

## “THE SOWER”

Mark 4:1-20

When I was in high school, we were taught that agriculture evolved as man evolved. Man was a hunter and gatherer and moved from place to place. Then some became herdsman and moved from place to place to find pastures for their animals. Some planted seeds so they could stay in one place and find food more reliably. Planting evolved from scattering seed to planting seeds in rows. Then animals were used for tilling the ground.

The Biblical picture of agriculture is quite different. Man has not evolved. The first man was pronounced “Good” by his Maker. If anything we have devolved from our original “mint condition”. Man learned to plant gardens from God who planted the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve. Their first two sons, Cain and Abel, were a herdsman and a tiller of the soil respectively.

Abraham and his sons and grandsons were herdsman. While in Egypt they were still herdsman but they were living in a country which supplied grain to many other countries. In the Wilderness they pined for the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic in Egypt.

When they reached the Promised Land many became tillers of the soil with vineyards, orchards, and fields. The sower in Jesus’ parable wasn’t sowing the seed because he hadn’t learned to plant row crops!

Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods? When he has leveled its surface, Does he not sow the black cummin And scatter the cummin, Plant the wheat in rows, The barley in the appointed place, And the spelt in its place? For He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him.  
(Isaiah 28:24-26 NKJV)

1.) "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 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." And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mark 4:3-9 NKJV)

As the crowd listened to Jesus' story nearly everyone of them could identify with the images in the story. They had heard the birds chattering back and forth while someone was sowing and then swoop down to peck away at the seeds. They had seen seeds sprout and in a few days wither away. They had seen thorns choke out a section of the crop. They knew the joy of harvest time when the plants bring forth their fruit in abundance. For many that is all the meaning they received from Jesus' parable.

2.) Jesus wanted His followers to see the deeper meaning in His parable. And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Almost every college writing or literature course will say that Jesus' used parables to make His message clearer to His listeners. However, Jesus said that He used parables to hide His message from unbelievers.

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. 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, 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.'" And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? (Mark 4:10-13 NKJV)

Matthew gives more of Jesus' explanation:

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will

be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

(Matthew 13:10-17 NKJV)

3.) "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. (Luke 8:11-12 NKJV)

In the August 2009 *Harper's Magazine* there is a long article "Like I Was Jesus" by Rachel Aviv. Rachel is a young Jewish woman writer from Brooklyn. She followed a team of young people from Child Evangelism Fellowship as they went to low-rent housing projects in Connecticut telling the Gospel story to children. Then she did some follow-up after the summer was over and they were gone. She was very fair in her article. The application for this sermon is that Rachel probably heard the Gospel dozens and dozens of times as the team went to different locations. At the end of the summer she was still as she describes herself "vaguely Jewish but mostly superstitious." As many times as she heard the Word, the devil came and took away the word of God out of her heart lest she should believe and be saved.

4.) "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. (Luke 8:13 NKJV)

When I was a young man I used to hear the word "backslider" used. I haven't heard it in a long time. The great Scottish preacher Arthur J.

Gossip has this description of backsliding in his sermon "How Others Gained Their Courage."

"Once on a day you did walk with Christ upon the heights, did meet Him face to face, did pledge yourself to make all things in your life according to the pattern shown to you on the mount. And you did mean it...And your heart used to have its dreams and its enthusiasms and its high adventures. And where are they now? Are they, too, gone? Have they, too, vanished like a dream? Is all the splendor changed into a poor, conventional, flabby thing, you who once walked with Christ?...Is your religion only a memory, or still a fact? If in that temple of the living God that is your soul the flags that hang there are all old and dusty and faded and tattered; if all the dates on them point back to long ago; if there is never a victory to chronicle this year, nor any recent triumph to be added, then be sure that there is something far amiss...."

5.) "Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 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. 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." (Mark 4:18-20 NKJV)

The fact that we are here today in church, desiring to hear and learn God's Word means that we fall into one of these two groups. Both groups have ears to hear and they hear the Word. One group has become entangled with the pursuit of riches, with the cares of the world, with the desire to possess things, the cute, the latest, the "in". We are particularly susceptible living as we do in an affluent society, surrounded by pleasures and comforts unknown to most of the world.

You and I must often examine our lives and see if we are allowing weeds to choke the growth of God's word in our hearts and lives. All of us who are Christians want to meet our Savior with our arms full of fruit for Him – thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. If that is going to be more than a pious dream, we must work diligently to clear our lives of all that would hinder His Word and work in our lives.

