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Jesus Teaches



What's the most fun you've had learning something new?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLjesus

Obeying Jesus' teachings leads to fruitful living.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Do you have a favorite teacher from elementary school, high school, college, or on-the-job training? It's possible the reason you liked that instructor so much is because the teacher fell into one or more of these groups:

- » Teachers who know their subject inside and out
- » Teachers who love the subject and are passionate about it
- » Teachers who truly care for their students

Learning is not always easy, but great teachers give us the *desire* to learn.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus certainly knew what He was talking about, and He taught with passion. He loved those He taught as well. But Jesus' teaching has another vital element. Jesus' teaching is life-changing—eternally life-changing. His deep love for us paved the way for what He taught, and when we follow His teaching, we're able to fully experience His love in fruitful living.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Mark 4:1-2a (CSB)

¹ Again he began to teach by the sea, and a very large crowd gathered around him. So he got into a boat on the sea and sat down, while the whole crowd was by the sea on the shore. ² He taught them many things in parables.

In Mark 4, we find Jesus engaged in teaching large crowds that came to hear Him speak. The crowd that gathered to hear Jesus' teaching was so large that He had to get on a boat and push off into the lake so that they all could see and hear Him. Still, it's important to remember that when large numbers of people followed after Jesus, some of them surely did so for the wrong reasons. They were amazed at Jesus' teaching because it was unlike anything they'd heard before (Mark 1:22), but we see no indication they acted on anything He said. Perhaps they just saw Him as a good teacher or a man with interesting things to say that they hadn't heard before.

We often hear this kind of talk today. "Jesus was a good man and influential teacher, but He was nothing more than that." That idea is far from the truth. Jesus was and is so much more than a compelling teacher. Jesus taught to show us who He is, to demonstrate who God is, and to help us know how to live in a right relationship with God and others. He also taught us how to experience a full life.

One key way Jesus taught was through parables. The term *parable* is a compound word made up of a form of the verb *ballo* (to throw, lay, or place) and the prefix *para* (alongside of). The word carries the idea that something is going to be laid alongside something else for the purpose of comparison in order to extract something meaningful.

When we study any of Jesus' parables, it's helpful to keep four things in mind:

- » A parable is a story with a plot.
- » A parable refers to a real-life scenario that would have been familiar to Jesus' audience.

What are the benefits and challenges of using stories to reveal truth?

QUESTION 2

- » A parable is for the purpose of instruction, not entertainment.
- » A parable teaches one truth. It is not an allegory with many truths hidden inside of it.

Everything Jesus meant for His audience to understand is right there in the parable.

Mark 4:2b-7 (CSB)

^{2b} And in his teaching he said to them: ³“Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. ⁴ As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn't deep. ⁶ When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn't produce fruit.”

Those who first heard Jesus tell this parable would have understood immediately the four types of soil. Growing crops in Palestine was not easy. For a farmer to ensure he could harvest the maximum amount from his crops, it was a common practice to reach for the seed from a sack on his back and fling the seed far and wide so that it would reach as far as possible on the land. The farmer might even put holes in the bottom of the seed sacks so that some of the seed would trickle out and fall to the ground at the farmer's feet as he walked along the field. The condition of the soil meant that not every seed would be productive, so his goal was to broadcast as much seed as possible.

- » **Hard Soil.** The first soil represents the hearers of the Word who have hardened hearts. Just as a seed cannot penetrate hardened soil, when seeds of truth hit a hardened heart, they bounce right off, never taking root.
- » **Rocky soil.** Some of the soil in Palestine is just a few inches thick. The soil may look promising on top, but it is just a thin layer over limestone bedrock. This soil allows seeds to get in and be warmed by the sun, but when the plant's roots meet bedrock, there's nowhere for them to go. The first hint of foul weather causes them to wither. The people whose hearts are represented by

How do you see each of the three soils on display in our culture?

QUESTION 3

What obstacles have hindered you from incorporating God's truth in your life?

QUESTION 4

the shallow soil hear God's Word and "immediately they receive it with joy" (v. 16), but they shoot up too fast and too wildly to withstand the first sign of trouble. It's just a superficial acceptance and belief.

- » **Thorn-infested soil.** Some seeds cast by the farmer begin to take root. They may look healthy for a while, but then thorns grow up and surround them, choking them out and depriving them of receiving the nourishment from the soil. Jesus used this soil to describe those who hear His Word, but instead of letting it take hold in their lives through a firm devotion to it, they let other things steal their focus: "the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word" (v. 19).

These three soils can be grouped together as one type of soil: unproductive. It becomes clear that although everyone has access to God's truth, not everyone responds to it the same way. Not everyone will trust God, obey His Word, and let it take root.

The types of people symbolized by the seed falling on the rocky soil and the seed falling among the thorns were never Christians. This parable is not suggesting that a true believer in Jesus Christ could lose his or her salvation (John 10:27-30; Philippians 1:6).

Thankfully, there is one other soil.



Mark 4:8-9 (CSB)

⁸“Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times.” ⁹ Then he said, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

The remaining soil is very different from the others. Resilient and receptive to the seed and free of rocks and thorns, it becomes productive.

- » **Good soil.** It is, quite simply, “good ground” (v. 8). Jesus used the good soil to point out what His true disciples look like. They hear the Word and receive it, let it spring up in their hearts, and carefully avoid anything that will stifle its growth.

Up to this point, those in the crowd readily would have understood Jesus' references to the sower, seed, and soils. But now Jesus added something highly unusual: the harvest. Considering the condition of the soil in Palestine and the way they sowed the seed, farmers typically expected a ten-fold return in their crops at best. It's more likely they only harvested seven or eight times the amount of seed sown. But Jesus took them far beyond the ten-fold result of a really good planting season. When God's Word takes root in a person's life, He declared, it produces fruit that increases “thirty, sixty, and a hundred times” (v. 8).

Jesus began this parable in verse 3 with a singular command: “Listen!” He ended the parable with the same instruction: “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen” (v. 9). In Scripture, to hear something means more than just detecting the sounds; it carries the idea of understanding and responding. When the Bible says God hears our prayers, it means He answers (1 John 5:14-15). In the same way, we are called to hear what God is calling us to do and respond accordingly.

God can do great things in our lives by making our lives fruitful and abundant for His kingdom, but those results all depend on what we do with His Word. Knowing what it says is important, but it is only life-changing when we obey it. Let's hear Him—and obey Him.

What's our responsibility in the process described throughout this parable?

QUESTION 5

"Be doers of the word and not hearers
only, deceiving yourselves!"

JAMES 1:22

HEAR AND DO



***Which of the following phrases best describes you today?
Check one.***

- Breaking through the soil
- Wilting on the vine
- New growth is slow but steady
- Growing like a weed

***What practical steps can you take to better understand and
follow Jesus' teachings?***

LIVE IT OUT

What do you need to do to obey God's Word? Consider taking one of these steps.

- » **Weed.** Think about your own personal obedience to God's Word. Are there any things in your life that hinder your ability to obey Him? Pray and give those things to God that are keeping you from fully trusting Him and wholeheartedly following Him.
- » **Water.** Make Scripture reading a daily part of your life. Each day, note what God says in His Word and consider what you need to do to obey Him.
- » **Sow.** Consider what God is teaching you right now. Be ready to share what you are learning about God and His Word when the opportunity arises. When we release our fears and share openly about what God is doing in our own lives, others benefit from our testimony.

The truth of God's Word is life-changing for those who respond to it. **When we listen to and obey Jesus' teachings, He enables us to fully experience a fruitful life.**



My thoughts