

Soil Sampling

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[0 : 00] While seeking the Lord's help, can we turn back in our Bibles to the passage that we read together in the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 4. And we can read again verse 19, maybe 18 and 19.

Mark 4 at verse 18. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 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. The desires for other things enters in and chokes the word. So I want to look with you today at the parable of the sower.

Although it's actually not so much about the sower, it's more about the seed and the soil. In fact, it's mostly about the soil. How four different types of soil respond to the seed that is sown in them.

And these four types of soil that Jesus speaks about in this parable, they depict for us the human heart. And the different ways in which our hearts respond to God's word.

[1 : 24] And as we study these four soils today, you may well find yourself being described in one of them. How does your heart react to Jesus?

So I guess today is cardiac assessment day. How is your own heart with regard to the Lord Jesus?

So I was traveling up. I went through parts of Easter Ross and looking across the Black Isle. And all these farms there, they've got things growing on them this time of year.

And some of them are green. And you think, how do they do it? And we can't. Well, it's a lot to do with the fact they've got fertile land. But also, many of these big farms today, they bring in someone called an agronomist, who will take some soil samples and come back and tell you, well, if you want to plant this, you need to add these nutrients at this rate per hectare.

And that's how they get a brilliant crop. Because they make sure that the ground is perfectly suited to the seed that is going to be sown there.

[2 : 42] Today, the seed of God's word is again being sown in this field here. But God alone knows where it will take root and flourish and where it will be trampled on.

But as we study this parable today, it should uncover to you the condition of your own heart.

Is it receptive to God's word? Or does the seed that is sown have very little impact and produce no fruit?

So, I want to look at the four responses that we see to the seed that is sown here in the four soils that Jesus describes. So that's where we will break it up very, very simply.

We'll look first of all at the path, then at the rocky ground, then the thorny ground, and then the good ground. We'll just follow the parable as Jesus tells it.

- [3 : 48] So the path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and then the good ground. Before we come to that, just a little bit of background. And this parable here, the parable of the sword, it's believed to be the very first parable that Jesus told.
- And in introducing it, he calls his audience to pay particular attention to it. If you look at verse 3, the start of verse 3, where he's just about to begin telling the parable.
- Verses 1 and 2 tell us the seating arrangements and how the audience were seated and so on. Verse 3, listen. Listen. Maybe your Bible has listen, behold.
- The pulpit Bible, which was used for the reading, had both words. It should have both words. He, Jesus puts a double emphasis on the need to pay close attention to this.
- You'll find that in the old Bible, in the authorized version. I can't remember exactly what it has. Harken. Harken, behold. I think it's so that he's placing emphasis on the importance of not just listening to what he's about to tell us, but taking it on board.
- [5 : 08] Listen. Take heed. So he makes the point that this parable deters our attention. Now, parables themselves have long been explained as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. I don't think you can beat that as a description.
- That's what we have here. An earthly scenario that was familiar to all his audience. A soul goes out to sow seed. And then he goes on to tell us the heavenly meaning.
- He goes on in verses 10, well, verse 13 onwards to explain the significance, to explain the heavenly meaning.
- I just want to look at his explanation for a minute. First thing he tells us, verse 14. What's the seed? He says, the sower sows the word.
- So that's pretty simple. It's God's word that is being sown. And then he goes on to explain that the four soils are the different responses people have to that word.
- [6 : 08] When it is sown. When it is shared. When it is preached. And then the farmer. The person who sows the seed. It's not actually identified.
- It's not identified. And that's because it's anyone who shares the gospel. Anyone who sows God's seed is like the sower.
- So that's the background. Someone scattering seed. Far and wide. That seed is falling in different places. And the reaction to it is varied. Now. Certainly on big farms.
- Farming methods have moved on. You would never see a farmer go out with a bucket scattering seed. You see big massive tractors. They are guided by satellite.
- GPS. And they sow individual seeds. In the exact place where that seed is going to take root. They call it precision. Sowing. And some people reckon that preachers.
- [7 : 09] Should be precision. Sowers. They say you need to target your message. To a specific audience. You need to make sure that you hit the spot.
- We should be precision source. I don't agree. We scatter the seed. And God alone knows. Where it will take root.
- And where it will flourish. But the thing is this. It's not just preachers. That should do that. This whole parable.
- This first parable. Jesus told. He doesn't lay any emphasis on the sower. Who it is. It's not even explained. Every Christian.
- Is a sower. Every believer. Wherever God has placed you in your home. In your workplace. In your neighborhood. In your school. You should be sowing seeds.
- [8 : 10] From God's word. Every opportunity. That you get. But I want to move on then. And look first of all. At this. The path. Let's read verse four.

And as he sowed. Some seed fell along the path. And the birds came. And devoured it. What was this path? Well in some of your crafting townships.

You may have. A stripper land. Between two crofts. That give access. Either to the shore. Or to the common grazing. These are. These are rights of way.

If they've been there. For generations. And the same was through. In Jesus day. Through the fields. There were. There were rights of way. That people traversed.

All day long. Every day. To get from. From A to B. Or to get to their parcel of land. And in a hot. Dry. Climate. As person.

[9 : 10] As person. After person. Traipsed across. These paths. They became. So. Compacted. That. That. The. The soil. Was.

Rock solid. Nothing. Was going to penetrate it. You'd be. As well. Sowing seed. On concrete. As you would. Putting seed. On. On these. Rights of way. Paths.

And so. Jesus tells us. That the inevitable. Happened. When the seed. Landed. On that. Rock solid. Ground. That the birds. Came. And they took it. Away. What are the birds.

For ever sent. Well he explains that. To us in verse 15. These are the ones. Along the path. Where the word is sown. When they hear. Satan. Immediately. Comes. And takes away.

The word. That's sown in him. Satan. Comes. Satan. Is your enemy. Satan. Satan.

[10 : 04] Wants. To have you. For himself. Forever. In hell. He doesn't want you. To hear God's word. He doesn't want you.

To think about God's word. He doesn't want God's word. To penetrate. Your heart. And so. The moment you hear it. It's gone. He takes it away.

You know. If he was fair. He would. He would let you think about it. If he was fair. He would let you ponder it. If he was fair. And had your best interest at heart.

He would. He would let you consider it. Satan. Takes the word. Away. You know. You come to church.

You maybe come every week. You hear God's word. Maybe. Maybe. You find it interesting. Maybe. Even some days. You find it enjoyable.

[11 : 03] But you go out that door. And it's gone. It's gone. It has no impact. On your heart. It doesn't change your life. One little bit. And maybe that's the way.

You like it. Because. You don't want your life. To change. But I want you to think. About this today. That's not just your choice. That is being orchestrated.

By your enemy. The devil. He doesn't want. You. To think about. What you've heard.

Both Matthew and Luke. They also recount. This parable. As well as Mark. And they tell us. That as well as the birds.

Taking the seed away. That. That. What remained. Was trampled. Under foot. And that's what we do. With the gospel. When we hear it.

[12 : 00] And discard it. We're trampling. Jesus. And all he did for us. Under foot. And over time.

Through repeated. Rejection. Of God's word. Your heart. Becomes. Hard. Heart. Your heart. Becomes. Almost. Impregnable. Like these.

Right away. Paths. But you know. There's. I don't think there's any ground. That cannot be plowed up. And there's no heart.

That is. Too hard. For God. To penetrate it. So you pray. You pray. That. That. That God.

Will. Cause that seed. To penetrate. You pray. That he will not. Let Satan. Take it away. But that you'll. You'll ponder it.

[12 : 54] You'll think about it. You'll let it. Sink into your heart. Don't let Satan. Determine. Your destiny.

I want to move on though. And look at the rocky ground. So that was the first of all. The path. The seed that fell on the path. And then in verse five. We're told about the seed that fell on the rocky ground. Let's read it.

Another seed fell on rocky ground. When it did not have much soil. And immediately it sprang up. Since it had no depth. Of soil. No depth. The picture is of a thin layer of soil.

With just rock underneath it. It's a kind of soil where. Where a seed would germinate quickly. There would be warmth from the rock. It would grow really quickly. But then. Because there was no moisture.

It just wouldn't last. We've got areas on our own croft. Over on the west side. And in the spring. You wish your whole croft was like that. It's the first place that gets green.

[13 : 55] It's the first area where the grass grows. But if you have a hot summer. We had one once or twice. If you have a hot summer. It just. Just. Goes brown.

There's no moisture. It dies. And that's what. That's what this is. Picturing. You can. You can. You can understand the picture. And Jesus is saying.

He goes on to explain it in verse 16. 17. These are the ones. Sown on rocky ground. The ones who. When they hear the word. Immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves.

But endure. Only for a while. Then. When tribulation or persecution arises. On account of the word. Immediately. They fall. Away. So this is a picture of those who.

Who become a Christian. But they're not. Prepared. For the trouble. That will come. With that. They're not prepared.

[14 : 53] For the. Opposition. And that commitment. Doesn't. Last. You see. He's talking here. Not about. Not about. General trials. And tribulations. We all have them. Everybody.

Will have trouble. In life. But there's. Specific. Troubles. That the Christian has. Simply.

On account. Of belonging. To the Lord. You see. He says. It's. It's. It's. It's. Trouble. On account. Of the word. On account. Of God's word. On account. Of being.

A Christian. You know. Jesus never. Hid that. Whenever you. Enter into. A contract. Nowadays.

You. All the good stuff. It's a big. Bold. Writing. Stuff. That's not so good. Tiny print. A small print. Maybe. 35 pages.

[15 : 48] 35 pages. Of it. Of it. Who's going to read. That stuff. Jesus. Doesn't put. This. In the small print. Jesus. Tells us. Very. Very.

Plainly. As Christians. In this world. You will have. Tribulation. Jesus. Is it. If anyone. Will come. After me. Let him.

Take up. His cross. And follow me. He doesn't hide it. He headlines it. Being a Christian. Means. You will face. Opposition.

And sometimes. Those who follow the Lord. They're not prepared. For that. Do you get flack. From your friends. For going to church.

When they're doing something else. Do you get digs. From your family. Because you're going out. Midweek. Or there's something else. On at church.

[16 : 44] You get guilt trips. That's all. The things Jesus. Is describing here. Tribulation. On account.

Of the word. And sometimes. There will be those. Who find it easier. To compromise. To cave in. To go with the flow.

Because. They don't want to be mocked. Jesus explains the issue. In verse 17. He says. They have no root. In themselves. And so endure.

Only for a while. We need to know. That being a Christian. Is no walk in the park. Far.

From it. You will meet. You will meet with opposition. You will experience trials. And troubles. Simply. On account. Of the fact. That you belong.

[17 : 44] To Jesus. Superficial. Christianity. Will not save us. Won't save you. God's word.

Needs to take. Deep. Root. In our hearts. So that it will continue. To flourish. When the trouble. And the opposition.

Comes. You need. To count. The cost. Of being a Christian. Otherwise. When the trials. Come. You will wither.

Just like this plant. And then I want to move on. And look at the thorny ground. Thirdly. The thorny ground. We've seen the path. We've seen the rocky ground. The thorny ground.

It's described in verse 7. Verse 7. We read. Other seed fell among thorns. And the thorns grew up. And choked it. And it yielded. No grain. No grain.

[18 : 41] The thorns choked the life. Out of the seed. For the last. Four years. We've planted. Veg. Behind the manse.

There's a wee plot there. But only two years. Out of the four. Have we ever. Got any return. On that. And that's not because. The soil is bad. It's not because. The seed was bad. Simply because.

We didn't have time. To keep on top of it. We didn't have time. To weed. The plot. And so the veg. Grew initially. But they were soon.

Just choked. To death. By all. The weeds. And so you can get to the picture. Of what Jesus is saying here. But what does he mean?

What does this picture mean? What's he teaching? Well. He explains it in verse 18. 19. And others are the ones. Solomon thorns. They're those who hear the word.

[19 : 35] But. Three things. 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. So he mentions three things. That can arrest the progress. Of God's word. In someone's life.

And these three things. Unlike the. The rocky ground we looked at. These three things are. Arise from internal motives. So. The rocky ground was. Was. Was trouble from outwith.

It was persecution. It was trials. Things that come from outside. Here he's now talking about. Things that arise. From within. Our own. Hearts. The three are.

The cares. Of the world. The deceitfulness of riches. And the desires. For other things. I want to look at each of these three. In turn. Fairly briefly.

[20 : 33] So the cares. Of the world. Well who doesn't have cares. Who doesn't have concerns. Who doesn't have worries. Believer and unbeliever alike.

Will have. Cares. In this world. We all have them. But for the Christian in particular. These cares. Should drive us to God.

In prayer. Sadly. Sometimes they do the opposite. And that's what Jesus is warning about here. The cares.

Of this world. Can bring a wedge. Between us and God. When they shouldn't. They should always. Thrive us to God. Paul. The apostle. You probably know that. He said.

Do not be anxious. About anything. But. Take it all. To God. In prayer. And sometimes. Folks say. He. He can't be serious. Paul can't be serious.

[21 : 27] He can't really be saying. Never. Be anxious. Anxious. Well. He's not. That's not what he's saying. In fact. If Paul said. Never be anxious.

Don't ever be anxious. He would be two faced. Because. In Philippians. Two. It's in Philippians. Four. That he says. Verse six. Philippians four.

Verse six. Do not be anxious. About anything. But in everything. By prayer. And supplication. With thanksgiving. Let your requests. Be made known to God. But that same Paul. Says in chapter two.

Verse twenty eight. Of Philippians. He's talking about. Epaphroditus. And he says. I'm the more eager. To send him therefore. That you may rejoice. At seeing him again. And that I may be.

Less anxious. Paul the apostle. That I may be. Less anxious. You know. If you're prone. To anxiety.

[22 : 21] Today. I think it should. Comfort us. That the great apostle. Paul. Tells us. That he was anxious. But then a wee bit after that.

He says. But it's not on. To stay like that. We shouldn't be content. To remain anxious. We should take all these things.

That causes anxiety. To the Lord. In prayer. And yet. We don't always do that. Do we? We phone a friend.

We try and fix it ourselves. And God is all too often. A last resort. God gets sidelined.

And it shouldn't be so. So Jesus says. The cares of this world. They choke the seed. Deceit. And then he says.

[23 : 17] The deceitfulness. Of riches. You know. That's a. Really interesting phrase. The deceitfulness. Of riches. Or of wealth.

It's a lie. It's a lie. Wealth promises. So much. Oh. If only I had enough money. I would get rid of this problem. I wouldn't have to worry about that.

It would sort this. I'd be content. Family would be happy. We'd be able to do all the things we wanted. That's rubbish. And you're deceiving yourself.

If you think that money. Will bring contentment. Because there are people. All around us. Chasing wealth. And what does it mean?

It means working crazy hours to get it. It maybe means. As a Christian. Sometimes compromising. On what is right. When God takes second place.

[24 : 13] And very often. People who are chasing wealth. They're too busy. To serve the Lord. Too busy to get to the prayer meeting. Too busy to be involved.

In anything that. Church puts on. And they're too tired. To help. And does it bring. Happiness. No.

It brings. Strained relationships. In a home. It brings. Children. Who. Don't see all that much. Of their parents.

It brings. Couples. Who. When they do have time together. They're. Tired. And they're. Grumpy. The deceitfulness. Of riches.

Does it bring contentment? No. It brings. Guilt. Guilt. Because you let so many. Others. Down. In the pursuit.

[25 : 08] Of that wealth. It is a lie. And Jesus making clear here. That even those. Who profess.

To be Christians. Can get caught up. By the deceitfulness. Of riches. Which if not addressed. If not arrested.

Will choke. The spiritual. Life. Out of them. Making them. Unfruitful. That's why the Bible says. You cannot serve.

God. And money. But then there's this third danger. Which is closely connected. To that. And that's the desires. For other things. In an age of advertising.

We're constantly. Bombarded with. You need to get. This thing. You need to get. Something bigger. You need to get. Something better. You need to get. Something newer. And.

[26 : 04] We can get caught up. So much with that hype. That you're never. Satisfied. Because you're always. Going to need. Something newer. And something bigger. And something better.

The desire. For other things. Causes us. To neglect. The one. Thing. Needful. You know.

The sad thing is. That this. Group. This seed. If you go back. And look at it. It was. It was. Beginning. To grow. It was.

Beginning. To grow. But it never. Bore fruit. Never. Bore fruit. Because it was. Choked. By the thorns.

And today. If you profess. To love the Lord Jesus. You should be asking yourself. Am I bearing fruit.

[27 : 00] For the Lord. Are there signs. In my life. That would show. That I am a Christian. The thorny ground then.

Cares. Wealth. And the desires. For other things. These can prevent you. From being saved. What a tragedy.

If that were the case. But I want to move on. We've looked at the path. We've looked at the rocky ground. We've looked at the thorny ground. Fourthly. Good ground. Verse 8.

Other seed fell into good soil. And produced grain. Growing up. And increasing. And yielding. Thirtyfold. And sixtyfold. And a hundred. Fold. So here.

The soil is just. Right. For the seed. And Jesus goes on. To explain. That in verse 20. That these are those. Who were. Those so long.

[27 : 58] Good ground. Are the ones. Who hear the word. And accept it. And bear. Fruit. They take it to heart. They don't just sit in.

Or go out. And say. Yeah. That was a good sermon. It doesn't just affect the head. It's not just an intellectual. Ascent. It hits home. Hits home.

You know. I heard a. A woman. Who gave her testimony once. Her testimony was this. She was. She was foreign. She had a degree. In theology. She knew her bible.

And said. She could argue with anybody. But one day. She got saved. And she went to the session. To profess her faith. And they said. What happened? And she said.

It was all up here. And it just went boom. It just went boom. That's what we need. God's word. Gets further than here. And hits home.

[28 : 58] Into your heart. Those who hear it. And accept it. They accept. The claims. It makes on their lives. They accept that Jesus. Is not just. A savior.

But he's lord. We must live under his rule. He must be boss. Of our lives. You know friends. There is no more fruitful. Life.

Than a life lived. For Jesus. And yet. Some. Who set out. On that life. Some who set out. To follow Jesus.

They fall away. They fall away. Either because of. Outward pressures. The opposition. We looked at. At the rocky ground. Or they fall away.

Because of. Inner desires. That compete. With God. In their lives. Christianity. Is an all.

[29 : 54] Or nothing. Religion. Jesus. Wants your. Whole heart. And he wants your. Whole life. He's. Looking today. He's looking for.

Hearts. That are not hard. Like the path. Not shallow. Like the rocky ground. Not. Preoccupied.

With things. Like the thorny ground. Heart. And so today. Cardiac. Assessment. Day. How is.

Your own heart. Is it hard. Is it shallow. Is it. Preoccupied. With things. Or is it.

Ready. To receive. Jesus. Christ. Christ. Because. Once more today. The good seed. Of the gospel. Has been scattered. In this field.

[30 : 52] Today. You've been listening. To the words. Of Jesus. Himself. As he told. This. Parable. Words.

Which he prefaced. Remember. How he started it. Verse three. Listen. Take it. This is important.

Jesus said. Is your heart. Responsive. To Jesus. Today. You know. We've looked at. Four types of soil.

This morning. But really. There's only two. There's only two. There's fruitful soil. Or there's. Unfruitful soil. And.

It's the same. With our hearts. There's only two kinds. Of hearts. Of heart. There's a responsive heart. Or there's a rejecting. Heart. Which do you have?

[31 : 53] You know. Hosea. The prophet. In chapter 10. He says this. He says. Break up. Your unplowed ground.

For it is time. For it is time. To seek the Lord. It's time. To seek. The Lord. And if you're a Christian today.

If you have set out. To follow. Jesus. Then you be sure. That you give him. Your whole heart. And your whole life. Don't hold anything back. Because one thing's true.

He didn't hold. Anything back. And what he. Gave. And what he did. To make your salvation. Possible.

I want to finish today. By reading. The words of Jesus. From verse 9. And Jesus said. He. Who has ears.

[32 : 51] To hear. Let him hear. Amen. May God bless his word to us. Let's pray.