

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis Sermon

Notes [www.twojourneys.org](http://www.twojourneys.org)

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at [twojourneys.org](http://twojourneys.org)

## A Study in Soils

Mark 4:1-20

Last Week: a brief introduction to the Parable of the Soils

Jesus implied that this was the most important of all his parables, perhaps the gateway parable by which all of them could be understood.

***Mark 4:13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"***

We walked through the basics of the parable last time:

***Mark 4:3-9 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."***

And then, Jesus' explanation:

***Mark 4:14-20 The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of***

*wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-- thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."*

**The most significant moment of our entire existence is the moment we hear the word of God, especially gospel message itself of repentance and faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins.**

Whether we spend eternity in heaven or in hell depends entirely on whether we hear the word of God with genuine faith or not, and if we do, there will always be fruit – a harvest to show for it.

So it is vital for us to understand each of these soils, because I believe Jesus wants us to take warning from the three bad soils and to be exhorted in reference to the one good soil with three levels of harvest.

I also believe studying these soils can also help Christian parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This world we live in is extremely hostile to our faith. Digging in deeper on these soils may help you moms and dads to reasoned and powerful exhortations to your children as they are growing.

#### I. Soil #1: The Path

*Mark 4:3-4 A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.*

*Mark 4:14-15 The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.*

#### A. This is the Normal Response to the Gospel Worldwide

1. Every single day, the gospel message is proclaimed around the world

***Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"***

2. Paul said this

***1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures***

3. Every single days, literally millions of people hear that message...  
AND UTTERLY REJECT IT
4. They reject it out of hand... without hesitation!
5. Jesus likened them to seed that fell on the road... on a hardened path beaten down day after day by traffic—feet, wagons, horses' hooves, cattle... the path is like concrete
6. When the seed of the word hits, it makes NO PENETRATION AT ALL!
7. So because of their hard hearts, the people feel no fear at all concerning their sins or judgment day or eternity in hell
8. These terrifying topics mean literally nothing to them; they hear the words of warning with arrogant confidence that they are foolish
9. Like wicked King Jehoiakim hearing the terrifying words of prophetic warning from the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies... he cut the scroll line by line and burned it in a firepot to keep his hands warm

***Jeremiah 36:24 The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes.***

#### B. Satan's Activity

1. In the parable, the birds eating the seed represents Satan snatching away the word... the Gospel of Matthew uses that exact term

***Matthew 13:19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.***

2. This shows the power Satan has over the hearts and minds of unbelievers
3. Satan seizes this word and removes it powerfully from their minds so they do not think on it at all; or perhaps they mock it or twist it
4. Others blaspheme it or resolve to wage war against it

As Paul described his mentality before conversion:

***Acts 26:9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.***

5. All of this is part of the way Satan seeks to thwart the advance of the Kingdom of God

Example: King Bagyidaw of Burma

On January 27, 1820, Adoniram Judson, the missionary to Burma, travelled up the Irawaddy River with his co-worker, James Colman, to the royal city of Ava to secure an audience with the Emperor of Burma, King Bagyidaw.

He went to ask for religious toleration to preach the gospel in Burma, but his deepest desire was to lead this man to faith in Christ. The Royal Palace in Ava was overwhelmingly ornate; every square inch of even the corridor that Judson travelled down to the hall where he would meet the king was covered in gold leaf.

When the king entered the room, all the Burmese fell on their faces in reverence. Judson and Colman merely knelt in respect. Judson gave the king his petition for religious freedom. Then, at the right moment, he passed over the gospel tract he had written for the Burmese people. Judson secretly prayed for the king... "O Lord, have mercy on Burma! Have mercy on her king!"

Bagyidaw read the opening lines of the tract: 'There is one Being who exists eternally; who is exempt from sickness, old age, and death; who is, and was, and will be, without beginning and without end. Besides this, the true God, there is no other God...' King Bagyidaw simply opened his hand with complete indifference, let the tract fall to the floor, then stepped across it and left the room to review some of his troops. The word had had absolutely no effect on him whatsoever.

Satan does this work every day in hearts all around the world.

### C. Is Satan At Work in Our Hearts Too?

1. One possible interpretation of the Parable of the Soils is that a person can be different soils at different times in their lives... like, every time they hear the Word of God
2. In that case, Satan snatches away the impact of a sermon or a Bible lesson in a person's heart *just for that day*
3. So, by causing a person to be inattentive by whatever means he can, he wins... like I can imagine smartphones, with their constant access to a world of entertainment and news and social media and STUFF is able to distract people and make them inattentive to God's Word... people glancing at their phones rather than listening to the sermon

### D. Praying Knowledgeably

1. Evangelists and missionaries and pastors would do well to pray in light of this incessant opposition of Satan to the spread of the gospel
2. So also Christian parents need to be mindful of Satan's activity in snatching away seed that is faithfully sown in the hearts of their kids

## II. Soil #2: The Stony Ground

***Mark 4:5-6 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun***

*came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.*

***Mark 4:16-17 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.***

#### A. Satan's Activity in the Other Soils

1. Satan's battle against the Word doesn't end just with the first hearing
2. In the stony-ground, Satan keeps working on people even after they have initially responded with great joy and passion

#### B. Stony Ground: Initial Excitement

1. It is often surprising to people that they see individuals who at one time were extremely passionate about the Word of God, who are filled with joy and energy and commitment, who say all the right things and show all the right emotions... who then later renounce the faith and become apostates
2. This is devastating to many... they wonder how it could ever be?!
3. We especially are enamored with PASSION!
4. We think that the reserved, cold, calculating thinker who makes a verbal assent to Christ and who speaks accurate doctrine but who seems to lack passion... we're not very surprised if those sorts later walk away; but if someone's face is lit up with joy, if their whole demeanor crackles with passion, if they sing the songs loudly and put their hands in the air, we think all that passion can only prove the genuineness of their love for Christ
5. NOT SO... Jesus himself speaks of the stony ground hearer as one who immediately receives the word with joy
6. He SPRINGS UP QUICKLY because the soil is shallow... it had nowhere to go but UP

7. The stony ground represents a layer of impenetrable rock, maybe limestone, never broken up with the plow
8. The rock itself is heated by the sun, producing a pocket of warmth for the seed to germinate and spring up
9. This plant shoots up like a weed... it seems to make amazing progress in Christianity
10. But the real test is about to come
11. The shallowness of this person is comprehensive; they are shallow in their doctrine; shallow in their conviction of sin; shallow in their relationship with Christ; shallow, shallow, shallow... they have NO ROOT SYSTEM

C. "When the Sun Came Up..."

1. Jesus says this plant lasts only a short time
2. He doesn't specify how long that is; that's the terrifying part
3. This could go on for years of shallow following of Christ
4. The individual has never had to pay a price for following Christ; there's been no need to count the cost, because life as a shallow Christian has been comfortable
5. But there comes a time when "trouble or persecution comes because of the Word"
6. As soon as that happens, they quickly fall away!

D. A Warning to Comfortable Christians in America

1. Biblical Christianity and American Culture are on a collision course
2. For many years, America has claimed to be a "Christian nation"... it was nothing of the kind, but it is true that Christianity affected the national politics and culture and media and entertainment more

than any other nation in history, so that Christianity and American culture have had a comfortable relationship

3. THAT IS COMING TO A SCREECHING END!!!
  4. More and more, Christian convictions on sexuality, gender, the exclusivity of Christ, the inerrancy of the Bible, and many other culturally vital topics will be in direct opposition to each other
  5. Christians more and more will have to choose between their convictions and their jobs; or their friendships; or their extended family relationships; or their ability to participate in the public square or be accepted to college or to begin their careers
  6. The heat of persecution is going to rise
- E. Warning: Develop a Root System; Persecution is Coming!
1. The opposite of this shallow, rootless Christianity is DEPTH
  2. Developing a root system that will enable you to flourish even when the sun is beating down on you and there's no rain... the deep roots enable you to survive and even thrive
  3. Deep doctrine... not merely the milk of the Word but its MEAT as well

***Colossians 2:6-7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.***

4. Deep intimacy with Christ

***Ephesians 3:17-19 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

- F. Christian Parents: Get Your Kids Ready to Suffer!
1. Don't expect their experience to be like yours

2. Get them ready to survive when trouble or persecution comes because of the Word
3. Read them stories of martyrs across the ages
4. Prepare them to be counter-cultural on the divisive issues—homosexuality, sexual purity, gender identity, exclusivity of Christ, inerrancy of God’s Word, all these... and tell them other battles are coming

### III. Soil #3: The Thorny Ground

***Mark 4:7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.***

***Mark 4:18-19 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.***

#### A. The Danger of the World’s Allures

1. Whereas the stony-ground hearer wilted at the world’s abuse, the thorny ground hearer dies at the world’s allures
2. Jesus lists the world’s allures in sweeping terms: “the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things”
  - a. All of these have to do with immediate, worldly concerns
  - b. Some of them are positive things the person desires, others are negative things the person fears... but they all have to do with a vision for a comfortable life of health and wealth in this present age
3. The problem: these weeds grow up and choke the word, making it unfruitful
  - a. They block the sunlight and suck the nutrients from the soil so the good seed is starved of what it needs to flourish

- b. In practical terms, there are only so many hours in the week and only so much energy in the mind and body... and this person is pulled away from the Kingdom of Christ to pursue other things

## B. One of the Greatest Dangers in Prosperous America

- 1. Jesus' general warning is HAUNTING

***Mark 4:19 the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.***

- 2. What are the "other things"???

  - a. Anything that is not Christ and his Kingdom
  - b. It could be good desires... like a single person wanting a spouse, or a childless couple wanting a child or an unemployed person wanting a job
  - c. Or it could be bad desires... any person who wants to get rich
  - d. The issue is when these desires grow and grow and come to dominate so that the inner life with Christ withers and dies

- 3. Specific warnings concerning wealth: READ 1 TIMOTHY 6!!

  - a. Lesson 1: seek godliness with contentment

***1 Timothy 6:6-8 godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.***

  - b. Lesson 2: watch out for the love of money

***1 Timothy 6:9-10 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***

    - c. Lesson 3: Do not put your trust in money but in God

***1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.***

d. Lesson 4: Give money away consistently

***1 Timothy 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.***

C. Christ's Central Command Against ANXIETY (the "worries")

***Matthew 6:31-33 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***

D. Warning to Christians: What Is Distracting You from the Kingdom?

1. Everyone here needs to take the thorny-ground soil lesson to heart
2. We are all affluent Christians who are very attuned to the world
3. By our electronic devices, we are connected to the world every moment of every day
4. Recently, I came to a stop light; looked around; everyone around me waiting at the red light was on their phones; all of the pedestrians crossing the crosswalk were on their phones; I could not see a single person not in some way swimming in world!
5. How can we possibly avoid the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things??
6. Ask God to cleanse you, to purify your life of these siren calls
7. By contrast... to SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS... what does that look like in your life? How do you put godliness and evangelism as the top priorities??

IV. Soil #4: The Good Soil

***Mark 4:8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."***

***Mark 4:20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-- thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."***

A. The Good Soil Clearly Described

***Luke 8:15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.***

1. As we noted last time, this is quite stunning
2. Jesus himself said this:

***Mark 10:18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone.***

3. And again this:

***Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"***

4. Only the Holy Spirit can make a human heart “noble and good”
5. The essence of this... taking God’s Word with deep reverence and obeying it

***1 Thessalonians 2:13 ... when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.***

6. Luke says “by persevering produce a crop”
  - a. The noble and good heart stays with it

- b. It hears God's Word, puts it into practice and PERSEVERES for years and years to see the harvest through to the end

B. What Is the Harvest?

1. The living and active Word of God ALWAYS produces a harvest
2. Good fruit is the test of genuine Christianity

***Matthew 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them.***

***John 15:2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.***

3. The fruit: attitude fruit and action fruit
  - a. Attitude fruit:

Altered heart and mind in conformity to Christ

***Mark 12:30-31 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> ...'Love your neighbor as yourself.'***

God the Holy Spirit works these more and more deeply in all genuine believers in Christ

Also:

***Galatians 5:22-23 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control.***

Also:

***Matthew 5:3-8 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.***

- b. Action fruit: anything done in obedience to the Word of God
  - i) Evangelism... people led to Christ are fruit
  - ii) Christian family... a family ordered and brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
  - iii) Prayer life... financial life... work life... worship life...

Deeds of service:

***1 Timothy 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.***

***Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

C. Why the Variability of Harvest?

***Mark 4:20 thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.***

1. Now, all of these would have been considered staggering return; farmers in the Bible times hoped for 5-7 fold AT BEST
2. The level of productivity Jesus is describing here would have been unprecedented
3. So, genuine Christianity produces a stunning level of harvest...  
FRUIT THAT WILL LAST FOR ALL ETERNITY!!!
4. But still, there is a variability of return
  - a. Not all Christians are equally fruitful
  - b. Some through personal sacrifice and hard work live lives that future generations of Christians have studied centuries later
  - c. George Whitefield preached the gospel relentlessly, sometimes a dozen times or more per week, over 18,000 sermons to over 10 million hearers
  - d. George Mueller cared for over 10,000 orphans in his lifetime

- e. Irish missionary Amy Carmichael served in India for 55 years without ever once returning home
- f. Hudson Taylor took responsibility for reaching the inland regions of China with the gospel, oversaw a mission agency that placed 825 missionaries in 300 mission stations winning 25,000 converts by the time he died
- g. Heaven will be filled with Christians whose lives of service to Christ will be shown to be greater than anyone in this room today
- h. But every genuine Christian will have SOME HARVEST for the glory of God