



The Sower, the Seed, and the Soils

Key idea:

The parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils teaches the secret of the Kingdom of God - that it has broken into the world in the Person, teaching, and work of Jesus, that is rejected by many, but that the Word of Jesus will bear great fruit in the lives of those who hear and embrace it.

Key text:

Mark 4:1-20

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."

Key points:

1. The parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils is given unique priority among the parables of Jesus and is critical for our understanding of Jesus, His ministry, His Kingdom, and our own faithfulness as His disciples.
2. Jesus tells us that this parable (and the others) center on the secret/mystery of the Kingdom of God.
3. The parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils reveals several things about the secret/mystery of the Kingdom:
 - a. The Kingdom of God has arrived in the Person, teaching, and work of Jesus the Messianic King.
 - b. The King and His Kingdom act in an unexpected manner and are thus rejected by many.
 - c. The King and His Kingdom are hidden from those on the 'outside' (who reject Jesus, His teaching, and His work) but revealed to those on the 'inside' (who embrace Jesus, His teaching, and His work in faith).
 - d. Although the Kingdom has arrived with Jesus, it will face much opposition, but will also bear great fruit in the lives of those who recognize and embrace Jesus as the King.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. When I read this parable in the past, did I put my focus on the sower, the seed, or the soils? Why? What are the advantages of this approach? What are the disadvantages?
3. How does reading this parable primarily about the Kingdom of God (and especially the 'secret/mystery' of the Kingdom) change the way I read and understand it?
4. Why did so many refuse to recognize that Jesus is the Messianic King and that the Kingdom arrived with Him?
5. What experiences in my life make it hard to remember that the Kingdom of God has arrived and is growing and bearing fruit already?

6. What do I learn from the fact that the sower spreads the seed so liberally? What does it teach me about God that He is willing to spread the seed of His Kingdom in soil that is so unreceptive?
7. What temptation do I face when I share the Word and so many seem uninterested or even hostile to it? Should this rejection surprise me? How should I respond to it?
8. Jesus mentions three causes of the Word not being received and bearing fruit - Satan, opposition and persecution from the world, and the desires of the flesh. Which of these causes me the greatest struggle in receiving the Word so that it bears fruit in my life?
9. How can understating this parable help me to hear and receive God's Word and then to live faithfully in the midst of a world that rejects Jesus and His Kingdom?
10. Who will I call or see to invite to gather with the church this week?