

**Mark 4:1-20 Final**  
 The Gospel of Mark  
 Sunday Morning

**4.8.18**

**INTRO**

Some of you might remember a months-long event that began on one day in September of 2005. The **Jutland Post** (Danish newspaper) published 12 **political cartoons** where the majority of them depicted the Islamic prophet **Muhammed** in different ways. Now, Muslims don't allow Muhammed to be represented through images; it's **taboo**. The Jutland Post said they were trying to contribute to the worldwide discussion about Islam and particularly **self-censorship**.

If you remember, these cartoons of Muhammed were **polarizing**, ignited responses that fell on both sides of the argument and ultimately led to protests and bans on **Danish goods**.

**Supporters** of the cartoons argued for **free speech** and **free press**.

**Critics** argued that they were **blasphemous** to Muslims and promoted **racism**, **Islamophobia**, and **stereotyping**.

My guess is that you had an opinion or **even now maybe** are trying to think through where you'd land on that issue.

The point is that these political cartoons **forced the readers to think**, and in many ways didn't allow for middle ground, you landed on one side or the other.

And Church, this is exact same thing that Jesus' parables are meant to do. Parables are Jesus' **signature teaching style** in which he speaks of everyday things that tend to knock people **off kilter** and force them to **land on one side or the other**.

They function like this political cartoon. Every parable the Jesus speaks is meant to force the hearer to choose, they are meant to get you and I as readers to respond and react. They are **challenging, uncomfortable**, hard saying that force the hearer to **make a choice**.

And the **Parable of the Sower** is not just the epitome of this reality, it's the perfect example this reality. As we walk through this text today we're going to see that there is a **premium** in this **parable on hearing**, because **everyone hears** what Jesus says but how they respond to this is of **utmost importance**.

There are some who hear the good news of Jesus and they **reject it** or even **oppose it**. Others who hear the good news of Jesus and accept it and are ultimately **changed by it**. There is no middle ground. You either **accept him** or **reject him**.

And what we'll see is that **a true disciple of Jesus is one who accepts him and is changed by him.** If there's one thing for you to remember this morning it's that reality.

So, we'll walk through this lengthy but familiar passage this morning in Mark 4:1-20 looking at what Jesus means by hearing and responding, noticing there's one two responses anyone can have to him, and then we'll see at the end that bearing fruit as disciples **comes from being with him and being like him.**

So, let's read this polarizing, challenging, and uncomfortable text and then we'll unpack it together. May God doing with His Word what he will this morning:

*Mark 4:1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

*Mark 4:10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that  
"they may indeed see but not perceive,  
and may indeed hear but not understand,  
lest they should turn and be forgiven."*

*Mark 4:13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And 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. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And 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.\* 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but 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. 20 But 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."*

If you glance back at the end of chapter 3, you might remember that the last time we left Jesus he was in Peter's house and there was a clear division. His family was on the outside of the house and his followers were on the inside. This kind of division in who believes in Him is drawn out more here.

But here we've left that house and Jesus is back at the Sea of Galilee teaching. And once again, a very large crowd has gathered about him (which probably doesn't do anything to calm his mother and brother's fears about him being out of his mind) and Jesus gets into a boat which is sitting in the water by the shore and he begins to teach. Likely he was at a place on the seaside which is now called the Bay of Parables because it is a natural amphitheater where it's said that a normal person can speak in a normal speaking voice and a thousand people could hear him.

So, he's in a boat, speaking to the crowd and he begins to tell this large crowd a parable.

But if you look, before he teaches he commands them to **Listen!** How they respond to what they hear matters. And if you look, he ends this parable with the phrase: "He who has ears, let him hear."

This is a bookend meaning that it's really important that they hear and accept what they hear.

The parable is a farming one.

- A sower (farmer) plants seed by throwing it into the soil.
- The sower isn't careful on where the seed goes, he is generous and seemingly careless with where he's tossing the seed. He is throwing the seed in as many places as he can.
- And Jesus tells us that this seed falls on 4 types of soil and the fate of each seed depends on which type of soil it lands:
  - **Path** – never takes hold because the birds eat it. The soil is too packed. There's no grain from this seed.
  - **Rocky ground** – the soil isn't deep enough for it to actually take root. Like a weed it springs up quickly but because the roots are shallow the plant dies as soon as the sun scorches it. There's no grain from this seed.
  - **Thorns** – Like the rocky ground it springs up but the thorns grow up around it and choke it out. There's no grain from this seed.
  - **Good soil** – This one takes deep roots producing grain. Some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some one hundredfold.

***He who has ears, let him hear.***

And it's here for the second time that Mark uses his signature literary device. We discussed this at the end of chapter 3, if you'll remember Jesus' mother and brothers go to take Jesus and then Mark cuts to the Pharisees and their story and then back to the mother and brothers. And the middle section unlocks the outer sections.

This happens here too. Just glance at verse 1-20, he tells the parable, he cuts to a discussion with his disciples, and then he retells the parable with an explanation. The point in doing this is that the middle section is always meant to interpret the rest. And this is the case here.

Jesus teaches at the seaside and then later finds himself alone with a small group of followers. We read in verse 10:

*And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables*

So there's the twelve disciples with him and then another group with them and they wanted further clarification about the parables.

And what Jesus tells this small group of followers is the key to understanding the parable of the sower, all parables, and the reality of Jesus himself. Look with me at verse 11:

*And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."*

Jesus makes a distinction here between those who have accepted and those that have rejected. We see this in how Jesus says this first sentence. We see both:

- To You have been given
- AND
- But for those outside

You can say that he is separating them as insiders and outsiders (think of the house in Chapter 3).

And what separates those two groups is what they believe about the Kingdom of God. This secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to those who are "inside", the disciples and those with him here.

This secret of the Kingdom is actually the person and works of Jesus himself. He has given them himself. What they have accepted in his teaching isn't abstract, they've accepted Him.

The glory of the kingdom of God is unlocked in Jesus alone, and this has been a secret for years, throughout the history in the Old Testament, God had been continuously unveiling this secret of the Messiah and His coming through the prophets. And here, the followers at his feet have listened to his message about himself and not just heard it but accepted.

But Jesus message about himself isn't accepted by all who hear it. Some hear it and are perplexed, or offended, or opposed to it.

Listen, Jesus says that for those “outside” it’s not just his stories and teachings that are parables but **everything** is a parable to them. Not just his words but who He is has become a confusing story. Jesus is an enigma to them, he as a person in word and deed doesn’t make any sense.

This is echoed all through the Gospel of Mark as Jesus has gone about preaching the gospel, hiding his deity from everyone up to this point, allowing them to hear and either accept him or reject Him. The lines of God’s sovereignty and our responsibility as human beings to hear about Him and response in acceptance and rejection are here blurred as they always are and Jesus is okay with this.

People hear his message about the Kingdom and how they respond to matters.

Those on the outside haven’t simply rejected his message of the Kingdom, they’ve rejected Him.

Now, at first glance, this quote from Isaiah 6:9-10 in verse 12 looks like Jesus is speaking in parables to blind them, confuse them, hinder them so that they might not be forgiven. But what we need to see is that Jesus is fulfilling a prophecy by speaking in parables.

But do you see the “**so that**” at the beginning of verse 12? This is Mark’s way of saying what Matthew says over and over again in his gospel. In fact, flip left to **Matthew** chapter **1:22-23**:

*22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive  
And bear a son,  
And they shall call his name  
Immanuel.”*

This is what Jesus means by the “So that”.

You see, the lack of understanding of the people is an outcome of their historic rejection of God in Israel and their present rejection of God in the flesh. They heard but they rejected Him.

Notice that in verse 13, immediately after this quote by the prophet Isaiah Jesus asks the disciples the question:

*Do you not understand this parable?*

And the only reason they understand it is because they are at Jesus’ feet, willing to hear, wanting to be as close as they can to him. They haven’t rejected Him, they don’t fully understand him, but they believe in Him.

And he unlocks this parable for them, and for us. And we'll see that this reality of hearing and responding is what this parable is about. A true disciple of Jesus is one who accepts Him and is changed by Him.

He says in verse 14 that the **sower sows the Word**. Now, we need to see this parable first with this in mind: **Jesus is the sower**. And Jesus sowed the Word freely to all Israel, without partiality. Remember how seemingly careless the sower was when he spread the seed. Jesus isn't holding back on teaching the Word to others. The Word being the good news of the Kingdom of God being ushered in by Him and what that means for sinners.

And each soil reflects different responses to him by those in Israel who rejected him or accepted him. I want you to notice that every type of person he speaks of actually **hears the word**. Some reject it and some accept it.

Those along the path hear but immediately **Satan** comes and doesn't allow that to do anything in them.

**NOTE: pause button**, This shows us how sinister and hateful Satan is. He is eager to contribute to people's rejection of Jesus. We should pray against this, that God would not allow Satan to steal the word away from those we are reaching out to.

So, they hear but nothing grows..

And those on the **rocky ground** hear and there is immediate growth like a weed. But because of the shallow nature of the soil there is no deep roots and when they begin to find following Jesus is causing trials and persecution, they reject him.

And then there are those on the **thorny ground**, they hear as well and there is some growth. But when they are forced to choose between Jesus and the joys of the world with it's temptations and riches, they choose the world and reject Jesus.

These three soils all hear, but they don't accept Him.

And that leaves us with the last group, the **good soil**. In verse 20 we see that these are the ones who **hear the Word**, and they **accept the Word**, and they **bear fruit**.

This fruit they bear is really good yield of grain, nothing miraculous. It's fruit born out of a healthy and productive seed yielding good grain.

It's impossible to hear this parable and not land on one side or the other. There is no gray here, you either accept Jesus or reject him.

**And Church, if you're a Christian, if you're a true disciple of Jesus then you've accepted him and have been changed by Him because fruit is being born.**

And the implication here is that you have born fruit, are bearing fruit, and will bear fruit. The life of the one who accepts Jesus is continual fruit bearing.

2 thing to close on this morning as we consider our acceptance of Jesus and what that means for us in terms of fruit we bear.

### **1. Bearing fruit comes from being with Jesus.**

Notice where his disciples are. They are with him, at his feet asking questions and benefiting from his wisdom.

They've accepted him and they sit with him. They are learners.

And it's clear that they haven't figured him out yet because they can't even decipher the parables, they ask him and he gives them the answers. Jesus is an enigma, he is so above us in every way that whether we have been a Christian for 1 year or 100 years we have only scratched the surface of who he is.

One of the joys of being his disciple is that we get to know him day-by-day. We get to find out who Jesus is and the more we do the more we will grow in how we trust him, and how we obey him.

Are you like the disciples here? Are you eager to understand him, to sit with him, to learn from Him through prayer and a study of the Word.

When trials come do you know him well enough to stand up in the face of them because he is worth it?

When you find that a choice needs to be made between Jesus or the World do you know him well enough to realize that the joys of Christ are greater than the joys of the world?

We bear fruit in spiritual growth the more we sit with him and know him.

This week, at some point, open your Bibles and read Exodus 34:6

*[6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,*

And then read how Jesus interacts with Peter after Peter denies him on the morning of His crucifixion. Read the care of Jesus with Peter after that and ponder in a new way that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of the Old Testament is Jesus. Make that connection fully and strongly and wonderfully.

Understand the care of Jesus with you. Exodus 34:7

Exodus 34:7

*[7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

Your sin has not been forgotten because God will not clear the guilty. He's abounding in steadfast love but he will not clear the guilty. Guilt has been removed from you and I because Jesus took our guilt to the cross. He took it **there and nailed it there and it's there we find forgiveness**. His **resurrection** assures us that our sin that he took the cross will no longer be held against us because he dealt with it once for all.

And maybe you haven't accepted him but are here, thank you for being here. This Jesus whom we have accepted is available for you to accept as well. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Come to him this morning and find the joy of being his disciple.

Be like those in verse 10, seek to know Christ, bear fruit in spiritual growth and joy.

## 2. Bearing fruit comes from being like Jesus.

I could mean many things by this, and you should take away many things of what it means to be like Jesus. We could talk holiness, patience, a desire for justice and truth etc... But let me focus on the one here in the parable.

Church, Jesus sowed seeds in Israel, telling everyone about himself. Some rejected and some accepted. And you and I as his disciples are to be like him. What Jesus did when he left the earth was pass that responsibility to you and me as disciple makers.

Our neighbors, our communities, our families – if you don't sow the seed of the gospel in them, who will?

Bear fruit.

What will you do with calling to be like Christ, the Sower?

Let me close with a word to both non-Christians and Christians:



**Non-Christians:** If you're hear this morning and are aware that you've rejected Christ, you land on that side of this parable, let me say one more time that Jesus' offer to come to Him still stands. The Bible says that if you draw near to him he will draw near to you.

**Christians:** Seek to bear fruit and heed to warning of Judas who was with Jesus, followed him, listened to him, but all along the joys of riches were too much. You have to wonder if Jesus didn't look at Judas as he explained the parable to his disciples. Heed the warning of Judas as you walk with Christ, see him as your all in everything.

True disciples of Jesus accept him and are changed by him. May it be so.

**Pray**

**BENEDICTION: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**