

四种福音听众—马可福音 4:1-20 (下)

Four Types of Gospel Hearers – Mark 4:1-20 (2)

Introduction, outline

- Scripture reading: Mark 4:1-20; Acts 13:42-52.

Mark 4:1-20 (NASB 1995)

1 He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 “Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” 9 And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” 10 As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. 11 And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, 12 so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.” 13 And He *said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

Acts 13:42-52 (NASB 1995)

42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were [aa]blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’” 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading

men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

- Why do people have such varied responses when the same gospel message is preached to them? Why do some people show great interest but ultimately end up not believing? Is it because I haven't conveyed it well enough? Is the gospel message itself not good enough?
- Outline:

Title: **Four Types of Gospel Hearers**

1. Background (vv.13-14)
2. The Road-side Hard Soil Hearers (v.15)
3. The Rocky-ground Shallow Soil Hearers (vv.16-17)
4. The Weed-infested Choky Soil Hearers (vv.18-19)
5. The High-yielding Good Soil Hearers (vv. 20)

Background (vv.13-14)

- "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?": The disciples need to grasp these truths! They are builders of God's kingdom, fishers of men to bring people into the kingdom. They need to understand the mystery of the kingdom and how God will fulfill it through their work. The disciples will encounter different responses as they proclaim the gospel message and they need to know why it is so.

This statement also indicates that understanding this parable is key to interpreting the other parables in this chapter. These parables are interconnected, revolving around the same theme: the mystery of the kingdom of God. These parables are about the expansion of God's kingdom and the disciples' mission to proclaim the gospel. They address things like what they should do and what results they should expect.

- "The sower": The disciples are, of course, good soil to begin with, but this parable is about their responsibility to preach the gospel! The application for Christians today should not be just "what kind of soil am I?" In this parable, the disciples are the ones sowing the seed!

【Insight】 The passage does not give any additional description of the sower. The outcome of sowing does not depend on the sower's attire, physical appearance, or the sowing technique they use. Whether the sower is dressed in a suit and tie or in casual clothing, it does not affect the growth of the seed at all. The results of preaching the gospel are not determined by the charisma of the preacher, their intelligence or eloquence, the emotional effect of music, or whether there is a passionate altar call at the end. The sower's sole task is to sow the seed, and the seed is the message of the gospel.

- "The seed is the word": If the seed being sown is not the true gospel, then whatever grows out of it is certainly not the fruit of the gospel. Please do not perform any genetic modification to the seed of the gospel.

【Caution】 If all you want is to increase yield, just modify the seed of the gospel message and you're guaranteed to see more professing faith. You can knock out judgment and only preach blessings; you can preach a heaven without hell; you can say God loves sinners but not say He hates sin. Just knock out all the elements that people don't want to hear. You can modify the genuine faith of carrying the cross daily to

follow the Lord into a mere intellectual acceptance of a set of doctrines or finding an emotional sensation or just reciting a simple prayer without demanding any actual change in one's life. Seeds that undergo such genetic modifications will surely bear something that's not the gospel fruit.

The Road-side Hard Soil Hearers (v.15)

- “These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown.” These hearts are impenetrable, totally uninterested in the truth. The religious leaders who are present at this scene belong to this category.

【Example】 I once tried to share the gospel with a relative. Every time, she was willing to listen, nodding and smiling as if she understood. When I asked her why she still wouldn't believe, she couldn't give any reason. A couple days later, I'd mention something we just talked about, and she'd act as if she never heard it before, completely forgetting everything I said, and I had to start from the beginning all over again! After several attempts like this, I finally realized that she was a hard soil beside the road! Of course, God can change her into good soil, but when someone's heart is hard like that, there is nothing you can do. It's as if your words bounce right off, entering one ear and going out the other.

“They go to a place of worship, for form or fashion, or to appear respectable before men. But they take no interest whatever in the preaching. It seems to them a mere matter of words and names, and unintelligible talk. It is neither money, nor food, nor drink, nor clothes, nor company; and as they sit under the sound of it, they are taken up with thinking of other things. It matters nothing whether it is Law or Gospel...”---A pastor

The Rocky-ground Shallow Soil Hearers (vv.16-17)

- "Immediately receive it with joy": We certainly hope everyone receives the message with joy! So, this type of hearers is the most deceptive. Their issue is not with joy but with the word "immediately." "Immediately it sprang up" (verse 5) but "have no firm root in themselves."

【Attention】 Joy is not necessarily evidence of salvation! Joy is an emotion which is affected by a variety of factors and may not necessarily be the fruit of the Holy Spirit or proof of salvation. In fact, a genuinely born-again person more likely will first experience emotions such as sorrow and grief (James 4:9), for this is the first time in their entire life when they truly realize the reality of their own sin. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is to convict a person of his sin, and that's not a very joyful experience (John 16:8-11)!

- "Temporary" - It's like a momentary burst of enthusiasm that fades quickly because there is no deep-rooted understanding of the truth of the gospel. The expression of joy is superficial and merely an illusion because there is no genuine comprehension.
- "when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away." - What exposes their true nature is affliction or persecution. This also reveals that their initial joy was not about the eternal well-being of their souls but rather the temporal benefits of their earthly lives. When obedience to the gospel means a loss to their earthly benefits, they immediately turn away. From the beginning, they were never truly born again and saved. Their pursuit was not God's glory but rather their superficial satisfaction.

The Weed-infested Choky Soil Hearers (vv.18-19)

- “sown among the thorns”: Thorns are the most hated weeds because they grow too fast. Before the seed has a chance to sprout, the thorns have already taken over, sucking up all the water and nutrients from the soil. Thorns represent all kinds of sinful and worldly lusts.
- “the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things”: These individuals have never truly overcome any sinful desires at all. They may have occasionally suppressed them by sheer willpower so they don’t show up on the outside. In reality, they have never truly conquered their sinful desires because they lack the ability to do so, as the Holy Spirit is not in them.

“Choke”: A vivid image. It literally means to cause suffocation, such as by pressing tightly on one’s neck. These desires grip tightly around the hearts of those who hear the message. They may think they’ve got the gospel message and made a sincere commitment to follow it, but whenever their efforts to obey hinder the fulfillment of their sinful desires, these desires grow stronger and more aggressive, fiercely choking their willpower to follow the truth. This kind of life is joyless, and eventually, they give up all pretense and reveal that their true master has always been their various desires and that they have never truly confessed Christ as their Lord.

- “becomes unfruitful”: The word “becomes” implies they once seemed to be bearing fruit! When they were seemingly bearing fruit, no one knew the truth, until they eventually stop pretending. They no longer read the Bible, pray, attend church, or share the gospel. They no longer show any sign of pursuing the Lord. It is only then that you know they were never truly born again to begin with.

Matthew 24:13 “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

1 Timothy 6:10 “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

The High-yielding Good Soil Hearers (vs. 20)

- “bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold”: The supernatural harvest. In that time, the average harvest was around 7.5 times the seed sown, and a harvest of 10 times was considered excellent. For the disciples who were about to be sent out to preach, this was Jesus’ key point for them to know! Why should they go and sow the seed? Because some seed will surely fall on good soil and produce an unexpectedly abundant harvest!
In fact, any good work out of genuine faith is a supernatural harvest, even if all you’ve got is an initial prayer of confession on the deathbed. As long as it is borne out of true faith, it is completely supernatural because sinners cannot produce any genuine fruit on their own.

The three kinds of harvest is not about comparing between genuine believers. Whatever the amount, it is all by God's grace a supernatural harvest! The key point is that this harvest is accomplished through the sowing work of the sower. God’s plan is to reap a harvest beyond imagination through the proclamation of the gospel! You go and sow the seed in faith, and God will astonish you with a final harvest beyond anything you can imagine!

Application Summary

What kind of soil are you? If you are good soil, are you busy sowing the seed? How much do you truly desire the harvest of the kingdom of God?