

A study of Jesus' Parables

"JESUS IS KING"

We hear the phrase "Jesus is King" a lot during seasons like Christmas and Easter. However, as I write this, very recently we've heard this phrase from one very unexpected source—Kanye West. Yes, the man who, back in 2013, released a song that proclaimed, "I Am A God," has just dropped a full-on Gospel album. *[Insert head explosion emoji here.]*

From all appearances, just days after Kanye's faith has come into the public sphere, it seems like he's experienced real and true life-change. And why should we be surprised that God is big enough, and the Gospel is powerful enough, that even a reprobate celebrity super-star might taste and see redemption through Jesus Christ?

However, there is something within us that hesitates. Unlike many other people who proclaim salvation through Christ, we feel the need to say, "Let's wait and see how this goes." As you read this, some time will have past. You will have hindsight that we do not yet have as to the continuing impact of God's Word in Kanye's life.

Kanye has provided an amazing illustration for today's passage. We introduced the topic of parables last week using a parable. Today, we examine that same parable's interpretation. Explaining his own parable, Jesus proclaims why some people experience lasting life-change, while some others do not. For Kanye, time will tell what kind of soil his heart is. Join me in praying that his heart is good soil—because his influence is great and his fruit could be significant.

MARK 4:14–20

¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: Whenever they hear, immediately Satan comes and snatches the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ These are the ones sown on rocky ground: As soon as they hear the word, they receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root in themselves and do not endure. Then, when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ Others are the ones sown among thorns: They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but worldly cares, the seductiveness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it produces nothing. ²⁰ But these are the ones sown on good soil: They hear the word and receive it and bear fruit, one thirty times as much, one sixty, and one a hundred.

SCOUTING REPORT

SETTING Sea of Galilee with a large crowd

NEED Explain the range of responses to Jesus' message

STORY 1 sower, 1 type of seed, 4 different soil conditions and consequences.

TRUTH The condition of our heart determines our response to God's Word

DISCUSSION

Who would you be the most surprised to discover they've become a Christian?

1. Describe the 4 soil types and (briefly) Jesus' interpretation. (14-20)

Soil Type Interpretation

#1:

#2:

#3:

#4:

2. What experiences might a person face that illustrates Jesus' interpretation of...

-the rocky soil? (16-17)

-the thorny ground? (19)

3. Have you experienced a heart described by the path, rocky soil, or thorny ground? If so, what changed?

4. To be a sower, who can you invite to this study?

Many times in our Christian walk, God will ask, "Will you obey?" Maybe you've hit the will-wall and there is something God is asking of you that you've not submitted to. If God's Word has challenged you to do something, talk with your coach today!

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

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STUDY NOTES

THE LANDRY SHIFT

Famed Cowboys coach, Tom Landry, was on the cutting edge of something that the modern NFL takes for granted. When the offense broke the huddle, the first setup they do isn't necessarily where they stay. In Landry's offense, the offensive line would get in a 3-point stance, stand up, and go back to their stance. During that standing up, players would go in motion, the backfield would change, and the defense would need to quickly adapt to make the next read.

As we explore Jesus' explanation of his parable, we must understand things can change quickly. The Landry shift illustrates that the first look doesn't always last. It's part deception, part distraction, which is a great strategy in football. But when we're talking about the Word of God planted in someone's heart, deception and distraction bear disastrous fruit.

Last week, we introduced the idea of parables. Parables are stories that reveal truth and challenge the hearer to respond. Also, parables are designed to conceal the meaning from outsiders. In today's passage, the disciples asked and Jesus revealed the interpretation to the parable of the soils.

A PLANTED SEED ILLUSTRATES GOD'S WORD

Jesus broke down his parable by providing the key piece of information—**"The sower sows the word."** This parable has several of elements. There is the sower, the seed, and the soils. The sower and the seed stayed the same throughout the whole story. Reading this parable, we understand the *Jesus* is the *sower*. However, because the seed is the Word of God, we can be *sowers* too. The sower is *anyone* who brings God's Word to another person.

Again, the sower and the seed remained consistent throughout the whole parable. The variable in the story is what kind of soil the seeds landed upon. The whole point is that different soil conditions produced different results. In a farming culture, Jesus' hearers would have understood the importance of good soil for seeds. The twist is that the soil in the parable is the heart of the one who hears the Word of God.

The first soil is a **path**. It's hard-packed dirt where the seed cannot penetrate. Not only that, but the birds came and took the seed away. Jesus explained that when God's Word is unable to penetrate someone's heart, **they hear the Word, and immediately Satan comes and snatches the word that was sown in them.**

The second soil is **rocky ground**. Seeds can grow on rocky ground, but **they have no root in themselves and do not endure** the scorching sun. Rocky soil seeds are unstable such that **when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately they fall away.**

Better, the third soil contains seeds thrown **among thorns**. The thorns are **worldly cares, the seductiveness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it produces nothing.**

Finally, Jesus discussed **good soil**. This is the person who, when **they hear the word**, they **receive it and bear fruit, one thirty times as much, one sixty, and one a hundred.**

GOD'S WORD WILL HAVE MIXED RESULTS

We have all probably seen people react in all the ways mentioned above—from the antagonizing atheist whose heart is like the path, to the friend who had a great experience on a mission trip or at camp, but whose faith was then choked by thorns. Maybe your heart has been like these different soils at different times. Perhaps you started to understand the truth of the Gospel and what God has provided through Jesus. Then, like the rocky ground, perhaps you had tragedy in your life and gave up on faith.

The amazing thing about this parable is that it's not a one-time event. Sure, salvation is experienced once when we receive the truth of God's Word—that Jesus died for our sins and that we can have a relationship with God through Him. However, as we grow in our walk, we encounter more truth from God's Word that challenges us to yield our hearts. Submitting our hearts to the Lord is a daily activity.

Distance runners know the "will-wall," when it seems like your legs don't want to keep pumping. The same thing can happen when God asks us to do something. Will we keep running? Will our hearts be the good soil? Or will we allow truth to get choked out? Will things like reputation, money, or success be the thorns that hinder our faith? In fact, this study will challenge us at various points. Will your heart be good soil bearing fruit or will something choke it out?

If your heart is the good soil, one example of bearing fruit means that you become a sower. If you've experienced salvation through the Gospel, you are perfectly equipped to share your experience. You don't necessarily need to understand the finer points of theology to share what God has done in your life. You too can sow liberally the story of what God has done.