

SLIDE 1

Which Soil are You?

Mark 4:1-20
David J Dahms
Lazy Mountain Bible Church
Sunday, January 31, 2010

Introduction

SLIDE 2

Mark 4:1–20 (NIV)

1 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.

SLIDE 3

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, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." **9** Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

SLIDE 4

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!'"

SLIDE 5

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.

SLIDE 6

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—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”

Let me ask you a question?

SLIDE 7

Which soil are you?

That is the purpose of this parable: To get you to ask that question of yourself.

Now before you answer too quickly, some thoughts.

First, assume for a minute that your answer is life or death. That your life depends on you simply answering this question truthfully.

In other words, imagine you are on a road up in the wilderness. You are alone. You are enjoying the day, the sun is out, the sky is deepest blue, the air is a crisp but comfortable. Perfect for walking. Perfect for hiking. And you are so caught up in the day that you fail to notice until you are right upon him that there is a person in the middle of the road. They are powerful. Muscles rippling. They have a kind, but firm continence.

As you approach, they look at you. You look at them, and instantly you see, this person is an absolute perfect physical specimen. You realize, that you could not run fast enough even down hill to out run this person. They dominate you completely, in the way that a Brown Bear in the center of the trail would. You would have absolutely no hope if this person decided to end your life—clearly they could.

He greets you, and then before you have a chance to speak, He speaks this same parable. This same story. And as he concludes he simply says, “I have been instructed to tell you, that you may freely pass by me without harm, you need only answer this question absolutely truthfully.”

Which soil are you?

And before you can even answer the question, he continues in his powerful clear voice, “Before you answer, know this, these two things are true: The seed in the story is the word of God, and you are one of the four soil types.”

“Now answer correctly, and pass without fear, ‘Which soil are you?’”

There is an ominous implication that lingers in the air. Answer correctly, and pass without fear, but answer incorrectly, then what?

It's a simple enough question. A parable of only 128 words. The seed is the word of God, and I am the soil. But which soil am I."

The person doesn't say which soil is the "right answer," the right answer is simply the one that is true about you.

You consider this person's question. It is a simple question. And the promise is there. All you need to do is answer it truthfully. Simply answer this question truthfully. You know the truth. Or do you?

You see the temptation of this story when you are in the safety of, well, a place like this, a church, a place that teaches, "By Grace you have saved by faith" A place in which your answer holds no consequence right? The temptation is to jump to the conclusion when you read this is, 'Well I am the good soil, right? I am the forth type of soil? I'm the good soil. I mean I'm here in church right? I come every Sunday. The word of God is sow in me every Sunday, right? I must be the good soil. That must prove it."

So why then are you so hesitant to answer this man's question as he stands there ominously blocking your path? Will he buy your answer?

Somehow as you look into his eyes, you know that he somehow knows the truth, that he knows which soil you really are. So come on, this should be easy. You don't need to study, you just need to answer his question truthfully.

Which soil are you? Why is this so hard?

Well for one reason it is hard because this parable reveals how easy it is to deceive oneself. It is so easy to jump to the conclusion we want to believe is true about ourselves.

I mean if you could jump back into time, and ask this question to a room full of Pharisees, which soil do you think they would say they are?

The good soil right? They would say, "We have committed our life to studying the Scripture, we have devoted our lives to live according to its laws."

But is that what Jesus would say? Would he agree with their self assessment? Most definitely not, right? I mean, he told this story:

SLIDE 8

Mark 4:12 (NIV)

12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

What would have happened to the Pharisee if he was where you were on the path before this man? Could they see themselves in this parable? Could they see the truth?

I mean, What was Jesus conclusion about the Pharisees? Hard soil right?

I mean it is easy to come to a place like this every Sunday, and have the seed of the word of god sown, and jump to the conclusion, just like the Pharisees would, that you are the good soil, right?

But is that answer right enough to get this man to step aside on the path and let you pass?

But this story is a fulfillment of a prophecy. You know what a prophecy is right? A prophecy are words of instruction, or warning, or encouragement, that are absolute promises from God. They portend events which are going to take place. Bank on it. They will occur because they come from God—the question isn't if they will come true, the only question is when.

And today is the day.

The crowds have gathered. The Pharisees have put a price on Jesus head. You can imagine their spies are circulating through the crowd. Spies that know what the Bible says. Teachers of the Old Testament law—who have been sent all the way from Jerusalem just to catch Jesus in his words—to find any inconsistency, any misspoken interpretation of the law—and they are ready to pounce. Ready to arrest him, take him to the temple in Jerusalem so that they can try Him for heresy, and dispose of him once and for all.

So Jesus changes his teaching style. Before taught clearly, he healed the sick openly, drove out demons boldly, and taught as one having authority. And all it got him was a death sentence. If you have forgotten this, then just re read Mark 1-3 this week. You will see it I true.

So here in Mark 4 he changes his teaching style completely, and in doing so fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah which was spoken 700 years before:

SLIDE 9

Isaiah 6:8–10 (NIV)

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” 9 He said, “Go and tell this people: “ ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ 10 Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

Surely this prophecy doesn't apply to you? I mean you get it right? You are not one of the ones blind to the truth of this story? Right? Your are not one of the hard hearted, with dull ears are you? Surely you are most definitely not one of those Jesus is speaking about who for years have attended church, but never understood, saw, but never perceived, right?

I mean, you are here. So answer truthfully, which soil are you? There are only four choices. You have a one in 4 chance just if you just guessed, but you don't need to guess right? I mean you know for sure right? So tell the man the answer and pass on by without fear.

SLIDE 10

Which soil are you?

There are only 4 possible choices.

Let's go to Jesus explanation of the parable, just to give you a little more data, so that you can answer this question and get on your way without being harmed. How does that sound. It would not be a good thing to come to Lazy Mountain Bible Church and leave without your head right? So you want to get this answer right.

So let's turn to Jesus explanation.

SLIDE 11

Mark 4:13–20 (NIV)

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.

SLIDE 12

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—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”

So it is pretty easy to figure out which soil you are. Right? There are only four types.

Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower reinforces His simple point:

SLIDE 13

Your growth in the kingdom of God is directly related to the quality of your response to the Word of God.

That is the spiritual secret revealed.

- Notice there is no socio economic barrier to spiritual growth—it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor.
- There is no education barrier to spiritual growth—it doesn't matter if you finished high school or not.
- There is not relationship barrier to spiritual growth—doesn't matter if you are single or married.
- There is not gender barrier to spiritual growth—doesn't matter if you are male or female.
- There is no racial barrier to spiritual growth—doesn't matter what ethnic heritage you hail from.

This parable teaches that your growth in *the kingdom of God is directly related to the quality of your response to the Word of God.*

So in all these years of church attendance, all the sermons you have heard, all the hymns and songs you have sung, all the cookies you have made, all the money you have tithed, all the Sunday School and Vacation Bible school lessons you have heard and taught.

Which soil are you?

SLIDE 14

There are just four choices: (1) no-growth; (2) shallow-growth; (3) stunted-growth; and (4) full-growth.¹

No-growth people.

At the lowest level of response are persons who *listen*, but do not *hear* the gospel. Spiritually, they are case-hardened against any response to the Word of God. Jesus compares them to beaten paths bordering the fertile fields, suggesting the hardening of minds from the constant tramp of life-long habits. A hardened shell of emotional and intellectual defenses will not let the Word of God penetrate through to the point where they consciously change their minds, turn around and go the other way. In other words, their wills are formidably set against repentance.

Shallow-growth.

At the next level, the growth of the gospel begins. People who have the potential for growth in the kingdom of God must not only hear the gospel, they must receive it and repent of their sins. In other words, it is to captivate their wills. But there is more. The Word of God must also take deep root in the emotions and intellect of the individual if growth to maturity takes place. Shallow-growth is the result of a spiritual experience that is emotionally exhilarating, but intellectually rootless. It is the person who comes forward to trust Christ, but leaves and nothing changes. They are saved, but wither. They never experience the abundance there is in the life in Christ.

¹ McKenna, D. L., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). *Vol. 25: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 25 : Mark*. The Preacher's Commentary series (86). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.

Stunted-growth

When the Word of God is received and rooted in a divided mind, the result is a full-size plant that is stunted at the final stage of producing fruit. Jesus specifies “*the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things*” (v. 19) as competing forces for growth in the kingdom of God.

Full-growth. By the process of elimination, Jesus infers the qualities of a hearer in whom the Word of God bears a multiple harvest. Like fertile soil, the person gladly receives the seed of the Word of God, accepts its substance and its spirit for growing roots as well as shoots, keeps the soil clear of rival growth, and thus bears a multiple harvest that stands in striking contrast to the wasted seed, the withered shoots, and the thorn-choked plants.

Thirty, sixty and on hundred fold. These were unheard of yields in those days. If you planted a seed of wheat, and the stalk produced 30, or 60 or 100 seeds, you would indeed be a very wealthy farmer. You would have enough to feed your family, reserves seed stock for the next year, and sell the rest at the market if you had enough carts to get it there. Just a couple years of harvests like this, and you would be a very wealthy farmer indeed.

- If you seek to understand his Word, it will change your heart.
- If you allow his Word to take root in your life, you will find the strength and the wisdom to face your problems.
- If you keep his Word as a priority in your life, it will help you keep all your other priorities straight.
- And if you live according to his Word, it will cause to experience a huge harvest in your life.

This is what the Word of God can do for you.

Jesus is saying, if we embrace the promises of his Gospel, the teaching of His word, it won't be long before you are experiencing the kingdom of God here on earth. That is the spiritual secret. Embrace Christ and his word, and you have life, and have it abundantly.

SLIDE 15

John 10:10b (NASB95)

1 I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

So now, surely after Jesus explanation, the honest answer to the man's question must be abundantly clear to you?

SLIDE 16**Which soil are you?**

When you get a love letter or Valentine's card, what do you do with it? (Besides hide it from the kids.) Usually you read it over and over again. What do you feel when you read a love letter? Hopefully, you feel loved. You feel accepted. You feel gratitude that God brought your spouse into your life. Though the ability to read comes from the brain, you really read a love letter with your heart. Above all, you cherish it as something intensely personal.

I've never read a love letter written by my wife and thought, *I wish the elders would read this; they really need to hear it.* I've never read a love letter and worried, *How can I possibly earn her love?* I've never analyzed the handwriting to determine who the real author was. I've never parsed the verbs or consulted a commentary to determine what was really being said. I read a love letter as if it were a letter of love to me from someone who loves me. Sounds awfully obvious, doesn't it?

So help me work this one through. The Bible is the greatest love story ever told. Yes, it contains instruction on how to live, models for us to follow, and examples of those who both rejected God's love and received it. Sure, some of it is hard to understand. But at its core, it is a love letter. From cover to cover, it is the ongoing story of an unconditional, patient, and gentle Lover seeking to win the hearts of reluctant, wandering, unfaithful people like you and me. Yet we seldom read it as if it were the words of a faithful Lover calling us to intimacy.

I've been transformed by the love of my wife. Her notes and cards and words to me over the last 30 years have not transformed me, they have merely informed me and reminded me of the depth of her love. It has been in knowing her, and living with her, and being deeply loved by her that I have been changed. I am not the same man she married, and that's a good thing!

Have you read the love in this Love Letter lately? Once you have experienced that love, you'll know what to do. Until then, nothing you do—no matter how righteous—really matters.