

Good & Bad Soil

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word, because we believe that God has something to say to everyone.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection.

We're shifting our focus a little bit. We left Mark chapter 3 behind last week, and this morning we're beginning Mark chapter 4, where Jesus leaves His healing, and we begin to see specifically Him teaching about the kingdom of God.

This is the section in Mark with a great focus on Jesus' parables. Now, if you remember last week, we saw this family intervention that happened with Jesus.

[1 : 26] His family came, and they were calling Him away from His ministry. They believed that He was perhaps harming Himself in the midst of it, that things had gotten out of control, and it was time for them to intervene.

Jesus, in that passage, clarified for them and for us His priorities, that His family is important, they're just not the most important. That mission, His purpose, the reason that He was sent, comes before everything else.

It's His keystone commitment, or His primary commitment, that He filters all His other commitments through. This week, we're going to continue to explore Jesus' call, His words to follow me.

It's the words He spoke to Simon and Andrew when He called them in chapter 1. It's the same thing He said to Levi in chapter 2. And as we look at that call, both for the world and for ourselves, this story, this parable, is going to help us answer a couple questions.

First, what is it that keeps people from answering Jesus' call? If Jesus is so universally recognized as a good teacher, if so many people believe that, why do so few people actually follow His teaching?

[2 : 38] How can someone be ambivalent towards such a polarizing and critical figure in the history of the world? So much so that the dating of world history hinges around the time of Jesus' birth and His life.

Yes, Jesus' impact is great. Why is it not even greater? Why is it not even more than it is? Now, the other question is similar but more personal.

Not just how we understand the world, but what about us? What keeps us from following Jesus? What pulls us away from Him? If Jesus, as we talked about last week, is the horizon line that we look towards, if He is the one that we center our lives around, how can we make sure that we are pointed and oriented in the right direction?

How can we go the distance? How do we live lives that are wise and fruitful? Now, I'm saying basically two things over and over again that we're going to look at in this passage.

One, we are going to get a mental map, a paradigm, to understand the world and how it responds to Jesus and His teaching. And two, we're going to understand what that means for us, how we can be people who are fruitful rather than barren.

[4 : 05] And so it's with those questions, I'm going to invite you to turn with me to Mark chapter 4. We're going to be starting at verse 1. One, you can turn in your worship guide, you can turn on your

phone, you can turn in your physical Bible.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 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. And He was teaching them many things in parables. And in His teaching He said to them, Listen, behold, a sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Verse 5. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

[5 : 19] And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. And He said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Verse 10. And when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parables. 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, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

Verse 13. And He said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word, 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. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

[6 : 43] 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.

Verse 18. And others are the ones sown among thorns. 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.

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.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we come to you again, grateful for your word that you've given to us.

You tell us in your word about those who, when they heard it, were struck to the heart. And we ask for that this morning. We ask that you would strike us to the heart, that you would honor your promise, that we talked about last week in John chapter 14, that you give your spirit to your people.

[7 : 59] We ask for your spirit this morning to help us understand your word, that you would use it to encourage us, you'd use it to challenge us, you'd use it to bear fruit in our lives, and most importantly, that you would use it to exalt Jesus Christ, that we would see him as more beautiful and more glorious than anything else.

We ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. We have changed scenes since last week.

You'll remember Jesus was teaching in a house. That's where he had the two circles around him, the inner circle that was coming to hear him, and the outer circle of his family that was coming to drag him away.

And now he's returned again to the sea. We see here in verse one, that word again reminding us that Jesus has been teaching by the sea many times. The last time we saw him by the sea was in chapter three, verse seven.

And that was the incident where it seemed like his very life was in danger, that people were pressing in on him so hard that he had to get into a boat to get away from them.

[9 : 14] That's the same dynamic we have here. In verse nine of chapter three, we were told he got into the boat lest they crush him. And here we see in verse one, he got into a boat and sat in it in the sea.

Now he could be getting into this boat for the same reason. He could be getting in to prevent himself from being crushed. That's possible. There's another likely reason that this is happening,

which is that Jesus is trying to speak to this large crowd.

And so I want you to imagine for a second that you are in a modern day auditorium. In fact, in a sense, we're in something similar to that right now. Except Jesus had no public announcement system.

Jesus did not have a headpiece like I do. He had no microphone. And so instead of the stage, you have the boat that Jesus is on. Instead of people sitting out in chairs, they're probably sitting on a hillside along the Sea of Galilee lined up in rows.

In fact, we have a reason to believe that this is what was going on. If you visit Capernaum today, you can see the same dynamic by the Sea of Galilee. So Jesus on the boat in the sea, the people on the shore, and he has his natural sound system, which is the water.

[10:29] It's just a basic principle that water carries sound. And so that's most likely why Jesus has chosen to deliver his message in this way. Now that's similar from chapter three.

In chapter three, we're told there was a great crowd. Here we're told there is a very large crowd. In other words, the pattern of intensification continues.

More and more people are following Jesus. The pressure is rising. The interest is growing. If anything, Jesus is becoming more and more popular.

It's in that context that we see him here begin to teach them. We're told in verse two, he is teaching them in parables. In other words, he is telling them these stories that help them understand the world and the way it works.

He's telling them stories here in this chapter to help them and us understand how it is that the kingdom of God actually operates.

[11:34] And so it's with that, we're going to jump right into the story itself here, this parable. Jesus tells the story in verses three through nine, and then he provides an interpretation for us in verses 13 through 20.

And at a big picture level, there are fundamentally two types of soil. There is good soil, and there's bad soil. And there's varying degrees to how these soils respond.

Some are worse than others of the bad soils. Some are better than others of the good soils. What we know here, though, is this scene begins, verse three, is there is a sower that goes out to sow. And we're told in the interpretation, verse 14, that this seed that the sower is giving is in fact the word of God. This image of a seed is important for us because it reminds us of how potent and powerful the word of God is.

Seeds, you know, contain their own nourishment, their own power within them. They come with all the ingredients needed except for the soil. And so from the very beginning, we're being reminded of the important question of this passage, which is if the word of God is so powerful, if the seed has what it needs in itself, why are there mixed results?

[12:58] Why do some people respond powerfully, others not at all? It's with that question that we begin to understand and see these different types of soil.

First, verse four, we have the soil that falls along the path. We're told that the birds come and devour it.

Jesus then explains for us, verse 15, what's going on. When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

In other words, there are this group of people that when the word of God comes, it makes absolutely no impact. They don't even consider it. It's not something that enters into their mind and they wrestle with.

It's something that goes in one ear and out the other. Their spiritual darkness, in other words, is so great, the distractions are so immediate that the word doesn't even gain a hearing for them.

[14:02] Maybe they ignore it. Maybe they are hostile to it. They do not wrestle with it. Or consider it. If you were here during our Philippians series, you know that I am a connoisseur of fine rain jackets.

And there's a variety of reasons for that, which I won't go into this morning. But there are varying qualities of rain jackets that you can buy, which are going to serve you with a variety of performances.

The deeper into the wilderness you are, the higher the quality of rain jacket you want. The way you assess whether it's a good rain jacket or not comes in a variety of ways.

First of all, you want to know what kind of tape it has. Because it doesn't matter how good the material is if the water comes in through the seams. Right? So you want your seams taped. The other question is how effective your hood is. If your hood is not effective, it doesn't matter how good the material is, water is going to come in through the top. And so what you want is the type of rain jacket that if someone were to dump a bucket of water over your head, you would be untouched.

[15:10] That's how you know you're dealing with a high quality product. Now, of course, you also want breathability. That probably comes after the other two. These folks, the hard soil, spiritually have the best rain jackets possible.

Nothing can touch them. Everything beads up and rolls off. They have no space or time to consider the word of God.

There is nothing that is able to get through. And so that helps us understand that type of response. Satan is actually at work, as Jesus tells us here at verse 15, pulling away the word before it even has the chance to make an impact.

This hard soil can't be penetrated by seeds. That's what happens when it's that packed down. Jesus then goes on to tell us about soils that do receive the word, but only superficially.

And so in verses five and six, we have the rocky ground. Verse five, we're told immediately it sprang up. Verse 16, these people receive God's word with incredible joy for a time.

[16:32] Then we see verse six, the sun comes out. It was scorched. Since it had no root, it withered away. Verse 17 clarifies this even more.

They had no root in themselves. And so they fall away. And he tells us here, in verse 17, that it's because of tribulation or persecution that arises on account of the word.

In other words, these folks are excited about the word of God until it stops being comfortable. And the moment it stops being comfortable, they are gone.

What's missing here? Verse 16 tells us they received it with joy. What did they not receive it with? They did not receive it with faith or repentance.

In other words, they loved the sound of the gospel. It seemed like this beautiful thing. The idea of forgiveness was attractive.

[17:47] And they did not grasp the fact that they were the ones who needed to be forgiven. They did not come face to face with the reality of their own sin. They did not realize that they could not stand before a holy God by themselves.

And so they never received and grasped the gospel for themselves. They were there for a moment. They were not there forever. There was something that was appealing to them.

It did not strike to the core of their hearts. Now, if you're wondering or thinking about Christianity, if you don't consider yourself a Christian, one thing I want to call your attention to in our worship guide is page 10, which talks about this dynamic of what it means to actually be someone who has been penetrated to the heart by the word of God.

And you'll see there's two bolded sections here near the middle bottom. One is repent. The other is believe in the gospel. You can hear many things about Christianity.

You can like many things about Christianity. You can admire Jesus. And if you have not repented from the heart, you will not last.

[19:03] Verse 17, they have no root in themselves. When the going gets hard, they leave.

It is not a keystone commitment for them as we talked about last week. It is a secondary commitment. Church is extremely useful. It is useful to help them meet all sorts of other goals. They thought it was a great place to meet good conservative people. And in a sense, it was. They thought it was a great place to meet dating prospects.

And in a sense, it was. They thought it was a good place to make business contacts. And in a sense, it was. They thought it was a good place for the lonely. And in a sense, it was.

They thought it was a good place to raise their children to have morals. And in a sense, it was. They thought it was a good place to have importance and power and identity. They weren't getting the respect that they wanted at work or at home.

[20:10] And suddenly they realized that if they came to church and they memorized the right set of facts and knew the right things to say, they could be someone of power and influence. And it worked for a time.

But while they were there meeting business contacts and dating prospects and good conservative people, they never met Jesus.

They were there for the wrong reasons. Again, verse 17, they have no root in themselves. Maybe this is someone whose family determines their faith and it never became their faith.

Tribulation and suffering come and they realize this is not for me. This is not what I signed up for. In fact, that clarifies things for us. Why would you not stand in persecution? Well, because you believe this world is the ultimate reality, the ultimate good. You're willing to endure as long as the church helps you accomplish other goals.

[21 : 23] And you have to believe in another world to be willing to suffer in this one. You have to believe in another world to be willing to suffer in this one.

By the way, Jesus is calling his shot when he says this. He's reminding us that you will suffer in this life if you're a Christian. You will suffer in this life if you're a Christian.

Paul tells us, 2 Timothy 3, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Notice what he doesn't say.

He doesn't say might be persecuted. He doesn't say could face persecution if they live in the wrong area. No, indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Jesus Christ will be persecuted.

Those of you who were here for our first Peter series, remember we talked about the fact that the church, as it suffered under communism, faced a variety of persecutions, one of which was that Christians faced limited career and education prospects.

[22 : 37] I guarantee you that that tribulation and that suffering caused some to realize that Christianity was not for them. They had no root in themselves.

If this world is your ultimate horizon line, if it is what you fix your eyes on more than anything else, that will never make sense.

And so that's the soil that falls on rocky ground. Then we have our soil, verse 7, that falls on thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And Jesus tells us in verse 19 what's going on. 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 unfaithful.

For this individual, these individuals, they are interested in Christianity. It's just a low priority. It is one of many priorities that needs to be juggled.

[23 : 54] They'll be there as long as there isn't a better offer. And so they come and go, depending on what's going on in their lives and the world.

This is the difference between the rocky soil and the thorny soil. The rocky soil leaves as soon as it stops being comfortable. They can't handle tribulation or persecution.

The thorny soil leaves as soon as Christianity does not serve their agenda. Doesn't have to be suffering or tribulation.

It's just there's something more important, and Jesus is not going to help them get there. This is the opposite of what the wise person does that we talked about last week.

This individual prioritizes what's most important for them, and then later they figure out if there's anything left over for God. Houses, jobs, families, hobbies, recreation, all are a higher priority.

[24 : 56] And so this is the person who says, I'm just too busy right now. We had a lot going on. I met a young man when I was a freshman in college.

He was a sophomore ahead of me, and he was very eager for Christianity. He'd even sort of mapped out which of the Presbyterian churches were the more traditional ones than others.

He invited us, freshmen who had no cars, to go with him because he wanted us to try out the church that wasn't quite as cool but maybe was a little bit more solid. He seemed firm in his faith.

Then he got on the fast track for a major airline, doing internships during the summer, and he realized which side his bread was buttered on.

And his life radically changed. His priorities radically changed. He dropped his Christian fellowship. He dropped his church attendance. He joined some other groups on campus that would help him reach his career goals.

[26 : 03] I looked him up as I was preparing this, and he is still in the airline industry as a high flyer, pun intended. Christianity was there until there was something that was more important.

It wasn't that there was persecution. There was just a better offer. Christianity was not delivering the good life for him. It's sort of like the theologian Selena Gomez tells us, the heart wants what it wants.

And for him, there was something he wanted more than that. Now, these bad soils are all in one category.

For us, the point is this. There are many things vying and competing for our attention and our affection. We are tempted by many priorities and many loves.

It is possible to miss the most important and beautiful things that are right ahead of us. As people who follow after Jesus, the goal as we read this is that we would be alert to the way that our enemy works in the world.

[27 : 19] We would remember 1 Peter 5, We would remember 2 Corinthians 2, warning us not to be outwitted by Satan for we are not ignorant of his designs.

There is in this passage a call for us to self-examination. What is your ultimate horizon line, truth, reality, experience, good, future?

What is it that you fix your eyes on more than anything else? What is it that you believe the good life is? Another way of asking it is this.

Why are you here? Why did you get up and come to this church this morning?

Did you come here for Jesus? It is dangerous to have Christianity as a secondary commitment and not a keystone commitment.

[28 : 38] If that is you, beware. Repent. Turn back now before it is too late.

There is something greater than this world. There is a better and more important horizon line.

There is something that can deliver what others can only promise. If you are or have been at some point in the dating world, you know there are a variety of characters that you meet.

One of the characters that you meet is the player. What does the player do? The player knows how to entice and arouse and flirt.

Right? And the longer you are with the player, the quicker, eventually you realize it is all a house of cards. The player can arouse and entice.

[29 : 52] The player cannot fulfill. Brothers and sisters, this world is a player. The deceitfulness of riches is real.

This world promises you all sorts of things that it will not and cannot make good on. It can entice you. It cannot fulfill you.

It will pull you in, chew you up, and spit you out. Players are not interested in you. They are interested in trophies to put on the shelf.

That is the world that we live in. There are many other voices calling for our attention. Do not listen. Our goal, as we look at this passage, is that we would be the good soil.

[30 : 53] We would be people who are teachable and tenderhearted. We would go the distance that God's word would actually take root in our lives. Not because we're old-fashioned and we can't keep up with the times.

No, because water never goes out of style. Not because we're old-fashioned and we can't keep up with the times, but because water never goes out of style.

We still need life. We need spiritual life. That's why we're told in John chapter 1, speaking about Jesus, in him was life and the life was the light of men. We want to be able to agree with the psalmist in Psalm 27 that I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

One of the dangerous things about the popularity of climbing 14ers in Colorado Springs and in Colorado in general is that as it becomes this normalized thing, people forget how dangerous it is. People assume that because it's popular, it's for everyone. And so often they don't do the research or the preparation that they need. Listening to the calls of this life above the call of Jesus is like this.

[32 : 14] It's like going to climb a 14er and you have gone to REI and you have bought a bunch of wonderful and high quality equipment. You have bought the best rain jacket possible.

You go on your hike, your climb, and you see an amazing view. The views are great. And then you realize at the top you didn't bring any water.

Yes, there are many beautiful and good things in this world. Yes, you have wonderful equipment and wonderful views and ultimately none of that matters if you have forgotten what is most important.

You might enjoy those views and that equipment for a time. You pull out the timeline long enough with no water and you are facing a situation of life and death.

Brothers and sisters, as you live life in this world, there are many beautiful and glorious things, glorious experiences and possessions, and those things are not wrong.

[33 : 23] and if you have forgotten the most important thing, if you have no spiritual water, all you have to do is extend the timetable out long enough and you are facing a situation of life and death.

That is the warning of this passage. in one sense you are doing well, in another sense you are headed for destruction.

There are many good things in this life. There is only one that provides us with true life. And so that's the encouragement here of the good soil, verse 8 and verse 20.

The good soil produces grain growing up and increasing 30-fold, 60-fold and 100-fold. And then we're told in verse 20 why.

Those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit. The key word of this passage is hearing.

[34 : 38] Verse 3 Jesus begins this by saying listen. Verse 9 He who has ears to hear let him hear. Verse 12 Hear but not understand. Verse 15 When they hear. Verse 16 When they hear.

Verse 18 They are those who hear. Verse 20 The ones who hear. There is not just something going on here at the repetition level but at the grammatical level.

When we see the word hear when it comes to the bad soil in the Greek it's giving us a verb tense that means they listened once. When we look at the good soil it is using an ongoing active verb tense.

In other words they listen and are continuing to listen. It is not a one time thing that happened. It is not the rain that beads up and rolls off the jacket. No it is an ongoing present tense experience.

I have told you before about the man who says reminds us that the disciples didn't get many things right but they got one thing right.

[35 : 42] They kept following Jesus. This passage reminds us of the same thing. We can get many things wrong in this life and we will.

We can fail and we can falter and it is the seed that has power. Keep following Jesus. Stay with the seed.

Continue to return to the word. Listen and respond because it is the word that has power. We are here together this morning looking at what God has to say to us in his word because we believe it is the seed that has power within itself.

It is the word of God at the beginning of Genesis that brought something out of nothing. It is the word of God that brings dead things to life. It is the word of God that does what we are told about in Ephesians chapter 2.

It takes people who are dead and makes them alive. No matter where you are for us if we want to be people who bear fruit in our lives our goal is this we keep listening.

[36 : 51] We keep following after Jesus. We stay with the word. That's what we see here in verse 10.

I told you before I asked you to imagine an auditorium with a speaker. You know if it's a good event with a speaker there are people who are able to come to the stage afterwards or line up at a microphone to ask questions.

And that's what we see verse 10. He was alone. Those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. The hard soil left the auditorium.

The good soil stayed around and asked Jesus what were you trying to say? They were the ones continuing to question and listen.

They want to know more. They have heard Jesus exhortation to listen. They know something more is going on. So they keep listening.

[37 : 56] They keep asking. The same is true for us. Now those of you who were with us in Christmas Eve of 2018 have heard this story before.

As I often say I apologize but I am in no way sorry. some of you know as I grew up I played violin and viola and I grew up right outside of Washington D.C.

in the suburbs. And so this bears special interest for me. I was in college when this happened but I was still headquartered in D.C. on January the 12th 2007.

And on January the 12th at 7.51 a.m. there was a man who showed up to the metro station in D.C. wearing jeans and a t-shirt and a Washington Nationals cap.

This man proceeded to take out his violin and begin to play as many people do in metro stations. Some people do it here in the springs too. You'll find those in Manitou Springs from time to time. [39 : 07] He played for 43 minutes a total of six pieces. Seven people stopped for at least a minute to listen. 28 people gave money and he made a grand total of \$52.

Unlike all the other musicians who showed up to the metro station this man happened to be Joshua Bell the most famous living violinist of our time.

He plays typically for \$1,000 a minute. The violin that he was playing in that moment cost \$3.5 million. Three days earlier he had played in Boston Symphony Hall and okay not good tickets were \$100 apiece.

Only one person who passed by recognized him. Many people didn't stop because they were too busy to notice. They were on their cell phones.

They were more important things to attend to. They were on their way to work. Author of one article says this, if we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on earth play some of the best music ever written.

[40 : 27] If the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that, then another magazine said this, Joshua Bell does nothing less than tell human beings why they bother to live.

Brothers and sisters, it is one thing to be too busy to hear a famous musician. It is quite another thing to be too busy to hear the voice of God.

It is a matter of life and death. will you stop and listen? Will you answer Jesus' call to follow him? That's a decision that God calls everyone to make. Will you give him your life? Or is there too much going on to listen to the music?

Verse nine, and he said, he who has ears to hear. Let him hear. Let's pray.

[41 : 44] Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the power and life of your word. We ask that you would make us the good soil, that we would not be pulled away by other loves and other distractions, but that you would be at work in our hearts, growing our faith and our trust and our love for you.

we thank you that you are the gardener. We ask that you would garden our lives. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.