

1 **In His Steps: What Soil are You? (Part 1)**

Mark 4:3-12 NLT

2 **You'll notice that I'm splitting this message into two parts.**

- There is so much here that we don't want to rush it.
- Today we'll take verses 3-12, and then follow up with 13-20.

3 **Last week we followed in the steps of Jesus as he healed the paralytic lowered through the roof of a home in Capernaum.**

- We discovered contagious faith as the faith of the man's friends was a catalyst for Jesus healing their friend.
- We saw how Jesus used the opportunity to heal the man's deepest need first – his need for forgiveness.
- But then the Pharisees challenged Jesus, rightly pointing out that only God can forgive sins.
- And to meet the challenge of the Pharisees, Jesus then healed the man's paralysis to show that as God himself, the unique Son of God, he had the authority to forgive sins and to heal.
- Jesus's healing and teaching inspired contagious faith in the paralytic, his friends, the disciples and the crowd.

4 **Today, we find Jesus continuing his preaching and teaching ministry in Galilee, this time teaching in parables.**

- Now what are parables and why did Jesus use them?
- Are they just interesting stories used to hold interest?

5 **The word parable comes from the idea of "to set along side."**

6 **As Jesus used parables, it means to set a spiritual truth alongside a daily truth of living.**

- It takes skill to make a good parable.
- Sometimes the things we use to explain or illustrate work against us instead of for us.
- Here are some examples from High School students of bad analogies in essays:
 - "His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underwear in a dryer without Cling Free."
 - "The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't."
 - "From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and "Jeopardy" comes on at 7 p.m. instead of 7:30."
 - "She caught your eye like one of those pointy hook latches that used to dangle from screen doors and would fly up whenever you banged the door open again."
 - "John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met."

7 **Jesus said, ³"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed.⁴ As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it.**

8 **⁵ Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died.**

9 **⁷ Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"**

- 10 **9 Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."**
- 11 **In this parable, Jesus described something they were all familiar with - a farmer casting seed on the ground, and the seed falling on different types of soil.**
- The seed fell on three areas without lasting success: on the pathway, on the rocky ground, and on the thorny ground. But some of the seed fell on good ground.
 - Now, why wouldn't the farmer only cast seed on good soil?
 - Here's why. Some fell on the pathway by accident, but most of the seed was sown on ground that was plowed after the seed was cast.
 - Why's that important? As a farmer, you didn't know where rocks were or where thorns might grow.
- 12 **And here's the thing - though this is commonly called *the parable of the sower*, it should really be called *the parable of the soils*. The difference is never the *seed*, but the kind of *soil* it lands on.**
- 13 **10 Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.**
- 14 **11 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders,**
- 15 **12 so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:**
- 'When they see what I do,
they will learn nothing.
When they hear what I say,
they will not understand.
Otherwise, they will turn to me
and be forgiven.'**
- 16 **What's that all about?**
- That sounds pretty harsh – not like gentle, loving, compassionate Jesus.
 - Is Jesus trying to hide the good news?
 - Why would he want to keep it a secret?
- 17 **Why? Because he understands the nature of the human heart.**
- Jesus said he was like a fisher of men and have you noticed that most fish don't respond to a direct invitation.
 - When's the last time you watched Bassmaster and heard the bass pro say, "Attention, Attention, all fish now proceed to the net!
 - No, it's up to the fish to decide how and when it comes.
- 18 **The disciples, who wanted the things of God, could be spoken to plainly. But often, others were taught with parables.**
- Here's a crucial point: In the Bible, a mystery or secret isn't something you can't figure out.
 - It is something that you would never know unless God revealed it to you.
 - In the Biblical sense of the idea, you may know exactly what a mystery is, yet it is still a mystery, because your mind has not been opened and illuminated by the Spirit.
 - And listen close - you have a part in that and God's Spirit has a part.
 - It's what Methodists call prevenient grace, meaning you would have never understood it unless God's Spirit allowed you to, which He is very willing to do if you are truly open.
 - It's up to you – the soil.
- 19 **And that's the way Jesus approached it.**
- 20 **9 Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."**

- 21 **Jesus kicked the story back to his hearers.**
- As an audience, we're used to critiquing the preacher and the message.
 - Jesus says, "No – this message critiques you." Do you have the kind of ears that can understand?
 - The natural tendency is for the audience to critique the preacher. But here, Jesus the preacher critiques His audience. The issue is how well they will hear, not how well He will preach.
- 22 **So that's the question we leave with today, "What soil are you?"**
- How well do you hear?
 - Do you have the kind of ears that can hear?
 - As we come to the Lord's table today, ask yourself that question.
- 23 ***Acknowledgement to David Gusik and his excellent commentary on the Book of Mark for many concepts in this sermon.**