

Daily Bible Study

“Soil Analysis”

Mark 4:1-20

February 7-13, 2010

THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY – This week we begin to dive into **chapter 4** a bit deeper as we continue our look at the very familiar piece of Jesus’ teaching; namely “The Parable of The Soils”. This parable is found in its entirety in **Mark 4:1-20**. As we begin this week in study I would like to share with you two quotes introducing this passage to us; one from the late Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) and the other from John Calvin. Maclaren: “Dean Stanley and others have pointed out how the natural features of the land round the lake of Gennesaret are reflected in the parable of the sower. But we must go deeper than that to find its occasion. It was not because Jesus may have seen a sower in a field which had these three varieties of soil that He spoke, but because He saw the frivolous crowd gathered to hear His words. The sad, grave description of the threefold kinds of vainly-sown ground is the transcript of His clear and sorrowful insight into the real worth of the enthusiasm of the eager listeners on the beach. He was under no illusions about it; and, in this parable, He seeks to warn His disciples against expecting much from it, and to bring its subjects to a soberer estimate of what His word required of them. The full force and pathos of the parable is felt only when it is regarded as the expression of our Lord's keen consciousness of His wasted words.” Maclaren speaks to the point we made last week when we introduced this text. That point was that a person needs “*ears to hear*” in order to understand what our Lord is saying in this parable; “a placing of one thing by the side of another, comparing, and comparison of one thing with another”. This was nothing more than a story discussing agricultural know how to many who heard it and as we saw last time it was a parable of judgment to them. But for those who were given “*ears to hear*” this parable as well as all the rest is a blessing, meant to instruct them and teach them the “*mysteries of the Kingdom*”. Now hear John Calvin as he gives a basic introduction to this parable of our Lord: “According to Matthew and Luke, Christ explains the parable to his disciples simply, and unaccompanied by a reproof; but according to Mark, he indirectly blames them for being slow of apprehension, because those who were to be the teachers of all did not run before others. The general truth conveyed is, that the doctrine of the Gospel, when it is scattered like seed, is not everywhere fruitful; because it does not always meet with a fertile and well cultivated soil. He enumerates four kinds of hearers: the first of which do not receive the seed; the second appear, indeed, to receive it, but in such a manner that it does not take deep root; in the third, the corn is choked; and so there remains a fourth part, which produces fruit. Not that one hearer only out of four, or ten out of forty, embrace the doctrine, and yield fruit; for Christ did not intend here to fix down an exact number, or to arrange the persons, of whom he speaks, in equal divisions; and, indeed, where the word is sown, the produce of faith is not always alike, but is sometimes more abundant, and at other times more scanty. He only intended to warn us, that, in many persons, the seed of life is lost on account of various defects, in consequence of which it is either destroyed immediately, or it withers, or it gradually degenerates. That we may derive the greater advantage from this warning, we ought to bear in mind, that he makes no mention of despisers who openly reject the word of God, but describes those only in whom there is some appearance of docility. But if the greater part of such men perish, what shall become of the rest of

the world, by whom the doctrine of salvation is openly rejected?” Read our Lord’s Word from **Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:13-20, Luke 8:11-15.**

*The Word Applied: How do you “hear” God’s Word? What type of hearer does God “look on” & what does Jesus promise one who “keeps” His Word? Answer: **Isaiah 66:2, 5, John 14:23.***

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, please open my ears that I may always hear Your Word, humbly submit and bow before it. Also, grant me power to obey and to find great delight in it.

TUESDAY – Let’s be reminded by way of review of what we saw in the introduction to this text a couple weeks ago as we considered why Jesus taught in parables as well as the matter of having *ears to hear* and understand what was being taught. We mentioned the seeming eagerness of the massive crowd as they are all on the shore of the sea looking out at Christ who *got into a boat and sat in it* and was there *teaching* them (**Mark 4:1**). However, in reading the entire text we find that there were various and differing groups of people that made up this massive *multitude* that followed Jesus. Jesus was the center piece in this picture and surrounding Him were a range of individuals from the merely curious onlookers seeking entertainment, to the loosely attached disciples, to the committed followers and genuine disciples of Jesus. In explaining to the latter group (**Mark 4:10-12**), Christ drops the startling and sobering truth that He spoke and taught in parables deliberately in order to *hide the truth* if you will. For example, see Jesus’ prayer of thanks to the Father in **Matthew 11:25** where He speaks to this very topic of the truth of the gospel and His person and work being *hidden*. It is understood in some sense why men have recoiled from such terrible words through the ages but the fact remains that this is God’s plan and purpose. In this particular parable it seems that the ones who needed it most, the ones who go home scratching their heads, are the ones who don’t get it and don’t see and believe. Beloved, our Lord Jesus said this was by Divine design. The illustrative parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils contains far more than a lesson in agriculture but only those blessed by the Father to see it, will see it, believe it, and understand it. Paul the Apostle explained the *fragrance of Christ* is both an *aroma of death to death* and *life to life* (**2 Corinthians 2:14-16**). Coinciding with our conversation of the truth being either revealed or concealed truth, it is interesting that Paul finishes **verse 16** with a statement of what seems to be a holy awe, amazement and terror when he says, “*And who is sufficient for these things?*” No pun intended Beloved, but Christ “weeds out” the superficial, casual, and careless listeners by speaking in parables. As men gaze if you will at the picture before them, behind a thin veil lays the eternal truth and only those who are blessed to hear it will while others will hear and not hear. This in no way minimizes man’s accountability as we find that Holy Scripture is replete with commands to pursue truth and it speaks of the blessings gained by the one who finds (**Proverbs 2**). Christ calls for all men to diligently hear, listen, and search as it were, but He also gives this solemn declaration found in Matthew’s account of this very parable, “*For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him*” (**Matthew 13:12**).

The Word Applied: What specific effort are you making to be continually exposed to the truth of God’s Word and believe it and obey it? What ways can you be more diligent?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, I know that without Your blessing and You Holy Spirit working in me I can't love and understand Your truth. Bless Your Word to me and help me love & obey.

WEDNESDAY – In **verse 3** we find one called the *sower*. The Greek word is *speiro* which means “to sow, scatter, seed”. The job of the *sower* was to go out and scatter seed on the *soil* for a crop. In **4:14** Jesus tells us what he actually sows; *the Word*. In **Matthew 13:37**, Jesus calls Himself the *sower* as He came from The Father, preaching the gospel of The Kingdom of God, the message of *repent and believe the gospel*. It is without doubt that Jesus Christ is certainly in view here as He is the master teacher, preacher, and *sower* of the Word of God. But beyond Jesus, we understand that all believers who scatter the seed of the good news of the gospel are *sowers*. Remember that the “Great Commission” as it is often called was given by Christ to His disciples. Those of us united to Christ by faith are in Christ and one of the ways our union with Him is evidenced is through the matter of obedience to His Word. As Jesus said, *If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed (John 8:31)*. This principle of continuance, steadfastness, or perseverance in obedience to The Word of God is a hallmark of genuine disciples and it is taught throughout Scripture (**Hebrews 3:14, 2 John 9**). Jesus also refers to this matter when He says in **Luke 6:46**, *Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do the things which I say?* That question by Jesus in **Luke 6** precedes the parable of the Two Builders or better said the Two Foundations. You remember the story in which Jesus speaks of two men who both went out and built houses and then a great storm came upon the two houses. The waters rose and things got very intense and the one house collapsed while the other withstood the storm. The difference in the two houses was the foundation or lack of it. The house represents a person’s life while the storm and rain illustrate the Divine Judgment of God which will one final day put to the test all professions of faith. Some will be exposed as only “religious” while some will be found truly “righteous” in Christ. Read **Luke 6:46-49**.

The Word Applied: What according to Luke 6:47 is the “foundation” if you will of the house that withstands the storm, proving to be a genuine disciple? Are you obediently “sowing seed”?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for the honor of spreading Your gospel. Help me to be faithful and fearless in proclaiming repentance & forgiveness of sins in Jesus name (Luke 24:47).

THURSDAY – The first type of *soil* that Jesus speaks about is found in **verse 4** and He then gives us the *Soil Analysis* in **verse 15**. The text tells us that *some fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it*. The *wayside* is a road or a pathway and Jesus said some of the seed fell by the wayside. It fell and landed on soil that was hard from foot traffic and it did not penetrate or fall into the turned soil and therefore the birds came and ate it. We already saw that the seed is the Word of God, The Gospel message of salvation and entrance into the Kingdom and now we read in **verse 15** that the soil is *their hearts*. It is the Greek, *kardia*, the heart, soul, mind, the center point of the real person if you will. The Word of God, the Gospel message lands on this type of heart and it is so hard, so packed down by the foot traffic of rebellion and sin that there is no place of softness for the seed. This is the scoffer, the mocker, the callous heart. We are told that the *birds (Satan)* comes and *takes away the word that was sown in their hearts*. The seed must be IN not On the *soil* for it to grow and the hard heart has no place for that “same old familiar story of repent and believe”. Read **Acts 17:32**.

The Word Applied: In Acts 17:32 Scripture gives us an example of a type of soil that is represented in our text. Analyze and explain what type of soil is seen here in this verse.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, plow my heart daily to receive Your Word and also prepare the soil of the people I will scatter the seed of Your Word and gospel upon.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY – We can just begin to discuss the second type of *soil* spoken of in our text as we find it introduced in **verses 5-6** and analyzed in **verses 16-17**. Jesus said that *some fell on stony ground where it did not have much earth...* When Jesus says *stony ground* our minds quickly think of ground with a lot of rocks in it. Most all of us have been in the garden “picking rocks” at one point in our lives but this is not the type of *soil* Jesus is speaking about and here is where some understanding of geography and geographical context is so very important. If we just keep reading we can discern that Christ is talking about something more than ground with a lot of rocks since He speaks of this new “growing” plant as one not having *depth* or *root*. Israel is known for having massive limestone bedrock under the surface of the ground and it is deep enough to avoid the plow but shallow enough to prevent plants roots from getting to the water table. An interesting article from The Jerusalem Post, October 25th, 2009 speaks to this fact that Jesus alludes to in this parable. The Post article was entitled “Limestone bedrock persuaded King David to choose J'lem as his capital”. An excerpt: “Religious Jews and others believe it was God who instructed King David to make Jerusalem his capital, but now a US geologist claims that the limestone landforms near the Gihon spring is what decided it. Dr. Michael Bramnik of Northern Illinois University lectured on the topic at last week's annual meeting of the Geological Society of America held in Portland, Oregon.” Interesting, but sorry Jerusalem Post, it was God. We’ll pick up this soil analysis next time but suffice to say the “pressure” will “prove” the genuineness of the “conversion”. Read **Hosea 6:4**.

The Word Applied: Beware of superficial, shallow commitment; real believers are refined in fire.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, grow my roots deep into the living water of Jesus and Your Word.