

The Parable of the Soils (Part 2)-Mark 4:13-25

Derek Berry
Calvary Baptist Church
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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 4:1-20...

I find the movie-going experience fascinating, mainly how a group of individuals can go into the same movie but have different feelings toward said film. Isn't that interesting? What doesn't change is the movie itself. A group may watch a film, and their appraisals of the movie all vary. The same goes for TV shows. I've come out of movies with high ratings, wondering how anybody could think that the film is above mediocre, and I've almost blown a gasket when films I love aren't given their proper flowers. And there have even been times when I've flipped on how I feel about a movie. I walked out of Batman v Superman thinking it was a good film, and two weeks later, I told my wife that it was one of the biggest disappointments of my life. And we do this as a society as well. Movies that may have been highly criticized during this initial release, Space Jam or the Star Wars prequels, for example, are now seen as classics.

This is an interesting phenomenon how the same movie can be so polarizing. One group may initially hate the movie; another may like it for a while before coming to hate it, and another may have loved it all along. Since the movies aren't changing, the only logical explanation I can think of is that we all have different tastes. And this is why we respond to the same movie differently.

If you've lived longer than a day in this world, you know that responses to the gospel are similar. It's not the gospel that changes; and as proclaimers of the gospel; you know, there are several different responses to the gospel message. As I'm sure writers desire for all to fall in love with their movies when released, don't we all wish everyone would respond to the gospel with a faith that perseveres to the end? However, this is not the case. And Jesus warns his disciples that there will be varying responses to the preached Word. This message is at the heart of the parable of the soils. The heading in your Bibles most likely says, "Parable of the Sower," but the "Parable of the Soils" would be a more appropriate title, as Jesus' message is about the responses to the gospel

and not the one heralding the message. Picking up from last week, our first point this morning is:

I. The Decoding of the Parable

Let's reread verses 13-14. Jesus begins by providing the interpretation of the parable to his insiders. Who's the sower? It's the one who heralds the message of the gospel. The sower is Jesus; it's his 72 disciples he sends out; it's his 12 apostles who carry the message; it's Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch; it's Paul as he plants churches; it's the early North African church fathers; it's the protestant reformers; it's Charles Spurgeon, it's George Liele, it's Tom Skinner; it's John Piper; it's Mark Dever, and it's the members of this church.

The sower represents all those who have beautiful feet.

¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" -Romans 10:15

This implies that there will be sowers who are sowing seeds. In other words, there will be those who proclaim the gospel, which is one of the four responsibilities of church members we discussed weeks ago. So, what is the seed? Well, as said, the "seed" is the gospel message. Therefore, the "word" here is shorthand for the gospel message. We see this exact employment of this term in 1 Peter.

²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. -1 Peter 1:23-25

So, the word is the gospel. And as we considered last week, the word of the gospel has the power to save. Beloved, do you know the gospel? If a nonbeliever walked through those doors, would you be able to communicate the message of the gospel confidently? If a fellow-church member asked you to recite to them the gospel so that they may be encouraged in a tough season, could you do it? Member, would you know if someone behind this pulpit was preaching a gospel contrary to the one the apostles preached? Often new pastors will take a chunk of time to rehearse their mission or vision statement with the church so they're all on one accord regarding what makes their particular church unique. That's not my desire. I want to spend most of my time ensuring that you know what makes the universal church unique: the gospel message. God forbid we can rattle off a catchy vision but not the gospel message itself. And since we're considering the responses to the gospel message, it's only appropriate first to consider it.

1. God (righteous creator)
2. Man (the sinner)
3. Jesus (the savior)
4. Response (repentance and faith)

The gospel starts with God. He is the eternal creator of the heavens and the earth. He's Triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's holy, separate from his creation, and righteous, meaning he always does what is just and right. He cannot acquit the guilty because he's perfect and demands perfection. This God created a people to be in a relationship with him so that they may enjoy him and represent him on earth forever.

And then we come to man, the sinner. Since our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned, we were condemned to eternity away from God. We're not sinners because we sin; we sin because we're sinners. We're born with hearts opposed to God, and God's righteousness demands punishment for our sins. And no amount of religious deeds can reconcile us back to God since sin separated us from him.

And then there's Jesus, the savior. God sent his one and only unique and eternal Son to live the perfect life that we should have lived. And then he died the eternal death we deserved on the cross. However, he rose on the third day, cementing his victory over death.

And lastly, there's our response to the gospel. God calls everywhere to repent and place faith in the finished work of Jesus. Repentance means changing our minds concerning God, which leads us to turn away from sin. Faith believes that what Jesus accomplished was enough to satisfy God's wrath, and therefore now complete trust and reliance are thrust upon the only one who can make us right with God again.

This is the gospel! Believer; know this gospel. Protect this gospel. Live in light of the gospel. Financially fund the ministry of this gospel. Believe in the power of this gospel. Read this gospel. Meditate on this gospel. Pray concerning this gospel. And preach this gospel! This is the seed that the sower sows in this parable. Now we consider that repentance and faith are the biblically correct response to the gospel, but let's examine what other responses we'll receive when preaching to others. Let's reread verse 15.

1. First Response

Verse 15 corresponds with verse 4 in the initial telling of the parable. Fields in first-century Israel were long, narrow strips marked off and surrounded by footpaths instead of fences or hedges. So as the farmers cast seed on the soil, it wouldn't have

been far-fetched for seed to fall on the trails only to be trampled or for the birds to pick off. Jesus employs this picture to illustrate those who hear the gospel only to reject it instantly. The Scribes and Pharisees would be a good example of this first response. They listened to the gospel of the kingdom from Jesus and immediately dismissed it.

As we considered a moment ago, humanity's hearts are hardened and are therefore disposed to reject any spiritual goodness from God. However, we also know that Satan works night and day in attempts to hinder gospel ministry. This point is made clear in the New Testament epistles.

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. -2 Corinthians 4:4

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. -1 John 5:19

⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. -2 Thess 2:9-10

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. -Ephesians 6:12

Beloved, just as sure as we've been given a job to proclaim the gospel truth to others, we have an enemy that seeks to hinder that work so that people may remain dead in their sins. Perhaps you've experienced the same. Whether it be a family member, a friend, a coworker, a classmate, or a random stranger, you've shared the gospel of the Lord Jesus in a spirit of love, and it's almost like talking to a brick wall. You passionately exclaim the passion narrative, only to be met with hostility, anger, and accusations of bigotry. Jesus is saying this is a response that you should expect.

2. Second Response

Let's reread verses 16-17. This text corresponds with verses 5-6. Here he's referring to a layer of limestone rock bed beneath the soil surface that's hard to detect and wouldn't allow for sustained seed growth. These next two responses hit home for me because I've lost count of how many individuals I've seen respond enthusiastically to the gospel, only for them to fall away later. In this response, Jesus refers to those who apostatize due to outward pressure and persecution. We see an example of this in John 6.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. -John 6:60-66

As soon as following Jesus meant uncomfortably submitting to his commands that were deemed extreme, these individuals no longer followed him. On the outside, they enthusiastically responded to the gospel but had no root in themselves. This is what the Book of Hebrews is all about. You have a church full of Jewish Christians experiencing severe persecution and are consequently tempted to revert back to Judaism, where there wasn't any persecution. Therefore, the author of Hebrews reminds them of the superiority of Jesus! He's greater than the angels who revealed the Old Testament law, he's greater than Moses, and he's the true and better temple; why go back to the shadow when we have the real thing? And in this epistle, we find many warning passages. Only those who persevere to the end will be saved. In other words, the perseverance of the saints is evidence that God truly saved someone. Therefore, we mustn't allow our understanding of eternal security to remove the sting found in the warning passages of Hebrews. The author doesn't leave it at, "Don't you believe, well then you're saved, and you can't lose your salvation." Far from it! He continually warns these individuals that if they cease in their pursuit of Jesus, they will indeed be lost eternally. Consider a few of the warning passages found in Hebrews.

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard... -Hebrews 2:1-3

⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. -Hebrews 3:6

¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. -Hebrews 3:14

Beloved, don't assume you're in the right relationship with God today due to past decisions. What does today look like? Because if you're not preserving, chances are your heart is this second soil with no root. Also beloved, continue to pursue Jesus! Don't

assume that you can't fall away. As a matter of fact, assume that you can and will unless you actively follow Jesus in the context of a local church. This brings me to another point of application. This is why us discipling one another is so important. The author of Hebrews makes this clear in several passages. We'll consider two.

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. -Hebrews 3:12-13

We're responsible for one another's growth and discipleship! We're feeble creatures in need of one another to ensure we don't drift away from the truth. A mechanical view of eternal security says, "Once saved, always saved, so there's really no reason to be diligent." A biblical view of eternal security says, "God has justified me, and the evidence of his justification will be my perseverance to the end. Therefore, I need my brothers and sisters, and they need me."

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. ²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. -Hebrews 10:24-27

The first sign of apostasy, or drifting, is a reluctance to gather with the saints. With that said, at the end of the day, there will be responses such as these because Jesus predicted and not because of a failure on the part of the church. However, as already seen, we must ensure we don't contribute to this type of soiled response. Here are two ways we can contribute to responses that lack root.

1. Modern typical evangelical evangelism

What I mean by that is the manipulative ways in which many church leaders seek to get people to make decisions for Christ, a work of novelty. This manipulative evangelism originated during the so-called "Second Great Awakening," led by Charles Finney. It should be noted that the First Great Awakening, led by men such as Edwards and Whitefield, centered on the work of God. These men understood conversion to be the work of the Spirit in humanity, not a decision that originated from within man. And this is why a biblical understanding of conversion is necessary; it will impact how you evangelize and view ministry. If salvation is the work of God, then you'll trust the means he's provided to save, namely the Spirit with the gospel. However, if salvation is based

on humanity's decision, you'll pull any manipulative string you can to get someone to make a decision. The problem is that the second scenario doesn't stick. We're not looking for decisions for Christ. That only results in this second soil. We're looking for the Spirit to transform individuals! And only the Spirit through the gospel makes this possible.

So, in modern evangelical evangelism, certain lights in the room may impact one's mood and make one more susceptible to emotional tugs. People are planted in the congregation to come up for an altar call so that others will feel more comfortable coming forth. The ease of believing will be emphasized, all so these leaders can brag about how many people were saved through their ministries. When we take this route, we become partners with the evil one. We must avoid manipulative evangelism at all costs.

2. The Prosperity Gospel

And I don't merely mean the name it and claim it gets rich scheme that is an abomination before the Lord dressed up as Christian; however, that's certainly included. I'm referring to a gospel presentation focusing on fulfillment and life enhancement as the nucleus for why someone should repent and believe. Does Jesus bring satisfaction? Yes. Do our lives become enhanced when we believe? In a sense, yes, because we learn to become better spouses, parents, etc. However, this is not the biblical blueprint of evangelism in the Scriptures. Jesus promised that following him would result in persecution, and we should be upfront about this when presenting the gospel. Believe in Jesus, and you may become ostracized in your family, you may lose your job, and the world will hate you, but we believe in Jesus not for how he can enhance our lives but rather so we can be reconciled with God the Father! Listen to the Scriptures.

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. -John 15:18-20

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted... -2 Timothy 3:12

Just ask Job if following God always means things will turn out how you want them to. When we hide these truths just so we can get someone to pray a prayer, we're only contributing to someone lacking root within themselves. Let's keep it moving.

3. Third Response

Let's reread verses 18-19. Many apostatize because they find the world more appealing than God and his Word. One could argue that the first case of apostasy within the human race was due to this very issue.

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. -Genesis 3:6

Before her were two options, follow God and his Word, or pursue the pleasure in front of her. I'm not convinced they had a clue of what they were really getting into, which is sort of the point with sin. It over-promises and under-satisfies. And we have those same temptations for us today.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.-1 John 2:15-17

We see examples of this in the New Testament.

¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. -2 Timothy 4:10

And this is what church discipline is meant to combat. Prayerfully the isolation from the church will lead individuals to the knowledge that their sin is unsatisfying and leads to destruction. As a reminder, we're not responsible for the responses to the gospel; however, we can contribute to a faulty understanding leading to apostatizing. In this case, it's presenting the gospel absent of repentance.

A pet peeve of mine is how certain ministers go out of their way to express the ease of following Jesus. "It's so easy," they say. "All you have to do is believe." This is a failure to preach the way Jesus and the apostles did because salvific faith is repentant in nature, which was apparent in the ministry of Jesus. So when people "believe" in Jesus and later learn that they actually have to die to their sinful desires, they apostatize without hesitancy. Let's be honest from the jump. Christianity will cost you.

²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? -Luke 9:23-25

4. Fourth Response

Let's reread verse 20. And then there's the final response. This thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold refers to the farmer's original financial investment return. By God's will, the true and biblical gospel transforms those chosen by God, and they persevere to the end. That's because God's work never falls short. The Apostle John sums up the second two responses this way:

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. -1 John 2:19

Paul sums up what the life of the fourth soil looks like:

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. -1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

Jesus, the Word, has come into the World, and the Word is going forth; therefore, we must heed how we hear, which is the point of verses 21-25. God provides more of His Word once we respond to the gospel. But for those who reject, even what they have will be removed.

Two points of application before we close. Notice that this parable is not about the sower. Jesus doesn't commend the gifts of the farm regarding a harvest but rather the Word itself. Remember that the Word does the work as a callback to last week. Therefore, you need not the oratory skills of Charles Spurgeon to faithfully sow the word of the gospel to those around you.

Secondly, don't be discouraged when you don't see your desired responses. Jesus promises that there will be many who reject and others who don't remain within the fold. If this was the case in Jesus' ministry, Judas, then so would it be for us. We preach the Word not primarily for results but for the glory of the lamb who was slain, has risen, and will one day return.

Let's pray.