

**Message of the Evangelists:
Parables of Jesus
Mark 4:1-20**

Intro: Children's Sermon: The Lord's Supper is a kind of parable, a word picture where the elements stand for something else.

The Book of Mark begins with a quote from Isaiah 40:3, one of the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah. It tells about a messenger who will go ahead to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Mark 1:3). This role of John the Baptist as one who prepares the way for Jesus is emphasized in Mark.

The ox is a servant, a domesticated beast of burden. He pulls the plow that breaks up the soil. Jesus is also a servant of the people. He heals the sick and afflicted. He works until he is tired and in need of rest. But the people are hungry for his ministry, and they follow him wherever he goes (see Mark 6:31-33).

A central passage in the Gospel of Mark is Mark 10:42-45. Jesus explains here the upside-down pyramid which is the political order among his followers. "Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In Mark, Jesus is the Ox.

The parables of Jesus are powerful stories that generally convey a single truth. They are memorable word pictures that help us understand the nature of God's work in our world.

The parables of Jesus are unique. He was a master storyteller, and he used a literary construct that was truly his own.

Mark describes Jesus climbing into a boat on the Sea of Galilee, sitting down, and teaching the people. Last week we saw Jesus, as described by Matthew, sitting on the mountainside as he taught.

Jesus describes three conditions that make it hard for the seed—the message of the Kingdom—to take root in a person's heart. What I want to do is turn those into qualities that make it possible for you to receive the truth of God and become fruitful in it.

In order to receive God's Word, you need:

I. INTENTIONAL VULNERABILITY: *As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up (Mark 4:4)*

A. Some people are immediately DEFENSIVE when they hear god-talk. They are skeptical, even cynical, and ultimately unbelieving. Part of their suspicion has to do with the messengers who bring them the Word, the farmers who do the sowing. Part of it has to do with the seed itself. They have heavy, long-standing defenses erected in their hearts against the Word.

B. Some are strictly OBJECTIVE in how they handle the Word of God. The seed lies on the surface of their mind and spirit where they can turn it, examine it, and consider it without actually being affected by it. Their objectivity guarantees that they will never be the SUBJECT of any transforming power from the Seed.

C. Some QUARANTINE the Word of God. It comes to them by accident or perhaps by some sinister intent. It does not really belong in their hearts or minds. If they consider it at all, they do so with rubber gloves and goggles. It is never allowed to go any deeper.

D. Others IGNORE the Word, leaving it on display for the Enemy, fully expecting that the Word will be eaten by birds, and they will be left without its uncomfortable presence in their lives.

E. In order to really hear the Word of God, you must position yourself with an INTENTIONAL VULNERABILITY.

1. You let down your cherished defenses against the Word and OPEN your mind to the possibility of God actually speaking to you in a way that makes sense and changes your life.
2. You receive the Word as given especially FOR YOU rather than as something your wife or mother needed but is not “for you.”
3. You drop the notion that God is seeking to poison your life with ideas that are self-defeating.
4. You actually take a serious listen as the Word is spoken, looking for its application in your own life.

II. INNER SPACE AND TIME: *Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root (Mark 4:5-6).*

***A cavern was discovered as the workmen were building Interstate 35 through the Hill Country of Texas. They call it “Innerspace Cavern.” It’s actually a very interesting place to visit.

A. The germination of a seed and the growth of a plant require TIME. The seed must take up residence in the soil. This happens with the rocky soil. The birds cannot see the seed, so it germinates.

But the seed cannot grow because it has no time to do so. As soon as the sun shines brightly on those leaves, the moisture is sucked out of the plant and it withers and dies.

1. You make TIME for the seed and the plant through MEDITATION in the Word, allowing the Word to go deeper in your mind and heart than it has ever gone before.
2. You make TIME for the seed through DISCIPLINE that maintains a daily nurturing process. The Word of God has tremendous transformational power in any life. But it has to be given a chance to do its work.

B. The proper growth of the plant requires SPACE for the germinating seed to send up its stalk and open its leaves to the sun and send down its roots for water and nourishment. Obstructions in the soil that you may not be able to see will keep the seed from sending down those roots.

***The grass always grew first and quickly on the top of the septic tank. But when the sun started drying out the soil, that grass was the first to turn brown because the soil was only a thin layer over concrete—no roots.

1. You make space for the Word by REMOVING OBSTRUCTIONS. Identify the obstacles that are preventing the Word of God from taking root in you. Deliberately dig those obstacles out of your heart.

2. You make space for the Word by PREPARING FOR OPPOSITION. Do not walk out of this worship experience thinking that you will encounter no opposition. Your opposition will be both INTERNAL and EXTERNAL. Trouble, maybe even persecution, will come to you because of the Word of God which you have made time and space for in your life.

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

***Every gardener knows this syndrome. No soil can support unlimited growth. A selection process will occur. Unfortunately, many weeds are very hearty and fast-growing. Often their growth will outstrip the plants which are intentionally introduced into the soil, and those good plants will fall into the shadows of the weeds, and they will lose the competition for water and nutrition.

The Nature of the Weeds that steal our focus: *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 (Mark 4:19).*

A. Worries of this life: issues of daily living like what I am going to eat, what I am going to wear, where I am going to live. These matters can choke out the Word of God that is trying to grow in your soul.

B. Deceitfulness of riches. Money is necessary to life. But it is also very deceitful. It promises what it cannot deliver. Here we have the standard distraction that always feels like our panacea—making more money. If we just had more money we could acquire all the other things that we want and need. This becomes an obsession for many men as well as women, and it chokes out the Word. It grows like a weed until the demands of accumulation suppress everything else in your life.

C. Desires for other things. John Piper who wrote “Desiring God” starts the 1996 edition with these words, “This is a serious book about being happy in God. It’s about happiness because that is what our Creator commands: ‘Delight yourself in the Lord!’” And the theme of the book is this: *God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in him.*”

God wants to be the solitary and consuming desire of your heart. This is what the First Commandment means. And nothing else will satisfy your soul.

CONCLUSION: The key is to recognize the true nature of the Word of God that falls upon your mind and heart. It is the prize! It is the pearl of great price! It is the hidden treasure. Sell everything else. Possess this alone, and you possess all that you will ever need.

The good soil HEARS, ACCEPTS, AND PRODUCES a crop. This is God’s goal and desire for your life.

This parable, like many of the parables, is about the surpassing value of knowing and loving God.

And the end result of this supreme desire is FRUITFULNESS. The First Commandment, love God, is the way to true production in your life. If you make the goal production, you miss the point, which is God, and the weed will grow and choke the Word.