**Sowing and Reaping**

**by Pastor Fee Soliven**

**Mark 4:1-20**

**Wednesday Evening**

**October 10, 2018**

**1 And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.**

Saints, again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore (of the Sea of Galilee). The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake. Jesus spoke from there.

**Jesus Teaching from His boat>**

**2 Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching: 3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.**

Saints, Jesus used many stories, or parables, when teaching the crowds. These stories used familiar scenes to explain spiritual truths. A parable compares something familiar to something unfamiliar. It compels listeners to discover truth, while at the same time conceals the truth from those too lazy or too stubborn to see it.

This story gave a familiar picture to Jesus’ audience—a farmer planting seed, with the resulting increase dependent on the condition of the soil. In ancient Israel, seed was sown by hand. As the farmer walked across the field, he would throw handfuls of seed from a large bag slung across his shoulders.

**Photos of Famers Sowing in the Fields>**

No matter how skillful, no farmer could keep some of his seed from falling by the wayside, from being scattered among rocks and thorns, or from being carried off by the wind. So the farmer would throw the seed liberally, and enough would fall on good ground to ensure the harvest.

**4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.**

Saints, some of the seeds fell on a footpath. The hard and compacted soil of the road made it impossible for the seed to penetrate. So it sat on top, as tempting morsels for the birds that came and ate the seeds.

Some of that seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. Unlike the wayside, the rocky places had some soil to accept the seed, but not much.

The seed sprang up quickly in the shallow soil, but the sun took the moisture out so rapidly that the young plants wilted. Some of the farmer’s seed fell among thorns.

Thorns rob the sprouts of nutrition, water, light, and space. Thus, when the thorns grew up, the good seed was choked out.

**8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." 9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"**

Saints, however, some of the seed landed in fertile soil. This seed had the depth, space, and moisture to grow, multiply, and produce a crop. A farmer would be happy to see his crop multiply even ten times—thirty, sixty, or a hundred times would be an incredible yield for it would mean even more to plant and harvest in the coming year.

Jesus pointed out that “listening” makes fertile soil for the message of the Kingdom. If we bear fruit, it is proof that we have listened. If others bear fruit, it shows that the seed we have planted has taken root in their heart.

Those willing to hear are those who will do a deeper kind of listening with the mind and heart that is necessary in order to gain spiritual understanding. Some people in the crowd were only curious about Jesus, a few were looking for evidence to use against him, and others truly wanted to learn and grow.

Jesus’ words were for the honest seekers. Those who honestly seek God’s will have spiritual hearing, so they will be able to listen and understand.

**10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.**

Saints, when Jesus got away from the crowd and was alone with his true followers (the twelve disciples and the larger group of believers), a more intimate question-and-answer period followed. Perhaps these close followers did not want to reveal their ignorance about Jesus’ words in front of the entire crowd. So, as soon as they were alone with Jesus, his followers asked him about the stories in general, and particularly the story of the four soils.

**11 And He said to them,** **"To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,**

Saints, the you to whom Jesus spoke was the group of his true followers. They had been given a special gift by God, for only they—among the crowds around Jesus—were permitted to understand the secret about the Kingdom of God.

They understood, though only partially, the secret that God’s Kingdom had arrived among them in the person of Jesus. The Kingdom of God had been a “secret” to the prophets of the Old Testament because, though they wrote about it, they did not understand it.

**Romans 16:25-26**

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith--

Saints, the believers who knew Jesus personally received spiritual insight that illuminated the secret so that it was no longer a mystery to them. Jesus was aware of the unbelief and outright hostility of many of his listeners. The outsiders have not yet accepted the message of salvation and may never do so.

Thus, for them everything will remain concealed. Those “outside” (the religious leaders and the vast majority of the crowd) would never comprehend the secret, for they would not come to God for the answer.

Choosing not to believe in Jesus as their Messiah, they would not be able to understand his Kingdom. The parables allowed Jesus to give spiritual food to those who hungered for it; but for the others, Isaiah’s prophecy would explain their situation.

**12 so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.' "**

Saints, God told Isaiah that people would see but not perceive, and hear but not understand (Isaiah 6:9); that same kind of reaction was witnessed by Jesus.

**Isaiah 6:9**

And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

The story of the farmer was an accurate picture of people’s reactions to all of Jesus’ stories. By quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus was explaining to this inner group of followers that the crowd resembled the Israelites about whom Isaiah had written.

God had told Isaiah that the people would listen but not learn from his message because their hearts had hardened beyond repentance. Yet God still sent Isaiah with the message because, even though the nation itself would not repent and would reap judgment, some individuals would listen.

Jesus came to the Israelites hundreds of years after Isaiah, but the scenario was the same. Most would not repent because their hearts were hardened; but a few would listen, turn from their sins, and believe. The deafness to the message did not mean the message was false or that the messenger was somehow at fault.

It is not for us to understand why some believe and some do not; instead, we are simply to continue to trust in God and proclaim his message. Neither Isaiah’s nor Jesus’ audiences were denied the opportunity to turn from their sins and be forgiven. Instead, the point was clearly made that refusing to listen would mean inability to perceive and understand anything Jesus had to say.

**13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?**

Saints, people cannot see without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. To understand is like formerly blind eyes being made to see. By nature, humans are spiritually blind.

But the spiritual insight given by the Holy Spirit illumines Jesus’ stories and indeed all of God’s word so that believers can truly “perceive” and “understand” what God has to say. Jesus was speaking to those to whom the “secret” had been revealed; thus, they shouldn’t have needed any explanation at all.

**14 The sower sows the word.**

Saints, the farmer was Jesus and—by extension—anyone after him who would bring God’s message. The seed that is sown is the word of God.

**Matthew 13:37**

He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.”

**15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.**

Saints, the story reveals people’s varying responses to the gospel message. The attitude or condition of their hearts would govern their response. The word makes no impression on the “hard-path” people.

Satan (like the birds, 4:4) comes at once and takes it away. Perhaps the person feels no need in his or her heart, no desire for anything other than this life, no guilt of sin or need of forgiveness. Satan has no trouble with these people.

**2 Corinthians 4:3-4**

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

**16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.**

Saints, the “rocky-soil” people hear the message and receive it with joy.

These people receive the Good News of the gospel because of the promises offered. They initially show some promise of growth. These people understand some of the basics but do not allow God’s truth to work its way into their souls and make a difference in their lives—their roots don’t go very deep and thus they wilt. When trouble comes (the hot sun, 4:6), they fall away.

**18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.**

Saints, “thorny-ground” people hear and accept the Good News and allow it to take root in their hearts, giving hope of a harvest. But “thorns” grow up and choke out the growing seed—distractions and conflicts rob new believers of time to reflect on and digest God’s word in order to grow from it, as well as robbing guidance and support from interaction with other Christians.

Jesus described the thorns: cares of this life, lure of wealth, and desire for nice things. Worldly cares (no matter how important or how minor), the false sense of security brought on by prosperity, and the desire for material things (including anything that serves to distract a person) plagued first-century disciples as they do us today. Daily routines overcrowd and materialistic pursuits distract believers so no crop is produced.

**20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."**

Saints, but other people are like the good soil—they hear, accept, and produce a huge harvest. These are the true disciples—those who have accepted Jesus, believed his words, and allowed him to make a difference in their lives.

**1 Samuel 13:14**

“But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

**Let’s Pray**

**Benediction**

**"May The LORD bless you and keep you, May The LORD make His face shine upon you, May The LORD be gracious to you, May The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you His (Shalom) peace.” In Jesus Name!**