

What Does Real Salvation Look Like? **Mark 4:1-20**

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that

*“they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.”*

¹³ And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

- Mark 4:1-20, ESV

Today's passage features Jesus' most important parable, the parable of the four soils. We can tell this is His most important parable because He asks His disciples, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” (v. 13) So, what makes this parable so important? It's because it reveals to us the essence of what a saving response to the Gospel looks like.

This is also one of the few parables that Jesus explicitly explains to His disciples. All three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) include this parable and its full explanation. Mark places it here as the first parable in his Gospel, making it the key for understanding all other parables. So, what does it tell us?

Whenever anyone hears the Gospel, they can respond in one of four different ways:

1. They can just completely ignore or miss the message. Jesus says that these people have the word stolen from them by Satan before it can find any soil and take any root. These people can be the most puzzling to understand, because they sit and hear the life-changing message of salvation in Christ and don't really hear it at all.

2. They can respond with enthusiasm to the free offer of forgiveness and eternal life and profess faith in Jesus as their Savior, only to quickly fall away as soon as it becomes difficult. Some of these may be people who respond to an invitation at an evangelistic meeting but never join a church or pursue discipleship.

3. They can respond with a profession of faith and begin on a path of discipleship only to get distracted by cares, concerns or worldliness. They might be caught up in any one of a number of things that take them away from Christ, but they end up abandoning the Gospel, the church, and their faith for worldly matters.

4. Finally, there are those who, by God's grace, hear the Gospel and respond in saving faith. They truly trust in Christ alone for their salvation, for forgiveness and righteousness and eternal life. They profess Jesus as their Lord and King and they join the church, grow in their faith and bear fruit in their lives for the glory of God. This fourth group, and only this fourth group, has found real salvation in Christ.

So, how can you know if you're in the fourth group and not the second or third? Many Christians struggle with identifying with the third group, as they feel like the word is being choked out of their lives by worldly cares. But every garden needs weeding and every good crop has struggles on its way to fruitfulness.

If you're trusting in Jesus and still seeking to grow in Him, and if the word is bearing fruit in your life in changed attitudes and actions, this is evidence that you have found salvation. Keep trusting in Christ and run to Him when you feel doubts and fears and shame rising in your heart.