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Sermon Summary #12

The Many Soils of the Human Soul: How People Hear and Respond to the Gospel Mark 4:1-20

How aware are you of the invisible and imperceptible spiritual dynamics that occur every time the word of God is preached, prayed, taught, discussed, or examined?

First, what is a parable? Simply put, it is a comparison drawn from the scenery and events of everyday life designed to communicate a spiritual principle or enforce a moral responsibility.

Second, why did Jesus teach in parables (see Mark 4:10; Mt. 13:10).

(1) He often taught in parables to **conceal** his teaching from those outside who were hostile to him: the Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, Roman authorities, etc

(2) He taught in parables to **disarm** his listeners, and by doing so to penetrate any hardness of heart or resistance to what he is saying. Cf. Nathan's parable of David in 2 Sam. 12:1-4.

(3) He taught in parables to **confirm** the rebellious state of their souls (Mark 4:10-13; Mt. 13:11).

Third, how does one interpret a parable?

Fourth, what is the central message of the parables? Every parable, in one way or other, is designed to teach the same truth about the coming of the kingdom, namely, that in advance of its coming in great power and glory at the end of history it has already come in advance in the person and work of Jesus in saving power, in the defeat of Satan, in the setting free of his captives, in the forgiveness of sins. In other words, the kingdom was to come in two stages, two phases, corresponding to the two comings of Jesus the Messiah (Mark 4:26,30; Mt. 13:11).

What is the meaning of the parable of the sower?

The kingdom of God is coming into the world just like seed sown by a farmer. In spite of Satan's opposition and the hardness of human hearts, the kingdom is gradually bearing fruit among God's chosen. The kingdom is here now, yielding fruit, but the final harvest is yet to come. *The kingdom displays only moderate success*, much as the farmer's seed only partially takes root and yields a crop. The kingdom does not force itself upon people; it must be willingly received. The kingdom is present, bearing its fruit, even as the seed sown by the farmer yields its fruit. It is also future, to be revealed and consummated in glory, even as the full harvest of the farmer's crop is yet to come.

The parable also challenges us concerning how we **hear** the word of the Gospel and how we **respond** to it.

First, there is the indifferent person (v. 15) –

Second, there is the impulsive person (vv. 16-17) –

Third, there is the inconvenient person (vv. 18-19) –

Fourth, there is the invested person (v. 20) –

How does Satan steal the seed?

- He distracts people when an opportunity to hear the gospel is at hand.
- He stirs up hostility/suspicion concerning the competency/integrity of the person presenting the gospel.

- He stirs up the non-Christian to distort what is being said into something the speaker never intended.
- He stirs up their minds to draw false conclusions or implications from the gospel that make it seem.
- He inclines their minds to link the Christian with people who've disgraced Christianity in the past, giving him an excuse to reject what is being said (i.e., guilt by association).
- He puts in their minds all sorts of questions and convinces them that if they can't get completely satisfying answers, Christianity can't be true.
- As the gospel is beginning to make sense, Satan stirs up pride, feelings of independence/self-sufficiency.
- Before serious consideration is given, Satan snatches the seed of the gospel (Mt. 13:4,18-19) from their mind: on the way home from church the car breaks down, or the conversation turns to politics or sports, or a sexy billboard diverts attention, or something on the radio captivates his mind.
- Satan might suddenly prompt him/her to place a higher value on things he/she might lose if one were to become a Christian: friends, fame, money, fleshly pleasures, approval of others.
- Satan stirs up feelings of hopelessness: "Not even Jesus can help. There's no hope. My life is a lost cause."

He also undermines the hearing/response to God's word in the hearts of those who are already born again:

- He may convince you that scheduling a late event on Saturday night is no big deal. So when Sunday morning comes you are exhausted, your attention span is short.
- He may orchestrate a dozen different distractions throughout the course of the worship or during our observance of the Eucharist, or when we pray, or when I'm preaching.
- He may provoke an argument between you and your spouse, or between you and one of your children, such that you can't concentrate on anything that happens after that.
- He may preoccupy your mind with what your employer is expecting of you tomorrow morning.
- He may work to convince you that I'm a complete dufus and not worth listening to!
- Don't think that Satan gives up after you leave this building or your house church, or after you've just finished reading a book. He may delay his attack for quite some time precisely to lull you into a false sense of security so that you lower your guard and are less aware of his presence or less aware of his strategy.

Remember: **If persecution doesn't work**, Satan will try **prosperity** (see vv. 18-19)! *Verse 17 isn't Satan's primary strategy with us. Verse 19 is! It isn't discomfort, but deceptive promises that become his weapon of choice.*

How to Counteract Satan's Strategy

First, using the imagery from this parable, cultivate the soil of your soul. Till the ground.

Second, devote yourself to attentive listening and study of God's Word.

Third, don't just listen to God's Word. Don't just study it. Accept it! See Mark 4:20.

Pray it into your heart. Submit your will to obey its commands. Open up your affections to enjoy its truth. Search out ways, beyond what I may say, to apply it today and tomorrow and every day thereafter. Figure out a way to speak that word of truth into the lives of others. Encourage them to speak it into yours and to hold you accountable for what God has said.