

Living the “Good Soil” Life. .. Mark 4: 1-24...

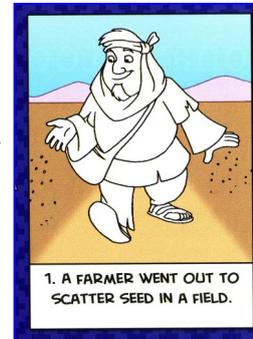
- It is amazing to watch a “tractor” flying over fields at 200 klm per hour sowing rice seed. The “Air Tractor” – a purpose built aircraft for agricultural use – was sowing seed on fields filled with water to a depth of 10-15 cm. The seed itself has been pre-wetted for 24 hours and then dried for 24 hours – beginning the germination process - is then scattered onto the water surface by the aircraft where it sinks to the good soil below and continues to grow. Minimal numbers of seeds fell on hard or unprepared soil because of the accuracy of the GPS...
- As I observed this modern method of sowing rice I am reminded of a story, a parable which Jesus told over 2000 years ago...



1. Teaching with _____ 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. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in His teaching said: 3 “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.

- Jesus the teacher—He had no powerpoint, no whiteboard, no books, no teaching aids .. Yet, He is by far the greatest teacher the world has ever known. Think of stories like the “Good Samaritan”, the “Prodigal Son” and now the Parable of the “Four soils” - passed down to us through the centuries. It's recorded in 3 out of 4 Gospels. It's one of the only parables that Jesus spends any time explaining. This parable gets to the heart of Jesus' own ministry on earth: Matthew 28:18–20...sharing the Good News and making disciples.
- What is a parable? παραβολη ... parable comes from two Greek words that mean “to cast alongside” (παρα —alongside; βολη —to throw or cast). A parable is a story that teaches something new by putting the truth alongside something familiar. A parable starts off as a picture that is familiar to the listeners. eg the sower sowing his crop. It is not just a story with a moral and meaning, but a story with a “mirror” in it—in which one may see oneself!
- This explains why some of our Lord's listeners became angry when they heard His parables they saw themselves reflected in the mirror! However, if we see ourselves as needy sinners and ask for help, then the mirror becomes a window through which we see God and His grace. To understand a parable and benefit from it demands honesty and humility on our part... “Lord, what are you saying to me?”



2. Parables — a _____ component. Mark 4: 10-13.

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!” Then Jesus said to them, “Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”

- A parable is not just a story with a moral/meaning/mirror—a but also a “mystery” in it,

- vs 12... *so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”* seems to suggest that parables were used to make the meaning obscure. No! Jesus knew very well that not everyone will respond to Him. It was just as Isaiah had prophesied long ago: some would see the Christ, but not perceive who He was; some would hear Christ’s words, but not understand. When speaking in parables Jesus was not hiding truth from sincere seekers. Only to the resistant they were stories without meaning. .. This is part of the mystery of it all.
- Some listeners were hungry for truth... others there just for the entertainment. Jesus sorted them out by using parables... Jesus wanted to teach/preach the Good News and Kingdom of God principles. . Jesus wanted to give people what they needed and not what they wanted. Our greatest need is forgiveness—because we are sinners we need a Saviour.
- The same is true with preaching the Word of God today. Matthew 28:18-20, In all the ministries of KFBC we are to share the Word of God—eg the Word of God is on leaflets in the Samaritan Purse boxes (inserted at the country of destination) being sent off at the moment—otherwise we are just a social group. Take advantage of opportunities.. eg If you are a grandparent what Christmas gifts are you buying for grandchildren? There are excellent Christian books/videos to give..

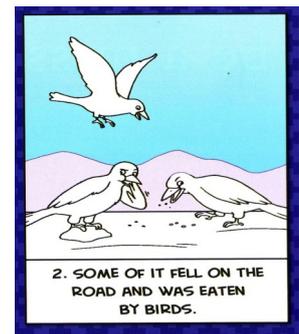


The four types of soil represent different responses to God’s Word.

a). The _____ heart Mark 4:4; 15

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.*

- The hard heart. Mark 4:4,15... A pathway is hard because of people walking on it constantly.



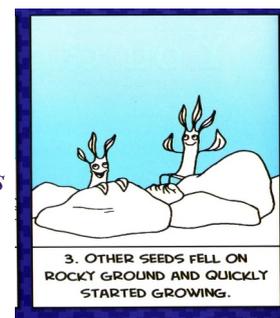
Now Jesus explains to the disciples: Mark 4:13 *“Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.*

- Jesus is saying that many people are indifferent or even hostile to the Word of God—their hearts are hard. They resist the Word of God and make it easy for the birds (Satan) to snatch it away. They think Jesus is irrelevant and can get on well without Him.
- But what about the 3 big questions of life? ... Hebrews 9:27ff Parents—teach God’s Word to your children from an early age—live out your faith in front of them. ... Bed time Bible stories to toddlers (and older) are fantastic. 80% of those who follow Jesus do so by the age of 15. Often the longer people live the harder their hearts become.

b). The _____ heart Mark 4:5,6; 16,17

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*

- 2. The shallow heart. Vs 5-6, 16-17. This heart is like thin soil on



-not much soil amidst the rocks.. What is planted does not last because the roots are shallow. Some people decide to follow Jesus but when tough times come they fall away....

Jesus explains further: *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.*

- Without good roots, a plant is doomed. Come a week without rain, and it'll wither in the hot sun. Some people misunderstand Jesus. They think He comes to take away our troubles! Or maybe we love the feeling of God's amazing love, or the emotion of vibrant worship, or the excitement of serving others. However when our faith is based only on good feelings, or our special experiences—it can't endure. If you always need another "high," another intense experience, then our faith will be short-lived. Our faith needs good roots drawing on the sustenance of His Word to keep hanging in there during the times of trial...

c). The _____ heart . Mark 4:7;18,19.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain

3. The crowded heart.. Mark 4:7, 18-19. This soil pictures the person who receives the Word but does not truly repent and remove the "weeds" out of his heart. Things easily push Jesus away from first place...

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.

The things of the world (weeds) smother the growth and prevent a harvest.

- Weed of wrong use of time.... eg too much TV/computer
- Weed of not regularly reading the Bible.... praying
- Weed of not regularly worshipping with others....it is easy to do all sorts of things on Sunday and not go to Sunday school/worship . Hebrews 10:24,25
- Weed of putting money/material things first
- Weed of bad language "Foul Mouthed Mary"
- Weed of immoral thoughts.. say no to pornography etc

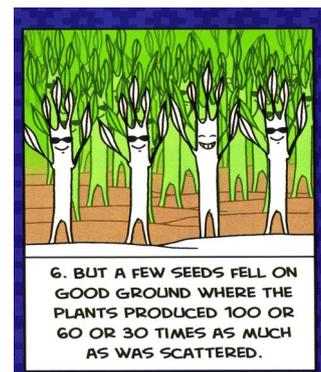
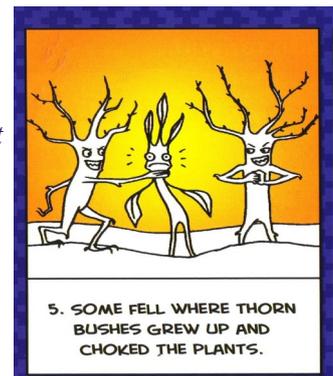
d). The _____ heart Mark 4:8..

. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times. 9 Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear"

4. The fruitful heart Mark 4: 8,9 ; 20.

20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

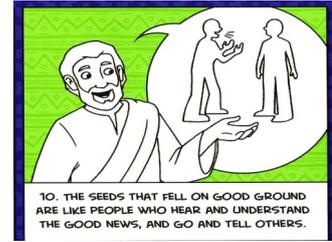
- This heart pictures the true believer—because fruit—a changed life—is the evidence of true salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:19-23)



- Only one heart out of the four produced fruit....

Some practical ways we can have a fruitful (good soil) heart

- Get alongside some one at school or in the community who needs a friend.. Be a friend.. And share the Good News with “gentleness and respect”.. 1 Peter 3:15.
- Write a letter or email someone who you know is lonely or sick. Do a “random act of kindness!” for someone....
- Help at home when asked... even when you are not asked!
- Say “hi” to a neighbour—loan a DVD (Verve—some of the Nick Vujicic story).
-
- Read the Bible often so you can remember some of the verses to help others
- Invite a friend to church/Sunday school... be a Sunday school teacher. (Max McDonald)
- Have a “quiet time” with Jesus each day... where you can pray to Him and read a verse/s from the Bible—and perhaps share that verse with someone else
- Volunteer to be a leader at youth group
- Become part of a home group/Bible study group.. Etc..



Conclusion

- Jesus said the soils represented different types of people. “Hard path” people don’t care or are indifferent to what Jesus teaches. The “rock” people have a shallow heart and soon fall away from Jesus when things get tough. The “choked out by weeds” people allow worries or busyness or materialism to squeeze Jesus out of their lives. “Good soil” people follow Jesus and serve enthusiastically no matter what happens in the journey of life. Jesus’ story about the four soils is old but it is very modern in its relevance.
- The question remains for all of us – what type of “soil” am I? The “good soil” person produces “fruit” for the benefit of others for now and eternity. William Wilberforce was a selfish, hedonistic and atheistic Parliamentarian until the age of 25 and then became a follower of Jesus. A “great change” occurred in his life as he became “Christ centred” and therefore more other centred rather than selfish. He laboured for over forty years in a very hostile English Parliament to eventually get legislation through which led to the abolishing of slavery in England which then impacted the whole British Empire. Wilberforce continued to work on a host of social reforms – including prison reforms, child protection, helped initiate the RSPCA and the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The whole world was to benefit from the “good soil” in William Wilberforce’s life. May each of us be “good soil” people as we serve and live Christ honouring lives. “We ask for Your help to do this please Lord!”