

## Mark 4:13-20 (cf. Mt. 13:18-23; Lk 8:11-15)

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?" <sup>14</sup> The farmer plants seed by taking God's word to others. <sup>15</sup> The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. <sup>16</sup> The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. <sup>18</sup> The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, <sup>19</sup> but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. <sup>20</sup> And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" (NLT)

<sup>13</sup> ¿No entienden esta parábola? —continuó Jesús—. ¿Cómo podrán, entonces, entender las demás? <sup>14</sup> El sembrador siembra la palabra. <sup>15</sup> Algunos son como lo sembrado junto al camino, donde se siembra la palabra. Tan pronto como la oyen, viene Satanás y les quita la palabra sembrada en ellos. <sup>16</sup> Otros son como lo sembrado en terreno pedregoso: cuando oyen la palabra, en seguida la reciben con alegría, <sup>17</sup> pero como no tienen raíz, duran poco tiempo. Cuando surgen problemas o persecución a causa de la palabra, en seguida se apartan de ella. <sup>18</sup> Otros son como lo sembrado entre espinos: oyen la palabra, <sup>19</sup> pero las preocupaciones de esta vida, el engaño de las riquezas y muchos otros malos deseos entran hasta ahogar la palabra, de modo que ésta no llega a dar fruto. <sup>20</sup> Pero otros son como lo sembrado en buen terreno: oyen la palabra, la aceptan y producen una cosecha que rinde el treinta, el sesenta y hasta el ciento por uno. (NVI)

<sup>13</sup> Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην καὶ πῶς πάσας τὰς παραβολὰς γνώσεσθε <sup>14</sup> ὁ σπείρων τὸν λόγον σπείρει <sup>15</sup> οὗτοι δὲ εἰσιν οἱ παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν· ὅπου σπείρεται ὁ λόγος καὶ ὅταν ἀκούσωσιν εὐθὺς ἔρχεται ὁ σατανᾶς καὶ αἶρει τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐσπαρμένον εἰς αὐτοῦς <sup>16</sup> καὶ οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ ἐπὶ τὰ πετρώδη σπειρόμενοί οἱ ὅταν ἀκούσωσιν τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς μετὰ χαρᾶς λαμβάνουσιν αὐτόν <sup>17</sup> καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ῥίζαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιροί εἰσιν εἴτα γενομένης θλίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζονται <sup>18</sup> καὶ ἄλλοι εἰσιν οἱ εἰς τὰς ἀκάνθας σπειρόμενοι· οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ τὸν λόγον ἀκούσαντες <sup>19</sup> καὶ αἱ μέρμναι τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλοῦτου καὶ αἱ περὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσπορευόμεναι συμπνίγουσιν τὸν λόγον καὶ ἄκαρπος γίνεται <sup>20</sup> καὶ ἐκεῖνοί εἰσιν οἱ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν σπαρέντες οἵτινες ἀκούουσιν τὸν λόγον καὶ παραδέχονται καὶ καρποφοροῦσιν ἐν τριάκοντα καὶ ἐν ἑξήκοντα καὶ ἐν ἑκατόν (NA28)

### Notes:

#### A. **Setting** {Markan Sandwich}:

- Recall: Jesus is teaching the crowds from a boat in 4:1-9 & 21-33 {the bun}.
- Jesus is teaching the *insiders*: the *twelve* and those with Him (4:10) in a private location in 4:10-20 {the filling}.  
←We are currently in the filling.

#### B. **A parable about parables**—key to understanding all the other parables (4:13).

Recall from previous weeks:

- Insiders* (those with Jesus (v. 10)) are permitted to understand the *secret (mystery)* of the Kingdom of God<sup>1</sup>.
  - Mystery* in this context is **not**:
    - [In the Pythagorean sense] Something that is mysterious because it is too esoteric, complicated, abstract, or mysterious to comprehend or *know*.
    - A mystery that a detective sets out to solve; a mystery that (at least in theory) is solvable with enough clues, evidence, deduction, and cleverness.
  - Mystery* in this context is:
    - (*contra* 1: Pythagorean sense) **something that is comprehensible or knowable** (although like most/all things not omnisciently comprehensible or *knowable*), and
    - (*contra* 2: Detective sense) **something that cannot be deduced** naturalistically (despite how clever we may be)—it must be revealed *supernaturally*, i.e., by God.
    - Mystery* is something that is **knowable** but only by **revelation**.
  - Jesus is the source of revelation regarding the ‘mystery of the Kingdom of God’.
    - Recall: Jesus (thus far in Mark) has progressively defined *insiders* exclusively in terms of Himself: those who are with Him—nothing else counts—no one is automatically an *insider* but all are invited to be *insiders*.
    - Insiders* are with Jesus and therefore have access to the revelation of the mystery by proximity.
- How one *listens* is the key to understanding! Those with ‘ears to hear’ [those listening], will realize that they do not *understand* the parables<sup>2</sup>→therefore, they need further explanation from Jesus→therefore they will *be with* Him, i.e., *insiders*, and they will be around as/when Jesus reveals more—*¡mucho más con el tiempo!*

<sup>1</sup> Recall: Jesus is not attempting to be ‘mysterious’ or enigmatic simply for the sake of; nor is He proving His superiority or divinity by demonstrating the ability to confound; nor is He filtering potential followers based on their ability to solve riddles. Rather, the nature of the topic: The Kingdom of God, and the circumstances involved (recall the twofold necessity to both reveal and conceal the message) necessitates the language and form.

<sup>2</sup> beyond the superficial understanding; recall last week’s ex: *Nathan and David* (2 Sam 12:1-13, esp. vv. 5-6: David’s superficial understanding & v. 13: David’s full understanding).

### C. Interpretation of the Parable of the Farmer/Seed/Soil: The Revelation of the Coming of the Kingdom of God (4:3-8):

- a. **Farmer**—someone who takes God’s word to others (v. 14)<sup>3</sup>.
  - i. **Narrative:** Farmer = Jesus
  - ii. **Mark’s Initial Audience:** Farmer = Christians teaching/preaching/evangelizing/witnessing/etc.
  - iii. **Us:** Farmer = Christians teaching/preaching/evangelizing/witnessing/etc.
- b. **Seed**—God’s Word (v. 14): Revelation of God by God (cf. Jn 1:1-18). Jesus is the ultimate and inerrant revelation [Word] of God<sup>4</sup>, and the Bible is the ultimate and inerrant revelation [Word] of Jesus [the Word] to us.
  - i. **Narrative:** Seed = Jesus (as revealed by Jesus’ words and actions of disclosure, eventually culminating in the understanding of: Jesus [as/is] the Messiah, the Son of God (1:1)<sup>5</sup>. As we have noticed throughout Mark thus far, this [who Jesus is] is a progressive revelatory process<sup>6</sup>).
  - ii. **Mark’s Initial Audience:** Seed = Jesus (as revealed by Christians very close to Jesus, e.g., Peter, Paul, Mark, etc. & available Scripture, e.g., Mark’s Gospel, Paul’s letters, etc.).
  - iii. **Us:** Seed = Jesus (as revealed inerrantly by the full scope of Scripture, i.e., *The Bible*, & secondarily, as revealed, approximately, partially, and errantly by other Christians, the church, literature, reason, experience etc.)<sup>7</sup>.
- c. **Soils**—those who hear the message: “The time promised by God has come at last! [i.e.] The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” (1:14-15)<sup>8</sup>. Reaction to the Seed [the Word] is varied and determines the categorical soil type—this is a picture of Jesus’ contemporary situation:
  - i. Thus far in Mark: many superficially hear (the crowds (3:7-10; 4:1-2; etc.)); some hear and misidentify Jesus, e.g., Pharisees: (3:1-6); scribes: Jesus is possessed by a demon (3:22); Jesus’ family: Jesus is crazy (3:21); etc.; and some are with Him, e.g., the *twelve* and others gathered around Him (4:10).
- d. **Harvest**—(Often in the OT & Jewish literature) a metaphor for the inbreaking of the kingdom of God (e.g., Is 9:3; Ps 126:6).
  - i. Also, “Fruitfulness and the imagery of large yields, was a common OT metaphor portraying the blessings and products of the new age (Jer 31:12; Hos 2:21-22; Joel 2:22; Amos 9:13; Zech 8:12).” (Bock 2005).
- e. **Interaction of the Farmer, Seed, and Soils→Harvest:**
  - i. **Constant:** The Farmer scatters the Seed over the entirety of His field, i.e., all soils (4:4).
  - ii. **Independent Variable:** Reception of the Seed [how one listens].
  - iii. **Dependent Variable:** Soil type & the corresponding Harvest, or lack thereof.
    1. **Soils that produce no Harvest:**
      - a. **Footpath**—“those who hear the message, only to have Satan<sup>9</sup> come at once and take it away” (4:15).
        - i. The Word is discarded *a priori*. No matter what Jesus does or says, the soil justifies a rejected response. The *teachers of religious law* in 3:22 are dangerously approaching this epistemological position (*hardheartedness*).
      - b. **Rocky Soil**—“those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy”, e.g., the crowds (cf. 1:27-28, 33, 37, 45; 2:12; 3:7-10, 20, 32; 4:1, with more to come).
        - i. “But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long.” (cf. Jn 6:1-70, esp. vv. 41, 52, 60-66). This will rapidly become a frequent scenario in Mark. Recall: parables by design, necessitate critical thinking, i.e., work, time, and effort. Like most things worth exploring, Jesus’ identity, purposes, and effects cannot be confined or reduced to casual hearing and passive contemplation. Response has to be grounded in who Jesus is, rather than emotive and/or in what Jesus does and how He makes one feel.

<sup>3</sup> Recall: the three ‘prefatory’ contexts to keep in mind: (1) narrative context (Palestine, c. AD 30); (2) Mark’s Initial Audience (Rome, c. AD 65-70); and (3) us (Puerto Rico, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn 1:18, “revealed” [NLT] (ἐξηγήσατο, *exēgēsato*): narrate, explain, give a detailed report, make fully known; *exegete* etymologically derives from ἐξηγήσατο.

<sup>5</sup> The OT anticipates Jesus (cf. Jn 8:56 et al.) & John the Baptist (via the OT) anticipates Jesus explicitly and identifies Him (1:1-9 par.), which is confirmed by God [the Father & Holy Spirit] (1:10-11). Remember to keep our contextual ‘eye’ on the Prologue.

<sup>6</sup> It is Impossible for Jesus’ contemporaries, including the *insiders*, to sufficiently *know* who He is (beyond nominal titles lacking sufficient definition) until He suffers, dies, is resurrected, and ascends.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, transcendental with respect to all three ‘contexts’ is the Holy Spirit and His directional and effective role in revelation.

<sup>8</sup> Recall, for Mark, this is a (non-exhaustive) summary of Jesus’ teaching/preaching message. Also recall, that *The Kingdom has come* and *is near*, strictly because Jesus is on the scene—because, Jesus is *the Messiah, the Son of God* (1:1).

<sup>9</sup> Mark highlights the fact that Jesus’ mission is not just a call to morality or a revival and/or religious or political movement; rather, He [Jesus] is constantly engaged against the root enemy: supernatural powers opposed to God [evil powers], i.e., Satan and the demonic realm (cf. 1:12-13, 23-28, 34, 39; 3:11-12, 15, 27 thus far—more to come). Satan can and occasionally does, directly (and of course negatively) operate against us [individual human beings] in a personal sense, e.g., Job (cf. Job 1:6-2:7); however, most of the time he doesn’t. Rather, he uses tactics of deceit, leading us into a delusional state, an orientation away from God (cf. Gen 3:1-7)—at which time we no longer need his explicit aid in self-destruction, as we orient ourselves farther from an existence in, and relationship with, God [reality, everything *good*, and life] (cf. Gen 3:8-24). It is wise to take the demonic seriously and not cavalierly (Jesus calls Satan a “strong man” (3:27a); we are not bound to Satan’s dominion solely because Jesus is (infinitely) stronger (3:27b)); however, let’s not give him [Satan] too much credit either (and/or avoid the accepting on our part, of the consequences of our sins). Too often humanity blame shifts Satan—we divert attention and blame towards Satan—we are guilty of much and we need to “Repent of [y]our sins and believe the Good News!” (1:15), and accept many of the consequences in life as being resultant of our actions contrary to life as God created it—we can’t ‘blame the enemy’ for our failures; nor is it helpful—God is the only remedy.

- ii. “They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.”<sup>10</sup>
  - c. **Thorn Inhabiting Soil**—“others who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out”
    - i. “by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things”.
    - ii. The plant apparently survives, but it produces no harvest.
- 2. **Soils that produce Harvest:**
  - a. **Good Soil**—“those who hear and accept God’s word”—“accompany Him”, i.e., **be His disciples** (cf. 3:14b),
    - i. “and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times<sup>11</sup> as much as had been planted!”—“and do His work”, i.e., **make disciples** (cf. 3:14c).
- iv. **Results:** All soil hears the Word (God distributes liberally without distinction to all); the differentiation of soils is determined by the those who receive: “hear and *accept*” (4:20) the Word (a continual action). Hearing is our responsibility, and it requires continual relationship with Jesus: openness, maintenance, activity, reception of, and alignment with.
  - 1. Soils are defined in terms of their reaction (reception or rejection) with the Seed [Word] and confirmed by the harvest (or lack thereof); the reaction is not predetermined, i.e., we are not inherently or fundamentally footpath, rocky, thorn inhabiting, or good soil; rather, our current soil type is a dynamic product of our life up to this point<sup>12</sup>.
  - 2. Soil is not static, it evolves. We can maximize the chance of fruitful seed; we can pick rocks; we can weed the thorns—we can improve our soil conditions (and the Farmer is willing and able to help). We can also neglect our soil and become apathetic and/or inviting toward foreign seeds encroaching on and growing in our soil—our soil can regress (cf. Hos 10, esp. 10:12; Lk 6:47-48; Augustine: *Sermons on New Testament Lessons* 73.3<sup>13</sup>).
  - 3. Our soil condition, present and future, directly affects the eventual Harvest (which includes Salvation and Judgement). “Whether one is hard-hearted, softhearted, distracted, or attentive will affect how and whether one receives the message<sup>14</sup> that Jesus is proclaiming.” (Witherington III 2001).
- f. **The Thrust of the Parable**—The bountiful Harvest: God’s Kingdom is being announced, is inaugurated, and will prevail<sup>15</sup>. Despite failure, wrongly perceived success, and at times, perhaps, appearance to the contrary<sup>16</sup>, “The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near<sup>17</sup>” (1:15)—solely because: “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (1:1).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Athanasius: *Letter 19.7, Easter AD 347*, where the metaphor is intensified (Oden and Hall 1998).

<sup>11</sup> These harvest figures are extraordinary, but not hyperbolically exaggerated, i.e., within (or perhaps slightly beyond) the reality of possible harvests. The literature is fairly diverse; cf. (Edwards 2002); (Garland 2015); (Lane 1974); (Stein 2008); (Wessel 1984); (Witherington III 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Actually, fundamentally, collective humanity was good soil (cf. Gen. 1:27, 31), that unfortunately is now (unaccompanied by grace) polluted and completely inhospitable to life (cf. Rom in general, esp. Rom 7:14-25, among many others)—by grace however, God restores our soil (to the degree that we allow), i.e., to use Mark’s language: all are *outsiders* (or to use Paul’s language: “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Rom 3:23)) but all are invited and able to become *insiders*. In Palestine, often sowing would precede plowing (or: plowing, sowing, and then plowing again); this mechanically converted footpath, rocky, and weed-infested soils into good soil adequate to receive seed and produce harvest. God does this with us!

<sup>13</sup> (Oden and Hall 1998)

<sup>14</sup> The announcement of, invitation into, and means to enter the Kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> “This parable is more than a metaphor for various human states of reception and attitude; it represents the historical inbreaking of God’s kingdom in Jesus, the sower of the gospel” (Edwards 2002). The details regarding the various soils could be seen as a footnote of grace—which helps us personally to identify our current state of hearing (and consequently, our current relationship with the Kingdom), and modify it accordingly.

<sup>16</sup> The appearance of, and despair over, conflict and rejection, as well as the excitement of apparent (but false) success.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus is announcing the Kingdom and defining the Kingdom, in many respects, in very different terms than those in which the Kingdom was expected or anticipated to be in: The Kingdom is looking much less like a political entity, and much more like a family (cf. 3:33-35); the kingdom is looking much less like the anticipated and longed for military overthrow of the Roman Empire and the House of Herod—it is rather much more like a seed...