ He would cut off the tops of the weeds (above ground) only.
- ◆ In time, the weeds revived in strength and choked the life out of the seed nearby.

Question: So what’s a “Distracted Heart”?

(V. 18) “And these are they which are sown among thorns, and hear the Word.”

(V.19) “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts (or desires) of other things enter in and choke the Word so it becomes unfruitful.”

Question: What distracts our attention and hinders the Word’s power?

Question: What keeps us from seizing the moment? (Three Things)

- | | | |
|----------|----------|------------|
| 1. Worry | 2. Money | 3. Desires |
|----------|----------|------------|

- ◆ **Worry** is accepting responsibility that God never intended for you to carry. (It is conquered in prayer – Philippians 4)
- ◆ **Money** - or fear of lack (is conquered by trusting God and seeking first His Kingdom – Matthew 6:33)
- ◆ **Desires** - is discontent and dissatisfaction with what the Lord has put in your hands.

- ◆ It leads to the “if onlys” and a perpetual unhappiness!

(Why?)

- ◆ Because you’re always reaching for something outside of your grasp (in the future).
- ◆ You are shopping horizontally for what only God can satisfy!

Principle #3 To Seize The Moment

- ◆ A “Distracted Heart” results when we treasure any other thing more than Jesus.

The Truth Is

- ◆ If there’s something you think you cannot live without – it has become an idol and a god to you!

Thomas Oden said

“An idol becomes an idol when without it we cannot receive life joyfully.”

Augustine said

“God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.”

- ◆ Everybody wants power – but what good is power without intimacy and contentment?

Question: What’s fighting for your attention?

Question: What noises are you listening to?

Question: What’s squeezing the life out of you spiritually?

Question: What’s interfering with your focus upon God?

IV. The “Good (Fruitful) Heart” Soil

(V. 8) “And other seed fell on good ground and yielded fruit that increased.”

(Jesus’ words fall on four listeners)

- ◆ The Pharisees proved to be non-receptive (they were the hard, beaten path).
- ◆ The crowd’s responded with initial joy (but faded away with no roots to anchor them).
- ◆ Still others followed Jesus longer (then became distracted and squeezed and divided in their heart and attention).
- ◆ But “thank God” for the last group!

Question: Who are the good soil (fruitful) followers?

(V. 20) “These are they which are sown on good ground; those who hear the Word, and receive it and bear good fruit.”

Question: Who are the fruitful, joyful, healthy followers?

Answer: Those who “Seize the Moment” (How?)

1. You hear the Word
2. You receive the Word

3. You do (or live out) the Word

Principle #4 To Seize The Moment

- ◆ My progress in God will go no further than my obedience takes me!

Question: How do I make spiritual progress?

Answer: By being obedient to the last thing God speaks to me about!

(In Other Words)

1. Instead of a Hard Heart – I humble myself before God to be broken!
2. Instead of a Shallow Heart – I put down roots and refuse to run from my problems!
3. Instead of a Distracted Heart – I narrow my interests and get radical with everything questionable!

(I flat out let the grace of God expose and conquer the weeds in my garden)

CONCLUSION

(Remember this about weeds)

1. Every Weed Starts Small
(A compromise, questionable activity, bad attitude, etc.)
2. Weeds Sap Your Strength
(They drain you of joy and enthusiasm)
3. Weeds Hide the Fruit
(The chaff covers the precious wheat)
4. Weeds Spread
(Left unattended, weeds beget weeds and multiply rapidly)

How to kill the weeds?

1. See how serious they really are.
2. Call them by name.
3. Get going, decide now to get rid of them today.
4. Stay out of other people's gardens.

And remember II Chronicles 16:9 (NKJV)

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”

Nuf Sed!
Bill Kirk