

1. **Introduction:** Jesus completed the parable of the 4 soils. The crowd left for a time. His disciples asked questions.
2. **Mark 4:10-12:** *“And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹²so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”*
 - Jesus opened the parable with “Listen!” Interestingly, He now says He speaks in parables so that people may hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven. My first thought was that was startling.
 - What does Jesus’ mean? Consider the two OT passages He alludes to.
 - Jeremiah 5:21: *“Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not.”*
 - Ezekiel 12:2: *“Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.”*
 - In each case alluded to, God speaks through a prophet to warn Israel of their impending exile to Babylon.
 - But people with a stubborn rebellious heart attitude have ears to hear but willingly refuse to accept the message and believe.
 - An attitude of unwillingness to understand is what Jesus’ concern. The difficulty is not a physical hearing disability, nor intellectual inability to understand. It is a simple problem of “I will not.”
 - So, Jesus speaks in parables. Those who want to understand will ask questions and Jesus will answer.
 - Persons predisposed to reject the truth spoken by Jesus willfully and consistently misunderstand the parables. Often the ones who don’t want to understand were the most educated and learned.
 - The rebellious deliberately distort the Word of God and consequently miss out on the divine blessings of God’s special grace.
 - In modern terms, Jesus was not “seeker-friendly.” Yet, He was always gracious and open with serious seekers.
 - Trying to share truth with those who willfully and rebelliously resist that truth is a fruitless enterprise but one we are called to carry out anyway.
3. **Mark 4:13-20:** *“And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵And 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. ¹⁶And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.*

¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹but 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. ²⁰But 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.”

- Jesus’ explanation of this parable provides an interpretive key for understanding all His parables. Some story elements always correlate with spiritual truths, but not every detail has spiritual meaning.
- In this parable, it is interesting that Jesus does not identify the sower.
- He does point out that the soil symbolizes people (their spiritual hearts).
- (1.) Jesus uses this parable to teach that there are some who hear the gospel whose hearts are as hard as the soil of a beaten path. The Word never penetrates their heart.
- They are people who may hear God’s Word preached but pay little attention. The words preached produce no more effect on them than water on a stone. They continue unchanged.
- (2.) Then there are some hearers of the Gospel whose hearts are like rocky ground with a layer of thin soil.
- Hearing the Word produces temporary effects in rocky heart soil, but no deep, lasting, and abiding effect. They find church interesting, the people nice, the fellowship good, but they have inadequate roots and fall away in the face of conflict or affliction of any sort.
- (3.) There are some hearers whose hearts are like thorny ground. The seed of the word germinates in their hearts but cannot compete with worldly desires. It is choked out by ***“the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things.”***
- They could be productive Christians, but their priorities focus on things that keep them from seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven and its King.
- (4.) There are some hearers whose hearts are like deep rich topsoil.
- They hear, believe, and obey. Sin is truly hated, resisted, and renounced. Christ is truly loved, trusted, loved, and obeyed.
- While differing in degree from person to person, there will always be visible repentance, visible faith, and visible holiness.
- They will clearly be branches of the vine which is Christ. They will produce good fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some a hundred-fold.

4. **Mark 4:21-24:** *“And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? ²²For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.”*
- The gospel seed sown in fertile heart soil releases the power of the Word and produces a bountiful harvest.
 - The Word shining forth like a bright lamp produces light that is a fruitful benefit to many. Both metaphors show the productive power of the Word to those who will hear and see and believe.
 - Believers are not to hold the gospel to themselves but share it by sowing gospel seeds or lighting lamps of truth.
5. **Mark 4:23-25:** *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” ²⁴And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. ²⁵For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”*
- Jesus has been speaking truth about the seed and light of the gospel.
 - He now says, *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”*
 - The saying about “measures” refers not to material or financial things, but to how we measure and deal with truth.
 - If we abuse truth by distorting a truth or misrepresenting an untruth as being true (like claiming good is bad or vice versa), the way we choose to measure truth is the way what we say will be measured.
 - This is a warning to be intentional and discerning toward accepting something as true. Evaluate what you hear carefully. Know how to extract truth and sift out the false.
 - The scribes from Jerusalem accused Jesus of begin possessed by Beelzebul and by Beelzebul’s power was casting out demons. No truth that statement as Jesus proved, but without doubt some believed it.
 - The *“pay attention”* comment means to be careful what you position yourself to hear (see Psalm 1). Avoid malicious gossip and people who preach a false gospel. Listen to the Scripture and meditate on it.
6. **Mark 4:26-29:** *“And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”*
- Verses 26 and 27 remind us that God is the author of physical growth.
 - We know our part in making growth possible – planting good seed in good soil at the right time. But we do not know the how of germination and growth to maturity.

- That's the way it is with spiritual growth. God's kingdom on earth comes to pass from seed planted by the hearing of the gospel.
 - Concerning how that seed germinates and begins to grow, we know very little. We do know it is the Holy Spirit who makes it possible.
 - The harvest will come at the right time, when all the purposed seed has been planted, germinated, and grown to maturity.
7. **Mark 4:30-32**: *“And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*
- The question Jesus asks here is an oratorical technique designed to arouse interest. The previous parable illustrated the slow process of growth of the kingdom of God on earth to the point of harvest.
 - The current parable illustrates its surprising initial growth.
 - Jesus says initially the kingdom will grow like the plant that comes from the tiny mustard seed. It quickly grows to be larger than all the garden plants, so large that birds can make nests in its shade.
 - The kingdom of God on earth began with Jesus. He gathered 12 disciples and many followers during His few years of ministry.
 - After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, there was a group of about 100 believers. Many were added on Pentecost. Within a single generation, this small group of spirit-filled witnesses multiplied and carried the gospel throughout most of the Roman Empire.
 - Jesus became incarnate to initiate His kingdom. Kingdom citizens are encouraged to actively participate in the kingdom culture.
 - The consummation of Jesus' kingdom is yet future. When He comes again, Jesus will come as reigning King of kings and Lord of lords.
8. **Mark 4:33-34**: *“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.*
- Mark closes this part of the gospel with a summary of this phase of Jesus' earthly ministry.
 - Jesus continues to speak in parables winnowing true followers from those who willfully resisted hearing and accepting the truth.