

Exegetical Notes, Mark 4:1-20

Seed and Soil

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Mark 4:1-20

Verse 1-2

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. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:...

- Jesus was again teaching by the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd had gathered around them. To put some distance between himself and the crowd, Jesus had gotten into a boat. He taught from the boat while his students stood on the shore.
- He used parables to teach the crowd. Parables are short stories that are designed to drive home a particular point.

Verse 3

“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.”

- The story Jesus told was about a farmer who was doing what farmers did...sowing seed in his fields. Sowing was done by hand in those days. Literally, the farmer was throwing the seed.

Verse 4

“As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.”

- Between the fields there would have been a path upon which people could walk without disturbing the crops. The path was never plowed so it was packed hard. Seed that fell there was left uncovered by the soil and was quickly eaten up by the birds.

Verse 5-6

“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.”

- Sometimes there was a shelf of rock just beneath the soil. Here the soil was thin and warm. The warmth of the soil would cause the seed to sprout early. However, the thinness of the soil meant that the plants could not put down deep roots. When the sun came up, plants in such an area of the field, would wither and die because of their lack of roots.

Verse 7

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

- Still other seed fell in a part of the field that had already been sown with weed seeds. The weed seed and the good seed grew together, but the weed seed choked out the good seed so that it was unable to bear.

Verse 8

Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”

- Other seed fell onto the right kind of soil. This seed grew and produced more seed even, potentially, doubling the initial investment.

Verse 9

Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

- Jesus simply said, “Think about this and consider its meaning.”

Verse 10-12

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 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 so that,

***‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’***

- The disciples wanted to know why Jesus used parables in his teaching. Remember that parables are simple stories that illustrate a particular point. They are not supposed to be complicated or confusing.

- Jesus responded to the question about parables by quoting a passage from Isaiah 8:16. The Isaiah passage talks about the hard-hearted resistance of Israel to the word of God. The point is that if you make what is clear and simple confused and difficult, so it will be. Some people just make everything harder than it needs to be. They cannot accept the simple truth of God for what it is. If they did, they would understand, confess, and be forgiven.
- See 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3. The “UNSPIRITUAL PERSON” cannot understand the things of God. The “SPIRITUAL PERSON” does. Unspiritual people cannot get it right even when it is given to them point by point in a very simple format.

Verse 13

Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”

- Jesus says that the parable about the farmer is very simple. If you can’t get this one, you will have trouble with every parable. So he explains to them how parables work.

Verse 14

“The farmer sows the word.”

- The farmer does not have a specific identity.
- The seed that the farmer sows is the word of God. It is the same good wholesome seed that is sown onto every type of soil. The differences noted are not due to the nature of the seed but to the differences in the soil.

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.”

- When some people hear the word, it never gets a start at growth. Instantly, Satan snatches it away.

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.”

- Other people receive the word openly and with joy. It sprouts in their hearts and they are, initially, happy. But then troubles or persecution come because of the word. In other words, they feel rejection because they have heard the truth of God. When this happens, as quickly as they came, they fall away. They wither and die because they lack roots.

Verse 18-19

“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 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.”

- Still other people are like the thorny places. They hear the word of God, but other things, specifically devotion to accumulating wealth and things, compete with it for importance and eventually choke out the word.

Verse 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.”

- Still other people hear and understand the word of God. They then bear fruit that increases the amount of grain. They share the word of God with others. The point is that good seed sown on good ground produces more seed.

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