

# The Four Hearts: Which One is Yours?

A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a spiritual truth. Jesus often taught using parables to illustrate profound, divine truths, which he called “mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 13:11). Parables are an effective teaching tool because the stories are easily remembered and because they feature imagery and customs that are common and familiar to the intended audience.

Jesus taught a parable about a sower who sowed seeds into four types of ground and got four different results. The parable of the sower is found in three of the Gospels: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:1-20; and Luke 8:4-15. While crowds thronged to hear Jesus’ teachings, he knew that only a fraction of them would genuinely receive the Word. Jesus used the parable of the sower to illustrate the fact that not every person who hears the Gospel will accept it, but that those who do accept and obey the Word of God will have spiritually productive lives. His teaching is relevant now more than ever.

## **Mark 4:1-20**

<sup>1</sup>And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

<sup>2</sup>And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

<sup>3</sup>Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

<sup>4</sup>And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

<sup>5</sup>And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

<sup>6</sup>But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

<sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

<sup>8</sup>And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

<sup>9</sup>And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

<sup>10</sup>And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

<sup>11</sup>And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

<sup>12</sup>That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

<sup>13</sup>And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

<sup>14</sup>The sower soweth the word.

<sup>15</sup>And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

<sup>16</sup>And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

<sup>17</sup>And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

<sup>18</sup>And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

<sup>19</sup> And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

<sup>20</sup> And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

In this parable, the sower represents those who are spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and teaching the Word of God. Like the sower, we are to cast the Gospel far and wide. The seeds represent the Word of God. It is fitting that Jesus used seed imagery in this way. As Dr. Wiersbe explained in his book, the Wiersbe Bible Commentary, “The seed is the Word of God, for, like seed, the Word has life and power (Hebrews 4:12) and can produce spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). But the seed can do nothing until it is planted (John 12:24).” The types of ground represent people’s heart. There are four types of ground in the parable: wayside ground, shallow ground, thorny ground, and good ground. Lastly, the results represent how people respond to God’s Word.

### **Wayside Ground (Verses 4, 15)**

Have you ever seen a grassy area where constant foot traffic has hardened the soil resulting in a worn section where no grass grows? This area is called a “wayside” and is what Jesus described when he talked about the “wayside heart.” Any seed that falls along the barren footpath does not take root and is eaten by the birds. The wayside represents the person who hears the Word, but it does not penetrate their heart. Rather, the devil, represented by the birds, snatches it away. Dr. Wiersbe said, “Those who recklessly open their hearts to all kinds of people and influences are in danger of developing hard hearts (Proverbs 4:23). Hard hearts must be plowed up before they can receive the seed, and this can be a painful experience (Jeremiah 4:3; Hosea 10:12).” Do not let your heart become hardened to the Word; Satan is just waiting to snatch it away from you!

### **Shallow Ground (Verses 5-6, 16-17)**

You may have seen weeds or grass spring up between the cracks in the sidewalk. Sometimes, vegetation is able to grow in very shallow, hard soil. The soil lacks depth, however, and the vegetation does not develop a strong root system that would enable it to withstand harsh elements. Therefore, the sun withers the rootless plant. In comparing a person’s heart to shallow ground, Jesus was

describing someone who hears the Word and has an emotional response to it rather than a true spiritual conversion. This person's emotion and enthusiasm eventually wanes and he or she does not continue. The initial response is fleshy and shallow, not spiritual and deep; therefore, any commitment to Christ is short-lived. The sun represents the testing that comes to all Christians to prove their faith. Dr. Wiersbe explains, "Sun is good for plants if they have roots. Persecution can deepen the roots of a true Christian, but it only exposes the shallowness of the false Christian." Christians need to get flesh out of the way in order to become deeply rooted in Jesus and lead a fruitful life.

### **Thorny Ground (Verses 7, 18-19)**

The thorny heart represents a person who allows "the cares of this world" to crowd their mind such that the Word of God is choked out. Weeds and thorns sap all the energy and nutrients from the soil and hinders the growth of the plants. The same applies to a person with a thorny heart. This person allows the cares of this world, such as: wealth, material possessions, and entertainment, to become their primary focus – to the detriment of their spiritual walk. The Lord is relegated to second, or third, place. When the cares of this world become more important than hearing and obeying the Word of God, the Word is pushed out. Worldliness, materialism and a thirst for constant pleasure are like weeds and thorns in a garden that prevent the plants from being fruitful. Do not let the cares of this world choke out the Word and prevent you from being fruitful. Clear out your life of everything that stands between you and becoming a fruitful saint in the service of our Lord.

### **Good Ground (Verses 8, 20)**

The good ground is the only type of soil that yields fruit to its fullest potential. Jesus used good ground to illustrate a person who hears the Word, understands it, receives it within, is truly saved, and proves it by patiently and consistently producing fruit. What is spiritual fruit? Spiritual fruit is a changed life. Fruitful Christians possess Godly characteristics, they witness for Christ, they help others, their life is marked by constant praise and thanksgiving, they engage in good works, and they eagerly awaits Christ's return. The parable shows that all Christians do not produce the same amount of fruit, but all true Christians will produce some fruit as evidence of spiritual life and will continue to produce fruit as time progresses. For more on becoming a fruitful Christian, see the Bible study "Cultivate the Fruits of the Spirit; Eradicate the Lusts of the Flesh."

## **Conclusion**

As Jesus illustrated in the parable, Satan, our flesh, and the world are the things that prevent us from becoming fruitful Christians. They are Christians' worst enemies. As Christians, we should strive to ensure that our heart is like the good ground that has been cultivated and prepared to receive the Word of God. Jesus left us with four hearts to consider. Which one is yours? Choose to be good ground. Choose to be fruitful. Choose Jesus today!

*God bless!*