

# STONE HARBOR

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## **How to Bear Fruit in God's Kingdom** *Understanding & Responding to Who Jesus Is*

Mark 4:1-25

### ***Introduction***

Coming out of a series of conflicts with the religious leaders of the day Jesus has been misunderstood even by His own family and the teachers of Scriptures; Mark now highlights Jesus in His role of teacher. As I read verses 1-2 of Mark 4, listen to the emphasis on Him in this role... [Read vv1-2]. Whereas, up until this point, by in large, Jesus has taught plainly with demonstrations of His divine power to back up His teachings, now He turns to the use of parables – word pictures of commonly observable natural and of this world realities designed to shed light on the more difficult to perceive truths of the supernatural and otherworldly realities.

We acted out the parable this morning because Jesus wants us to have a picture in our minds eye as we process this truth. Dennis started the reading of Mark 4 in verse 3 with Jesus' words, "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow..." Listen...behold. Jesus wants us to listen with our ears and behold in our minds eye.

The first point I'd like to make this morning is that Jesus is...

## **I. Jesus is the TEACHER of truth to the multitudes**

### ***A. Jesus is the teacher***

#### **1. His Identity as Teacher**

Who is Jesus? He is the teacher.

#### **2. Who He Taught**

Who did He Teach?

“...a very great multitude gathered to Him...” -- I’m sure there was a mixed bag here. We had seen Him just in the last passage with a large crowd pressing in to touch Him in order to be healed from their physical afflictions (3:7-10). Others were there to catch Him in some error so they could discredit Him. Still others were there to save Him from embarrassing Himself from His audacious claims. He had become famous and people came to see and hear Him for a variety of reasons -- pure and impure. **He taught them all.**

### 3. What He Taught

#### a) The Parable of the Sower

[Review of verses 3-8]

#### b) The Exhortation

[Review of verse 9]

He who has ears....  
Let him hear!

Jesus is the teacher and He is calling us to give Him our attention.

Trans. Now before we go any further into understanding the meaning of Jesus’ story, let’s just camp on Jesus as teacher. What does that call forth from us? Jesus is the teacher, therefore...

### ***B. So, let’s be His students, listening to His teachings.***

#### 1. Jesus Is Worth Listening To...

##### a) Even if you are a unconvinced of Jesus as the Son of God

His fame and influence in the world alone argue that everyone who wants to understand the world we live in should listen to what He has to say.

##### b) Especially if you are a believer and follower

We need to work this into our identity. Who am I? I am a student of Jesus the master teacher. Who are you?

Jesus is the teacher of spiritual truth; therefore, I can without reservation encourage absolutely everyone to be His students listening to what He has to teach.

After Jesus presents His parable, He does a very interesting thing that I had missed up until this time of studying the passage again. He ends His teaching to the multitudes without

clarifying its meaning. **We** go on to read the rest of the story in verses 10 and following. But, it is clear from this passage that the multitudes didn't get to hear any further discussion.

It must have left them wondering, "Now, what did that teach us?"

Some who had gathered to hear Him teach went away with that question hanging in their minds, but verse 10 shows that others got more clarification.

Look at verse 10. [Read 10-12 with emphasis on "to you"... "but those who are outside"...]

So there are two types of people here, those who follow Jesus and get more instruction and those who do not follow and who therefore do **not** get more instruction. Verse 11 clarifies that the followers of Jesus are inside the Kingdom of God and those who don't are outside the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is almost like a teacher who spends the entire class period just getting you thinking and raising questions, and then chooses to talk more only if you follow him to his office after class and asks him more questions.

Verse 12 implies that Jesus is not only intentional about this difference of clarification He gives to the two types of people, but that he does so "in order that" those on the outside would not fully understand and return and be forgiven. Verse 12 sounds almost mean spirited of Jesus, like He is hiding information so good won't come to these poor slobs on the outside of His exclusive kingdom. But I wonder if He ever kept someone from following Him into that inner circle. I wonder if He ever closed the door on His office and said, "I'm sorry you are not welcome." I don't think that is it. I think rather that Jesus is saying those who follow and ask will get more clarification and will return and be forgiven. If you have the heart to follow Him, you are on the inside, you are in His kingdom.

Larry Hurtado points out that these verses are an allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10 where God calls Isaiah to preach his message of repentance to the nation of Israel. Isaiah was to preach even though most of Israel would not give heed and repent. By quoting Isaiah 6, Jesus is giving to His disciples a similar responsibility to speak God's word with out regard for the intended result. Jesus is giving His disciples not just understanding of His teaching but responsibility for its preaching. The fact that some will not understand is not a result of God's mean spirited keeping people in the dark, but rather God's prophetic awareness that they will not take the message to heart. It occurs to me that this puts both Isaiah and Jesus' disciples in the position of faithful responders to God's call to get His message out, more than in the position of accomplishing the conversion of the people. The responsibility of Isaiah and of Jesus' disciples is to preach the message God gives them. Results are to be left in the hand of God who gives understanding according to His own will. May we who have been given an understanding of who Jesus is, like Isaiah who Himself saw a vision of God, respond as he did: "Here I am Lord, send me." Isaiah 6:8

Jesus is more than a teacher like the lecturers you may have had in high school or college who present information and consider their job done. We see in the next verses that Jesus is...

## II. Jesus is the EXPLAINER of mysteries to His followers

### A. *Jesus explains the parable to His followers*

Let's read His explanation of the parable... [Read 4:13-20]

### B. *4 Soils Explained*

Right off the bat in verse 13 and 14 Jesus gives His followers real reason to listen. "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all parables? The sower sows the word." We get the idea here that Jesus is giving us not only the explanation of this one parable but some tools that will also serve us in understanding other parables as well. He specifically answers the question, what does the seed stand for in Jesus story? The answer: "the word." I think it is safe to say that "the word" is the truth God has revealed to man, especially in the Scriptures and even more precisely it is God's word about Jesus and the fact that in His coming the kingdom of God is at hand.

We already know from verse 11 that the parable describes the "kingdom of God" and verse 12 indicates that if understood, the parable will lead people to "return and be forgiven."

#### 1. **Soil 1 – 4:15**

"These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear..."

We see that the situation of a sower sowing seed in various types of soil is really a story about different types of people hearing God's word about His kingdom with a variety of effects. The condition of the soil seems to be the key determinant as to how the word is received and the fruit that comes of it. The condition of the soil is likened to the condition of the heart, the attitude and understanding of the people who hear God's word. The first soil where seed falls is described as "beside the road and the birds came and ate it up." It is explained here in verse 15 as the situation where even though the word is heard, Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them."

It is easy for me to see Jesus as the first sower and His disciples who are being given understanding of Him even in this passage as the sowers of God's word after Him. Jesus is Himself the very word of God (John 1). But here, Jesus names Satan as one who takes away the word which has been sown. Jesus reveals truth and Satan is right there to take it away. We are in a battle! Jesus sows seeds of truth, some people hear and then Satan takes those words of truth away from them. I am compelled to pray against Satan at this moment. I feel Satan has done this to me. I hear a word from the Scripture or from a message preached and it seems for a moment important, yet it appears to make itself wings. This is possibly

another explanation of what happens: Satan, like birds eating exposed seed, takes away the truth that had the potential of bearing fruit in my life.

That there is an enemy out there taking understanding away from me makes me want to pull it to myself with all the greater intentionality.

## 2. Soil 2 -- 4:16-17, Shallow Soil

The feature which stands out most prominently to me in this soil is the presence of rock and the absence of much soil (v.5). Jesus explains this as those people who hear the word and “immediately receive it with joy.” What could be wrong with that? The word is preached and people receive it with joy. Life is good!

But Jesus explains that just like when there is no depth of soil and a seed springs up because there is some soil, so too when there is no deep conviction about the value of the word they have heard, just as immediately as they received the word, they will immediately fall away when some form of hardship comes their way because of that word.

I can imagine a dialogue going back and forth:

Jesus is God’s Son establishing the Kingdom of God bringing healing and displacing the demonic.

Oh, that’s neat. I’ll follow Him.

Great! If anyone would come after Me let him deny himself, pick up his cross daily and follow me.

I’m down for the healing, but I’m not good with the whole deny my self thing. I’m out of here.

Fickle: This soil describes the fickle heart that is excited to hear about Jesus and all He can do for them to make their life better, and they actually receive that truth about Jesus that they see as good, but they do not receive the complete and true Jesus.

I can see that these are those who hear that Jesus saves, wanting to be saved, jump in quickly with great emotional joy. But when they learn that Jesus is also the King and wants to be Lord of their life, that is another story altogether. Jesus saving me sounds good. Me serving Jesus does not sound so good. It really cramps my style. I’m out.

May no one here be so fickle and trade diamonds for costume jewelry.

### 3. Soil 3 – 4:18-19 – Thorns

These are the people who hear the word but the fruit of the word is not realized in their lives because instead of embracing the word and valuing it above all else, they are in effect sidelined by:

#### a) The Worries of the World

#### b) The Deceitfulness of Riches

#### c) The Desires for Other Things

This is where many of us do battle isn't it. Look at what these thorns do: "they enter in and choke the word" making it unfruitful. Instead of bearing the fruit it could have, the word God sows in our hearts is strangled by these squeaker wheels that get our intention and take our attention off of God.

God, give us strength to combat the seduction of this world so that we might experience the far greater value of bearing the fruit that will come forth from the seed of Your word.

### 4. Soil 4 – 4:20, Good Soil

Finally, we get to the good soil. What makes good soil good? What makes the condition of a man's heart fertile for growing the word God plants in us?

#### a) They hear the word

Each of the other types of people have also heard the word

#### b) They accept it

Here is the first part of the difference, they accept it. This is really what the parable is about: how different people respond to the word of God about the kingdom of God. Here in the good soil they accept it. Like a gift given and received. Like a compliment taken in and treasured. Like a responsibility embraced. The psalmist sings, "I found Thy words and I ate them; they became to me a joy..."

#### c) They bear fruit

Here is the second and greater difference between this soil and all the rest, between this heart and all the rest. This heart hears and accepts the word to such an extent that it bears fruit. What is the fruit of God's word sown in our hearts? Context would argue that Jesus has in mind here that we would return to God and receive God's forgiveness (4:12). I think the fruit also can be seen as the sweet intimacy with God that comes from understanding Jesus to be His Son and therefore valuing Him so highly that you become

His follower, sharing time with Him, listening to Him, partnering with Him on any mission He has for you. The fruit is knowing God and intimacy with Him through Jesus.

So, we see in this passage that Jesus is the explainer; therefore, let's be His followers/disciples giving ear not only to His classroom instruction, but also all He has to say. Let's ask Him questions and pay careful attention to His answers. Verses 21-25 show that in addition to Jesus being the teacher and the explainer of God's word, He is also the...

### **III. Jesus is the ENCOURAGER to action to those who understand**

#### ***A. Jesus is the encourager to action***

Listen to Jesus in Mark 4:21-25...[Read]

#### ***B. Use the Lamp to Shine the Light on Truth***

The disciples have been given the understanding of who Jesus is and here Jesus encourages them to regard this as a lamp that should be used to displace the confusion of those who live in the darkness of not knowing God. I almost hear Jesus saying, "I've given you a light, use it now to help others find their way."

#### ***C. Listen Carefully To Jesus***

I hear in this exhortation, shared in this context, both a warning to continue listening to Jesus' disclosure of God or else it will be taken away; and I hear a lure to continue listening to Jesus because to the degree I listen to the knowledge He has given, even more understanding of spiritual matters will be given.

Jesus is the encourager to action; therefore, let's be His team, doing what He encourages us to do, using the knowledge He has given us and going back for more.

### ***Conclusion***

As I have studied this parable and its explanation I find myself wanting to cultivate the soil of my heart so that it is fertile soil in which the word of God can grow and produce the fruit of His intention. I recognize I don't determine the fruit, that is up to God. Yet I can not escape the reality that a cultivated field will yield greater fruit than one that is not.

I believe the Lord would have each of us this morning do a little personal farming by cultivating the soil of our own hearts and minds. Some may need to pull to themselves the seeds that have fallen by the wayside before the enemy comes in and takes them away.

Some may need to correct the shortage of soil and move from only giving God's word a very shallow place in their heart to giving him a depth of thoughtfulness that is worthy of God's truth.

Many I perceive need to do some work of removing the thorns that choke out the seed that has already been planted.

Finally there are also those of you who have already cultivated good soil by breaking up hardness and readying your hearts for the word of God; you simply must continue with an eye to bear the fruit of God's intention.

At the time of Christ, farmers would plow a field to soften the soil, sow seed, and then plow the field again in order to cover the seed with soil so that it would germinate and grow from a good enough depth so that it could grow to maturity and bear fruit. As we close this service, I'd appreciate you taking a walk with God past the pots that represent the different ways we can respond to the word (the truth of the Kingdom of God being established in the presence of Jesus). As the Spirit leads, what action would He have you take that would symbolize what you are committed to doing in response to this teaching of Jesus. Some may want to pick a seed off the ground and plant it in the soil before Satan comes and takes it away; some may want to grab some more soil and add it to the pot with just a little signifying their need to give God more room to grow deep in their lives. Others may need to remove some thorns, take off the paper that represent them and give that seed some room to grow. Others of you may want to plow again the soil of the last plot and turn the seed under the embrace of the soil continuing and completing the care for the seed of God's word.

We are going to play that soft music again to put you out in the field where Jesus has sown some seed. Make a pass past the pots and demonstrate to God how you intend to respond to the word He has sown in your heart. Then stand at your seat and I'd like to pray for us before we go in a closing song.

1. What activity do you see Jesus investing His time in and what does that call you to be and do?
2. What type of soil most clearly matches the soil of your heart?
3. What might you do to improve the growing conditions for the seed of God's word Jesus has planted in you?
4. As a man is given a light on a dark night, how might you use the understanding given you as a follower of Jesus?