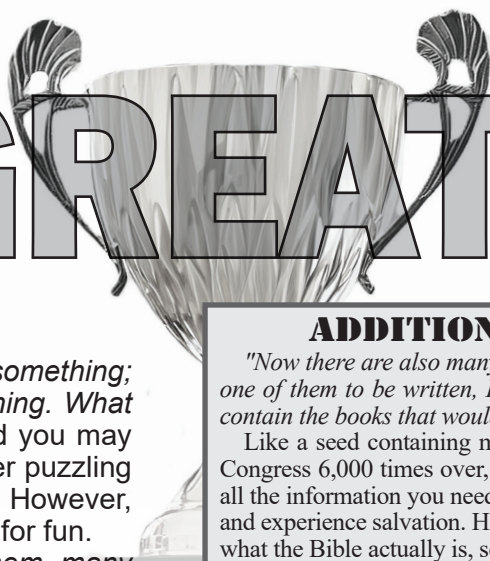


THE GREATEST



A RIDDLE

“When you do not know what I am, I am something; but when you know what I am, I am nothing. What am I?” Think about that for a second and you may realize the answer is the title. Riddles offer puzzling questions that can be difficult to discover. However, unless you’re Batman, they’re mostly just for fun.

In Mark 4, Jesus “was teaching them many things in parables” (Mark 4:2). Webster defines a parable as “a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle.” Biblically, it tells a heavenly truth that challenges the listener to respond. Parables, like riddles, require the hearer to listen carefully and can be challenging to understand.

In our passage today, Jesus shared part of the point of parables—to hide the meaning from the masses. Jesus **said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand.”** The time had not yet come for understanding and forgiveness. However, the disciples needed to understand the riddle.

MARK 4:10–20

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.”

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.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

Like a seed containing more genetic writing than the Library of Congress 6,000 times over, the “seed” of God’s Word has all the information you need to sufficiently know the Lord and experience salvation. However, to discover a bit about what the Bible actually is, scan the QR-code.



DISCUSSION

What is something you’ve learned through this study that you’ve never understood before?

ICEBREAKER

1. In this scene, who was with Jesus? What did they ask? (10)

2. What is the “seed” in the parable that the sower sows? (14)

3. What was the condition of each soil in Jesus’ parable?

Soil #1 -

Soil #2 -

Soil #3 -

Soil #4 -

OBSERVATION

4. To what did Jesus compare each soil and what was the result?

Soil #1 -

Soil #2 -

Soil #3 -

Soil #4 -

INTERPRETATION

5. How does this passage encourage or challenge you as you think about the condition or your own heart toward the Word?

6. What about sharing the Word with others?

APPLICATION

Maybe throughout our study you’ve wondered about your own relationship with Jesus. If you have struggled with a “good soil” heart, talk to your Coach today!

THE GREATEST

STUDY NOTES

IT'S A ROCK

In the movie, *A Bug's Life*, there's a great scene between the main character, Flick, and the young Princess Dot. Trying to make a point about the power of seeds, Flick asked Dot to pretend a rock was a seed. **Scan the QR code to see the scene** and how she just doesn't get it.



This scene relates to our passage today for three primary reasons. First, we've all been in Dot's shoes. Somebody is trying to explain something and we just aren't getting it. Second, we've all been in Flick's shoes. We're trying to make a point and the listener just doesn't understand—I mean, how simple can it be, right?

Finally, Flick made the incredible point that within the rock-pretend-seed is everything needed to become a mighty tree. DNA contains vast amounts of information stored in a cell. One article put it this way, "The 74 million million [yes, two "millions"] bytes of information in the Library of Congress could be crammed into a DNA archive the size of a poppy seed—6,000 times over." All that to say, a seed is a powerful thing!

As great as a seed may be, several other factors play a role in the success or failure of a seed to thrive. Jesus capitalized on this phenomenon as he expanded his teaching ministry to include the use of parables. Unfortunately, the crowd and the disciples were a bunch of Dot's.

JESUS IS GREATER THAN MYSTERIES

As we said in the introduction, Jesus had been teaching a large crowd and he shared the Parable of the Sower. Many times, we have to study to understand Jesus' audience, the circumstances, and several other factors before we can take a guess at what Jesus meant by different parables. In Mark 4, we don't need to guess. **When [Jesus] was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.** Jesus teaches us about his use of parables by explaining to the disciples exactly what he meant.

Part of the point of parables was to hide the meaning from the masses. However, Jesus wanted the apostles to understand. He asked, **"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"** This one parable helps us understand ourselves, our mission, and parables in general.

Soil #1 – "As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it" (Mark 4:4). Due to the footpath's hard ground, these precious seeds never had a chance, becoming an immediate and total loss. Jesus later explained

the heart condition of this type of soil, **"When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them."**

Soil #2 – More receptive, but shallow. This seed fell on rocky ground...and immediately it sprang up since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away (Mark 4:5-6). The ground and the sun worked together against this seed which started quickly, but didn't last long.

Jesus explained, **when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. 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."**

Soil #3 – This seed fell among thorns. That is, soil containing unearthed thorn roots which competed for light and nourishment. Eventually, *the thorns grew up and choked it.* The soil, submitting to its environment, yielded no grain (Mark 4:7).

Jesus explained, **"They are those who hear the word, 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."** (Mark 4:18-19).

Soil #4 – Jesus contrasted those failed results with the *other seed.* That last seed fell into good soil. This seed, identical to those sown on soil that failed, produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielded thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold (Mark 4:8). Now, likely with joy, Jesus explained, this last soil type represents **"the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit"** (Mark 4:20).

JESUS REVEALS MYSTERIES OF RESPONSE

Left untended, bare soil typically produces weeds. It doesn't usually produce beneficial plants. The same is true for the soil of our hearts. The obvious question from this parable is, "How is your heart's soil?" Better yet, "How will it look in 5 or 10 years?"

Those are important questions, but just as important is to understand how people respond when you're the one scattering seed. You share the gospel and you don't understand why people don't respond. You open the Word with someone and they just don't get it even though it couldn't be clearer to you. The problem isn't the seed, it's the soil. The seed of God's Word doesn't fail, but it can be resisted and rejected.

Don't stop tending your soil and don't get discouraged as you sow the seed. Not every seed will bear fruit, but when it does, you'll be blown away at the harvest.