

SEED SOWN ON GOOD SOIL

Mark 4:1-20 (Key Verse 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.”

In today's passage we are going to learn from Jesus how to live a fruitful life. Jesus reveals how to truly be fruitful by teaching the crowds using the parable of the farmer sowing seed on four types of soil, the path, rock, thorny and good soil. In order to truly be fruitful Jesus illustrates that our hearts need to be like the good soil where the word of God will rest like a seed growing into a tree, producing fruit some thirty, some sixty some a hundred times what was sown. Furthermore, we are going to learn what kind of a heart is like the path, rock, and thorny soil and why we cannot produce fruit when we have a heart like those. Also, we are going to learn what kind of heart is like a good soil, and how we can cultivate our hearts to be like the good soil and produce good fruit. May God be with us all to receive one word today, commit to growing as fruitful servants of God.

The passage today begins with Jesus who was surrounded by very large crowds at the lake, they came to Jesus to hear the words of God, to be healed and for him to drive out demons from them. Since the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the people were amazed at how much authority he had as he preached the word of God, authority to heal and to drive out demons. What they witnessed in Jesus is some thing they have never seen before; his love and compassion is something they have never seen before. And so today they came to Jesus who was at the lake, which was not the best spot for Jesus to take care of them. It was not the best spot for him to preach the word of God such that each of them could hear him. But amazingly Jesus did not chase them away, or ignore them and continue to preach, but rather he devised a means to effectively serve each person at the lake. What did Jesus do? Jesus got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while the people were along the shore at the water's edge. In that way all people could clearly see and hear Jesus while he was preaching.

What did Jesus preach about? What kind of teaching was it? Let us look at **verse 2a**: *“He taught them many things by parables.”* Jesus taught the crowd in parables; Jesus' intention was to teach them about the great treasures of the kingdom of God. Now to understand the treasures of the kingdom of God one needs to think deeply, one needs to carefully consider the words of God to grasp it fully and benefit from it. And so, to help the people to think deeply and understand the treasures of the kingdom of God he taught them in parables. Furthermore, Jesus urged the crowds to listen carefully, he said Listen! with an exclamation mark to indicate how important it was to listen and to consider carefully what he was saying. Now what was the parable? What did Jesus say?

The parable was about a farmer who sowed his seed, as he scattered the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil, it sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew, and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.

When Jesus had finished telling this parable, many of the people in the crowd took their belongings and left for they thought Jesus was telling them about something that they already knew, they already knew that seed falling on the path have no chance of surviving, the same as those on the rocky and thorny soil. The only seed that has a chance is the one falling on good soil. So, when the people heard this, they were disappointed and took their stuff and left. They left because they missed the point, Jesus' intention in telling this parable was for the people to think deeply beyond mainstream. Through this parable Jesus wanted to reveal a great treasure to the people, he wanted them to consider carefully so they can find this treasure, or at least realize that there is treasure in this parable. When Jesus finished telling the parable, he said: *“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”* In saying this, Jesus challenged the crowd to listen and hear the message and discover the treasure of the kingdom of God.

While the masses left after Jesus told the parable, some remained together with the twelve and went to Jesus and asked him about the parables. They remained because they considered carefully what Jesus said, they thought deeply about what Jesus said. Although they did not fully understand the meaning of the parable, the fact that they remained

shows that they considered carefully what Jesus said, and were drawn to know more, they were convinced that there is great treasure in what Jesus said. And so, they went to Jesus and asked him about the parables. To understand the words of God we need to think deeply about them, we need to see them as the great treasure they are, the words of God are not like mainstream, they are the treasures of the kingdom of God. When the twelve and the other people asked Jesus about the parables, he said to them in **verse 13**: *“Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”* Jesus shook them a bit, but immediately he was willing to explain to them the parables. Even for us, we need to think deeply, we need to consider carefully the words of God, when we do not understand we need to ask Jesus in prayer. And Jesus will reveal the meaning to us.

What did Jesus reveal to them? What was the parable about? The parable was about how to be fruitful; this was the treasure of the kingdom of God. It is treasure for that is how we can truly be happy. Being fruitful is what many people seek in this world, many people study hard to get a job to be fruitful by providing for their family, siblings and parents, many parents work hard to be fruitful to provide for their family. Many brothers and sisters, shepherds and shepherdesses work hard to produce fruit in a form of growing sheep. Many people work hard to change their lives, to turn away from the life of sin. Somehow, not many get it right, despite all the hard work, many people still find themselves not producing good fruit, they find themselves filled with burdens, anxieties, they find themselves hopeless and unhappy. They are like this because though they work hard, their way of producing fruit is not the way that is can truly make them happy.

So, Jesus explained the parable starting in **verse 14** saying: *“The farmer sows the word.”* Here the farmer refers to Jesus, it refers to Jesus’ disciples, it also refers to us today as servants of God. When we go out preaching the gospel, we are like the farmer sowing the seed, delivering the message now is like the farmer sowing the seed, when we meet gospel workers on campus preaching the word they are the farmer sowing the seed. Earlier on we learnt that the seed falls on 4 types of soil, three are bad or unfruitful and one is good or fruitful. For the word of God to produce fruit, it must fall on good soil. Now the soil here refers to our hearts. In order to produce good fruit, that can truly make us happy we must not be like the three bad soils, we must have a heart like the good soil. This is how we can truly be fruitful; this is how we can truly have the treasure of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus went further and explained the parable, how the different soils and how they are likened to people’s hearts. **First, the path.** Let us look at **verse 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.* The path is hard soil, it has become this way because of people and vehicles moving up and down on it, when a seed is sown, it will just get tossed about and eventually eaten up by the birds. Now people with a heart like the path are those who do not receive the word of God at all, they hear the word of God and never meditate on it, they never give it thought. This kind of people are Satan’s favorite for like a bird he comes and snatch the word from them before it can even take root. Now the question is how does one become like this? People become like the path when they look at the world relatively, just like the path they allow all things to move up and down in their hearts, they are filled with many thoughts, theories and philosophies in their minds. They treat God’s word as one of the many philosophies in the world. They argue that they are many religions, and all can lead to God. But in **John 14:6** Jesus said: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

People with a heart like the path, may seem like nice people who get along with all people and enjoy life, but deep down they are tormented by sin. They may seem like they are fruitful, having lots of money donating to charities, appearing to be filled with love for people. But deep down they are tormented by sin, though they appear to be fruitful, deep down they are not happy, they suffer from meaninglessness. This happens because the only way to truly be fruitful is through the word of God, when the word of God is sown in one’s heart. When we have a heart like the path, we cannot be fruitful. When we have the heart like the path, we need to go through the hard exercise of cultivating our hearts, remove all these ideas and theories, philosophies, accept God’s word, accept Jesus as the Son of God, the savior of our lives. We need to do this, so that we do not give Satan a chance to snatch the word from us.

Second, the rocky soil. Let us look at **verse 16-17**: *“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. / 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.* Unlike the people with a heart like the path, the people with a rocky heart accept

the word with joy and enthusiasm. However, after receiving the word of God as Christian believers, trouble and persecution always our way. This is why Jesus even encouraged us in **John 16:33b** saying: *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* Also, in **verse 6** Jesus likened the persecution and trouble to the sun coming up. For plants to grow, they need sunlight, in the same way trouble and persecution are necessary for our growth as Christian believers, it trains us to be stronger, mature and bear fruit. In order to benefit from the trouble and persecution, we need to be rooted in the word of God. For the plant to survive the scorching sunlight which is necessary for the growth of the plant, the plant needs to be deeply rooted on the soil.

Now this is the problem of the rocky soil, because of the rocks in the ground the plant is not able to have deep root and as result they die. In the same way those with a rocky heart, quickly fall away when trouble and persecution come because of the word. But now, how does one have a rocky heart? Those who have a rocky heart, are those who harden their hearts, they receive the word with joy, but they refuse to go all the way in, they draw the line, they refuse repent. They refuse to change their life, to live a sacrificial life and go through hardships. They refuse to give up their desires and ambitions, they hear the word, and seem to accept it with joy, but they just continue to sin. This people when they face hardships and are challenged by their shepherds they complain and fall away. They are like this because their hearts are shallow, like the rocky soil and when they are like this, they cannot produce fruit. Just like the people with a heart like the path, they too need to go through the hard exercise of cultivating their hearts, break the rocks of their hearts so that the word of God can take root in their heart, withstand hardships and persecution so that they may grow stronger and mature to produce good fruit.

Third, the thorny soil. Let us look at **verse 18-19**: *“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.* On a thorny soil, seeds can grow very well with deep root, but the issue with this soil is that thorns can grow there as well and they are usually tough, such that they hinder the seed of God’s word from growing fully by choking it. If the seed of God does not grow fully in one’s heart, then they cannot produce fruit, they cannot experience the treasure of the kingdom of God. When the seed of the word of God does not fully grow and produce fruit, it leaves one burdened to follow Christ, they become superficial and habitual Christians. And this leaves them unhappy.

But how does one end up at this point? How does one’s heart become like the thorny soil? Jesus said the thorns that choke the word of God are the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires of other things. The worries of this life refers to the worries and concerns we have in this life such as our studies, will we pass this year, will we get a job. Worries about getting a raise so we can provide for our families in this tough economy, worries about our marriage partner. The deceitfulness of wealth refers to the love of worldly things above Godly things, the desire to be rich at whatever cost, compromising our spiritual wellbeing. And lastly, the desires of other things, that refers to pleasure seeking life, a life of sin such as sexual immorality and easy-going life. When we have this kind of things in our mind, though we might study the word of God deeply and receive it, these things easily choke up the word in our hearts, hindering us from growing and producing fruit, instead leaving us frustrated, burdened, superficial, and habitual. When we have a heart like this, we need to cultivate it in order to produce fruit, we need to go through the hard exercise of remove these thorns in our hearts so that the seed of God’s word can grow and produce good fruit.

Lastly, the good soil. Let us look at the **key verse 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.”* When we have a heart like the good soil, we can truly produce good fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown. How is those with the heart like good soil able to do this? Firstly, because they hear the word of God. What does this mean? When Jesus spoke to the crowd on the lake, he emphasized that they must Listen! So, to listen to the word of God carefully is a very critical attribute of the good soil heart. When Jesus encouraged the people, only the twelve and some other people, took his word and listened, the others did not, they thought what Jesus was telling them was basic agricultural knowledge and left. They missed an opportunity to learn from Jesus, they missed the opportunity to receive the word of God deeply in their hearts, because they did not listen carefully to him. But the twelve and the other people could stay and could learn from Jesus the secret of the treasures of heaven, they could learn the meaning of the parable of the farmer who sows seed.

Furthermore, Jesus said those with a heart like the good soil, accept the word of God. What does this mean? Accepting the word of God means to understand the word of God, obeying it and making it the basis of one's life. The word of God is to be practiced in our lives, it is not for knowledge so that we can be able to share it with others only, but most importantly, the purpose of the word of God is that we may live by it and apply it fully and not partially in our lives. This is how we can grow; this is how we can produce fruit and truly experience joy and happiness. I pray that God may have mercy on each one of us today, to hear the word of God, consider it carefully and think deeply about it, ask God in prayer to help us understand it. Accept it deeply in our hearts, obey it and live by it fully so that we can produce good fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred what was sown.

Conclusion

In this passage we have learnt about seed sown on bad and good soil, we have learnt that the seed represents the word of God, and the soil represents our hearts. We have learnt that it is the desire and goal of all people to produce fruit, this is what all people truly need to be happy, this is also the will of God for all people. We have learnt that to produce good fruit, we need to have a heart like the good soil, we need to hear God's word, and accept it deeply in our hearts, obey it and make it the basis of our lives. We have learnt that having a good soil is not something that we have from the beginning, some of us at first have a heart like the path, the rock, and the thorns. But through today's passage we have learnt that it is possible to change our hearts from bad soil to the good soil, by cultivating it. I pray that God may have mercy on us, help us to plow our hard and worn-out hearts, break the rocks of our hardened hearts, and remove the thorns growing in our hearts so that we too may grow to have hearts like the good soil, produce fruit and experience true joy of the kingdom of God.

Amen