

### 3.22.15

### Mark 4:1-20 Parable of the Sower

**INTRO:** The Guardian: "What scares the New Atheists"  
-Written by an "Old school Atheist"

\*The atheists have their own "denominations" now...disagreeing with one another...splintering into different "disbelief groups"

\*New Atheists are evangelists...they are aggressive in wanting to win converts to unbelief.

\*Their basic assumption is that as the world "progresses" it will become less religious...science will win out and reason will be enough to have values and meaning.

\*The problem is the world is not becoming less religious, the opposite seems to be occurring...so they are getting more frustrated because the rest of the world won't repent of its belief in God.

\*Many in history have believed that they could kill the church and stop the spread of the gospel...all have failed.

\*In amazing ways and in interesting places...the seed of the gospel has found fertile soil...it has always continued to grow...fertile soil even in hostile environments leads to a harvest.

\*Both in numerical growth and in individual growth in faith.

\*Jesus told a story that tells why this is...the gospel seed is always latent with the possibility of fruit.

\*It is powerful, alive...put it in fertile soil...it grows

**Mark 4:1 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. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:**

\*Chapter 4 contains four of Jesus' parables, here we find the parable of the sower and its interpretation.

\*Although he didn't invent this form of teaching he used it like no other teacher before or since.

\*Parables were different forms of speech, often a story...but not always...that were used to draw out a key point.

\*The point was always related to the life and message of Jesus.

\*So the story Jesus is about to tell about seeds and soils is not just a sermon on how people listen to sermons.

\*This parable really sets up all the rest of his teaching...this is a story about how people are going to respond to him.

\*There is warning in this story, but there is also opportunity in it.

**3 “Listen! (PAY ATTENTION!) A farmer went out to sow his seed. seed was broadcast, then plowed under. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”**  
**9 Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

\*Jesus is not trying to be tricky but he is drawing out those who really have hearts for the truth...

\*"Engage me with your heart and mind."

\*Remember, this is not just some random storyteller...he has already announced the Kingdom and given powerful evidence that he is the true King.

\*So when he says something...it would make good sense to pay close attention...this is the guy who since birth has been very unusual...no one like him, ever.

\*And when he tells a parable...the ones who have ears at all for the truth...have to lean in even more to understand.

\*Some who are hanging around, are not all in...Judas.

\*Some are sort of in, and will fall away, but come back...Peter.

\*So he teaches with creative stories...to drive points deep, to make them think.

\*I can never remember asking a child "Do you want me to tell you a story?" and being told "no!"

\*My granddaughters have put a book on my lap and said "read story"

\*They have not yet said "G, read us this list of life principles"

\*Stories speak deeply to us...truth comes embedded in them.

\*What is the difference between telling someone "what" to think and training them "how" to think?

\*It's like the difference between handing a man a fish sandwich and handing a man a fishing pole.

\*The man with the fish sandwich will be in perpetual need for a handout...the man with a fishing pole will learn how to feed himself and others.

\*Stories and analogies, testimony...help people learn how to think...in this case he is training them to think in terms of the Kingdom...making them work and lean in to him.

\***Me & Harold:** "Tell me what you think about this topic."

\*He knew what was going on.

\*I was asking him to tell ME what to think...without having to do any real work myself.

\*I was thinking "He's smart, he's studied a lot...I'll just think what he thinks."

\*That kind of knowledge is "easy come, easy go."

\*What he said was...

"Go read these books(plural, heart dropped); think it through and come back and we will talk."

"Ah man, can't you just tell what to think?"

\*In Cults and other mind-control groups, people are told **what** to think not taught **how** to think.

\*If they begin to think for themselves...they are expelled, or worse.

\*This can be as true in non-religious groups as it is in religious ones.

\*In America there have been scientists who have been threatened and even fired for daring to question the status quo on issues related to science and faith.

\*I read an article about some grown children of same sex parents who are being threatened because they are questioning the narrative (based on their own experience) that says "There no difference in traditional parents and same sex parents in the long term health of a child."

\*I saw part of ESPN special on the 1980 "miracle on ice." Soviet/US Olympic Hockey Game.

\*The Soviet Coach pulled the world's best goalie for allowing a goal just before half.

\*This probably cost them the game.

\*The interviewer asked different people (now 35 years later) what they did or said to the coach.

\*They basically said, "Are you kidding me, this was the Soviet Union...we did and said nothing...at the time we didn't even think anything."

\*Not that it would have been appropriate to question the coach but their response indicated they had been raised from birth...to not think.

\*Jesus certainly wanted his followers to learn truth and he wanted them to obey truth.

\*But he wanted them to learn "how" to think in terms of the Kingdom.

\*They were going to be tested, really tested...they needed to internalize the truth in ways that they could apply in multiple life situations.

\*This was all part of the Lord's training plan to make that happen...

**10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.**

\*Later the crowds had dispersed and he was hanging out with the twelve and some others.

-He focused on the twelve but he had a much larger following than just those twelve guys, both men and women were part of his larger group of followers.

\*They asked him about the parables (plural, not just this one)...

-"Why do you talk like that?"

**11 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.**

\*Secret="mysterion".

\*Paul uses the word 22 times...it is not some secret code for special people...it is something formerly hidden now revealed...the gospel.

\*The life and work of Christ...its an open secret...revealed right there in front of them in the life of Jesus.

\*The revealed "secret" is that the Kingdom **that** will one day come in visible, overt power has come secretly and is advancing in the hearts of men and women.

\*Jesus was doing what the parable was saying...he was broadcasting seed

\*They were doing what the parable was saying...responding in different ways.

\*They are being warned to not be a certain kind of soil, and are given an opportunity to be a kind that will bear fruit.

**12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"**

\*This is a direct quote from Is. 6

\*God told Isaiah to deliver the message even though it would be rejected.

\*The seeing but not perceiving was not the "goal" of Isaiah telling them the truth of God...but it was often going to be the result.

\*It wasn't "Isaiah, go tell them the truth to **in order** to harden them."

\*But rather it was...

\*"Announce the truth, **even though** many will remain hard to it."

\*Parables veil the truth from those with no stomach for it.

\*"Why doesn't he just speak clearly...he doesn't know what he is talking about."

\*"Stupid farmer talk, this doesn't even come close to the depth of our own spiritual wisdom."

**1 Cor. 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.**

\*The smartest person in the world with no spiritual discernment is going to believe the things of God are utter folly.

\*The response today to truth is similar.

\*"Faith is for the weak. Humility is for the passive. Hope is for the uninformed. Gospel is for the stupid.

**\*You see throughout the Gospel two paths in terms of response to Jesus:**

1. Increasing spiritual atrophy (loss of strength and movement)

\*If you don't work a muscle, it will lose strength and the joint will freeze, painfully so.

\*When people fail to respond to the truth they have given progressive hardness sets in.

\*Romans 1, "Claiming to be wise they became fools through their suppression of the truth."

2. Increasing spiritual acuity: growth of sharpness, understanding as we respond positively to the truth.

\***Very important to respond to the truth in front of you...**repent if you do not.  
-atrophy can set in as we walk away from what is true.

**\*Incremental: me and my shoulder.**

**13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"**

\*Maybe they were trying a bit too hard...or really were that dense.

\*"Look fellas, if you don't get this parable, you are going to be in real trouble with some that are coming your way soon."

\*"But anyway, here's the meaning."

**14 The farmer sows the word.**

\*Jesus, of course, is the Farmer and the seed is the message of the Kingdom.

**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. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 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. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 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. 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.”**

\*Jesus keeps the explanation pretty simple.

**Four responses: Two results: 3 no fruit, 1 fruitful.**

**1. Immediate: Satan immediately takes the truth.** "As soon as they hear it." "Immediately"

\*Seed never germinates at all.

\*I believe Satan's main strategy is and has been to control the cultural narratives.

\*These are the "stories" that determine what people believe is real, valuable, true...and what is not...these narratives are powerful...they are what tells us how to live.

\*These narratives become so embedded in culture that people don't realize they are there...they are like the operating system in the background that all their programs run on.

\*They are accepted without thought and over time become assumptions of what is real.

\*Over time if you doubt the narrative...you are doubting reality.

**2 Cor. 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

\*The minds are blinded to the light of the gospel because the "narrative" that has been set rejects the gospel narrative...it can't be true.

\*It often takes something drastic to unseat this narrative...it always takes the work of the Holy Spirit in a life to do so.

\*The narrative takes many forms but here are two:

1. The gospel is naive, ridiculous, outdated, irrelevant, bigoted, mean, etc.

\*When a person has this narrative as their OS...then anytime they come under conviction, feel like maybe God is drawing them in, or have doubts about what they believe...Satan immediately is able to say...

"Yes, but you know that can't be true, its not possible for it to be true."

\*Immediately the seed is taken because the person's narrative will not allow for it...it would be like trying to convince them that the earth does not go round the sun.

\*What hope do they have? A work of God to show them what is true.

\*God must remove their blinders.

\*Jesus often spoke in story because he was resetting the cultural narrative...or if you prefer...rebooting the world's operating system so that truth could run in people's lives.

\*This is why some leaders wanted him dead...they controlled the narrative.

\*The one who controls the narrative have the power...they tell you what is real, important, what is valuable and what is not.

\*What to buy and believe and how to act.

\*Jesus set all this upside down...it was not well received.

\*If a group of people no longer believed the narrative you used to control them, to sell to them, to lord over and said "We don't believe that story."

\*We believe this story..."Jesus is king, we are free, we will value what he values."

\*It caused some real problems...it has happened in history...its happening now.

\*Christians continue to be killed in parts of the world for rejecting the cultural narrative.

2. Another leading cultural narrative is that the gospel is "true" but it's not real.

\*NPR news show on a small Texas town: "God, Guns, Football" not always in that order.

\*Here the narrative counters any doubts about how and why someone is living with this...

"Your okay, you know Jesus, you've heard this stuff your whole life...you go to church, now get back to thinking about what really matters...your job, or car or truck, sports, or what you are going to do this weekend."

\*The seed, is immediately snatched...event though they may be believers of biblical **content**...they are not being transformed...there is not fruit growing.

\*The narrative can be..."Yea, its true, you believe it...its just not as real as you job or truck."

\*Satan is a pragmatist...he doesn't have to concern himself with truth only with what works.

**2.(immediately)then the Quickly:**

\*Eventually whether the truth is rooted into our lives or not is going to be tested.

\*House Church pastor said that he fears many Chinese Christians are "one unanswered prayer from returning to ancestor worship."

\*This is more description than criticism...he was not complaining as much as describing the urgent need for discipleship, teaching...for deep rooting.

\*This is exactly what happened to Peter and probably to varying degrees all the disciples.

\*However, they all except Judas would return and the truth would eventually go deep and trouble would not turn them away from truth.

\*Eventually the truth will be tested in every life...it is vital that the truth get some deep roots prior to that happening.

\*If you are going through testing, suffering and you don't feel ready...I've been there...

\*My suggestion is "cry out to him now" and when this passes...do not let up...lean in.

\*Get rooted.

\*If things are going pretty well...put deep roots down...Spiritual summer and spring times are not for vacation they are for getting deeply rooted.

### **3. Finally:**

\*Finally, there are those who have their fruitfulness choked out by what Jesus calls,

**"The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things."**

\*This one potentially applies to everyone who is left over after 1 and 2.

\*Immediately (truth is taken from some), Eventually (truth is taken from others who have no root), finally (truth can be taken from anyone else)

**\*How...distraction.**

a. "Worries of life" ...uh,oh...I have some of those.

b. "Deceitfulness of wealth" ...doesn't mean you have to be rich, it is more about a false sense of security.

\*Like probably all or most Americans have.

\*We are rich in protection, resources, etc...

\*Spoke with a man several weeks ago in Virginia about some homeland defense issues he said, "Terry, we are okay in a local disaster, and even Katrina was local...but if something really massive happens...we are not ready."

\*Even though we have strength, and power and assets and people watching and on stand by 24 hours a day...we are not "safe"

\*That is the deceitfulness of wealth...a false sense of security can choke the fruit that comes from depending on God alone.

c. Then its as if the Lord says, "Just in case you don't see I'm talking to you yet..."



\*He throws in "Desires for other things."

\*Desires for what other things?...any other thing.

\*The warning is for everyone...no one is exempt from having to be vigilant...to keep choosing the object of our affection.

\*But this is not just a warning; this is an opportunity.

\*Because he ends with the exception, the fruitful exception.

**The fruitful exception:**

\*These are the one's who...**"Hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop — thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."**

**\*Here's what we see in the story: Warning and Opportunity**

\*Not just information...some of you are poor soil, too bad for you.

\*Some are good soil, lucky you.

\*These are all choices...the hearts became these ways.

1. Hardness: the truth cannot penetrate.
2. Shallowness: the truth is crushed by disappointment
3. Distractedness: the truth is neglected because of a focus on less important things.

\*The Fruitful life is a choice as well...**"hear and accept"**

\*Attentiveness and responsiveness.

**\*There is personal application here:** Ask God for help and make the decision to be attentive and responsive to the truth.

1. Have you become hardened to the truth by the prevailing cultural narrative?

-Are you skeptical of the gospel truth?

-the prevailing cultural narrative produces the results you see around you and in you.

\*Test the truth of the narrative...by testing the fruit of the narrative...what do you see?

2. Have you been crushed by disappointment...found out the hard way you were not rooted.

-Cry out to God...read the Psalms.

-Stories of people who were not rooted but were rescued anyway.

3. Are you distracted

\*Too many things vying for your attention and the truth is way down the list?

\*You are not trapped there...you do have a choice...maybe you have forgotten that.

\*Don't be drug along by the flow of the current...step on shore and pay attention to what matters most.

\***There is wider application as well:** Easy to become cynical, or hopeless...the gospel does not bear fruit...people around are not coming to Christ, not changing.

\***Not so...it is and it always will.**

\*Your role is to pray and announce...not to fret and worry.

**1. Pray for fertile hearts...**

a. Ask God to remove the blinders.

b. Look for difficulties as doors into lives.

c. Watch and wait for the things that people chase to become disappointments to them.

**2. Live a fruitful life in front of people experiencing a famine in their own lives.**

\*Let them in, let them see

\*Invite them in

**3. Be patient, keep announcing the truth:** Takes time, sometimes years...

**\*PAY ATTENTION TO THE SOIL CONDITION NOT THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF FRUIT.**

**SMALL GROUP NOTES**

**March 22, 2015**

**Mark 4:1-20**

**Intro:**

\*Briefly, describe or tell one a favorite story or "parable" that has been important to you or your family. Try to make it a story that has had some instructional value for you and your family.

\*What are some of the reasons that a story is such a good vehicle for "carrying" truth?

\*Jesus was a master at telling parables. They have been described as "An earthly story with a heavenly point."

\*One thing that is important to avoid is turning parable into **Allegory**. An allegory is where the many individual parts of the story have some hidden meaning. This was a common way of interpreting parables many years ago.

\*The best way to read and apply the parables is to stick with what Jesus said about them himself. They are designed to point people to him and what it means to live life in his kingdom.

**Read:**

**Mark 4:1** 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. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." 9 Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 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 12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" 13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 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. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 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. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 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. 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."

### **Discuss:**

#### 1. Seed on the path:

- \*What do you believe are some of the prevailing cultural narratives that people in our community believe without even thinking about it?
- \*Talk about how these narratives are "delivered" (media) and how they become embedded into people's lives.
- \*How does the gospel provide a counter-narrative?
- \*How can the gospel penetrate into the life of someone who believes the cultural narrative?

**2 Cor. 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

#### 2. Seed on rocky places

- \*Why does trouble or persecution without rootedness lead to a falling away?
- \*What are the reasons a person might not have deep roots in the faith?
- \*Can a person be a believer for a long time and have shallow roots...why or why not?
- \*Can a person be a believer for a short time and already have deep roots? (**Hint: don't confuse "roots" with biblical information alone**)
- \*If a person realizes they have fallen away because of a lack of deep roots, what might the path look like? What did it look like for you at some point in your own life?

#### 3. Seed among the thorns

\*The thorns are distractions, the three listed are: The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and a desire for other things.

\*Describe in practical ways how these things become distractions that choke out the truth in our lives. Be non-theoretical...give real life examples.

#### 4. Seed on fertile soil

\*What are the two "conditions" found in the fertile soil that leads to a bountiful harvest?

\*How are these two conditions "choices" that we can make and what would it look like to make these choices?

#### **Apply:**

\*Focus on the opportunity in the parable. There seems to be a guarantee of fruit if the soil is of a certain type.

\*Consider whether you have paid more attention to the presence of absence of fruit in your life or to the condition of the soil of your heart.

\*What would it look like for you to pay close attention to the soil condition and then to believe God for the production of fruit?

\*Pray together about this.

# The Gospel of Mark



*"For even the  
Son of Man  
did not come  
to be served,  
but to serve,  
and to give  
his life as a  
ransom for  
many."*

Mark 10:45

**Mark 4:1-2 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:**

**Mark 4:3-9 “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 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. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.” Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

**"How" to think  
not just  
"What" to think**

**Both are important!**



**Mark 4:10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.**

**Mark 4:11 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.**

**Mark 4:12 so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”**

**1 Cor. 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.**

**1. Increasing spiritual atrophy**

**2. Increasing spiritual acuity**

**Mark 4:13 Then Jesus said to them,  
“Don’t you understand this parable?  
How then will you understand any  
parable?”**

**Mark 4:14-17 The farmer sows the word. 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. 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.**

**Mark 4:18-20 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. 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.”**



**1. Immediately, Satan takes the truth.**

**2 Cor. 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

**2. Quickly, trouble takes the truth.**

**3. Finally, distraction takes the truth.**

**The fruitful exception!**

**"Hear & Accept"**

***Hardened to the truth?***

***Crushed by disappointment?***

***Distracted?***

***1. Pray for fertile hearts***

***2. Live a fruitful life in front of them***

***3. Be patient, like a farmer***

**Pay close attention to the condition  
of your heart.**