

<b>Series:</b> Journey Deeper	<b>Reference:</b> Mark 4:3-8	<b>Title:</b> Desire	<b>Date:</b> 10.27.2019
<b>Website Writeup:</b> In the parable of the soils, where do you fall? What's your great desire? How does your desire define your effort towards spiritual formation?			

### **COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES**

This series follows along certain chapters of M. Robert Mulholland Jr.'s book, *Invitation to a Journey; A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. Much of these sermons will be reminiscent of, or sometimes direct quotes of his writings. I urge you to read along as we study this together.

For this series we're memorizing two short passages. Anyone brave enough to recite them? If you get them right, you'll get a prize...

#### **Romans 12:1-2...**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

#### **Ephesians 2:8-10...**

*<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

I remember first seeing Kim in a hallway at church 28 years ago & thought, "I'm gonna get as close as I can to that!" Phone calls were made. Friends consulted. Awkward moments endured. Money spent. And New Years Day 1991, a kiss was procured! Not a small amount of effort had been put forth towards the object of my desire.

Last week we talked about putting effort into our spiritual formation. In thinking Effort, we think Desire. Effort towards an object of desire. Desire's vital. It ignites effort.

Magnets attract metal objects. Organic & plastic materials are unaffected. If the magnet is Jesus & we are metal filings, the unseen magnetic force is our desire & the movement is our effort. So the question is, if Jesus is the magnet, are you wood or metal? Are you drawn to Him? Do His words inspire? Do you endeavor to know Him more deeply? Would you do anything to be around Him? Do you listen intently to Him?

It's good to have our breath taken away at times. To be slapped back to reality. To have eyes opened. To be shocked awake. Sometimes we're not listening well.

I recently watched Dave Chapelle's controversial stand up routine, *Sticks & Stones*. He did an impression & asked the audience to guess who it was. Without all the colorful language, he said something like... "Uh-duh, if you make one mistake & I found out, duh, I'm gonna destroy your whole life. Duh, even if it's something you did years ago, and you regret it. Duh, I'll destroy your whole career." Then he asked, "Who's that?"

Of course, people guessed Trump - and pointing at the audience, Dave said, "No, it's YOU!" And they laughed & laughed, even though he'd just insulted them!

In Mark, Jesus speaks in parables of the Kingdom of God. In chapters 1-3 He addresses three different groups of people: the crowds enamored with, but not committed to Him (1:21-45; 3:7-12), the leaders who reject Him & want to kill Him (2:1-3:6; 3:22-30), and His disciples who are committed & following Him (1:16-20; 3:13-19).

Then in chapter 4 he tells the famous parable of the soils.

### **Mark 4:3-8**

*<sup>3</sup> "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came & ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up & choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew & produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."*

Now, do you imagine if He asked them, "Who's that about?" Would they've said, "Caesar!" Maybe...but he would've responded, "NO! It's you!" And they would not have laughed... They're the soil in which the gospel seed has been cast. God will hold them responsible - are they receptive, or not?

The four soils correspond to these groups. The leaders signify the first soil - the hardened path. The crowds signify the second - the rocky places & also the third - the thorny weed-infested places. The disciples signify the fourth - the good fertile soil.

**Desire translates to receptivity.** Jesus begins with the exclamation, 'Listen!' He urges them to hear, or listen all through this & surrounding parables,. Whenever Scripture talks of hearing, it's talking of receptivity leading to obedience - or effort towards Jesus kingdom life! It's the magnetic pull upwards towards Jesus. Hearing means a willingness to listen to the truth, then making the effort to respond & obey. If life isn't transformed by the message, we've not truly heard the message.

He's saying, "Are you listening? This parables about you! Are you gonna receive my words & be transformed? This whole chapter's about 'hearing' (vv3, 9, 12, 15-16, 18, 20, 23-24, 33) and not just that they hear the grammatical syntax. We hear so many words

in a day. Background noise. Song lyrics. Talk show hosts. TV shows. Movies. Radio. Youtube. In one ear & out the other! We're not really listening to it all!

But here, in the person of Jesus, God speaks. King of heaven & earth. God incarnate. So, we're talking of hearing in the sense of understanding the Kingdom of God & committing ourselves to it 100%.

We notice a progression in the three bad soils, the plant dies later & later in each instance. And Jesus explains the meaning to His disciples in vv13-20.

The first soil signifies a hard heart, where the seed is robbed by birds before it even takes root. This is someone with whom you can't even converse about Jesus or heart issues of that sort. Their arguments rehearsed. They're unreceptive & maybe hostile. Closed, nothing can root in them at all.

In parts of Galilee there's a layer of limestone & shale a few inches beneath the surface. Over top is a thin layer of soil. In rainy weather it's briefly becomes fertile ground. So, in Jesus' second soil, the seed sprouts quickly, but the sun would dry up all moisture & kill the plant, its roots unable to go deep. It rooted, but not far enough. The shallow person. Someone who explodes with excitement about faith, but never really roots themselves deeply into the Scriptures, or church, in order to grow deep roots in Christ. Easily distracted, taken away by the first hardship, or next feel good moment - like Paul said to Timothy, *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:4)*.

In the third soil, the seed roots in soil surrounded by weeds stronger than itself. They soak up all the moisture in the ground leaving the plant nothing to live on. It may last a little longer than the other two, but still dies quickly. The person whose faith is choked out by worry of money, career, reputation, comfort, safety, what have you.

It's why Jesus said, "*You cannot serve both God & money.*" (Luke 16:13). Or that worry & anxiety is a sign of a life centered on possessions, comfort & security (Matt. 6:25-34). Scripture has strong words calling such affinity towards these things as idolatry. Putting something other than God in God's rightful place in life.

The root of a plant was an ancient symbol of stability & commitment. Plants in that area were often threatened by heat & drought. The root is that which guarantees the future existence of the whole plant. Many plants have desiccation tolerance - with deep roots, or they drop leaves early, or die back & stay underground in order to survive. As a matter of fact, if you see a patch of dried up moss on a trail in a hot climate, often if you pour water on it, it'll be green & vibrant within minutes. It has resilience & sustainability.

When asked to endure persecution & opposition similar to what Jesus routinely suffered, shallow quasi-followers ‘fall away’, they’re easily offended or tripped up.’<sup>1</sup> They’re fragile & brittle, with no staying power, since they’ve not been fully receptive of the whole gospel.

Then you have the seed falling on good soil. Soil tilled over, tended, watered & ready to receive seed. A seed sprouts, spreads out a root system, and produces a plant which bears more & more fruit in a cyclical seasonal way. It reproduces. As a matter of fact, Jesus contrasts this threefold yield of fruit from this seed with the three bad soils before. In the good soil we have the person who hears being transformed, bearing fruit in obedience to Christ. The fruit is qualitative, as seen in the fruit of the Spirit of Galatians 5:22–23. And it’s also quantitative, in that they bring others into the kingdom as seen in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

So, as the seed’s been cast, we’re responsible to listen & obey. **What kind of soil are we? Because in Christ...**

**We’re all sowers of the Word.** We’re called along with the Disciples to proclaim Jesus to the world around us. We’ve looked a lot at Matthew 28:18-20 - the Great Commission in past weeks. Christians have agreed throughout history to make Jesus’ last command our first concern. The complete Gospel, with all the feel good bits & pieces, and challenging ones as well.

There’s a temptation to hold back on some of the truth we’re called to proclaim. Jesus didn’t. He said to these teachers & this crowd very clearly, you have no roots, you’ll die off. Tragic, but needed to be said. We aren’t responsible for another’s receptivity, only speaking whole truth in love.

We’re called to cast seed, we can’t make it take root. And we can’t present a truncated Gospel to make people feel comfortable - let God defend Himself. Our gospel must include hell as well as heaven. You never know which part of the Gospel will preach to someones heart, we must give the whole thing. We can’t create openness, but we can preach. God demands a complete surrender to the whole gospel, repentance of sin hand-in-hand with grace & salvation. He calls for a complete dependence on Himself. If I incise the difficult parts out of the Gospel, because I am afraid of offending someones sensibilities, I may be cutting off their blessing. Jesus never calls for half-hearted commitment from anyone. He doesn’t allow for partial dedication to Himself. He calls us to death & rebirth in Him. So...

**Discipleship & commitment aren’t optional.** Shallow commitment has too often been accepted as the norm in Christian life. We want to be sensitive to seekers, but it does them no good for us to create an atmosphere which allows for mere shallow interest in the things of Jesus, without demanding surrender to Jesus. The crowds

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<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Mark*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 69.

signify seekers in Jesus's ministry who remain only seekers. Interest must translate to commitment, or there's no spiritual life to speak of. The crowds were enamored & amazed at Jesus' power, but they remain spiritually neutral. This turns into rejection later as they distance & disassociate themselves from Him in His trial & crucifixion. The task isn't to make seekers more comfortable, but truly challenge them. Not to impress with cute feel-good stories, or great intellect, rather to give them the true Jesus with all the difficult truth surrounding Him. So, what we find is...

**Worldliness is an extreme danger.** **James 4:4** says, *4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

**Mark 4:18 & 19** say, *18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth & the desires for other things come in & choke the word, making it unfruitful.*

Jesus is clear, we can't live one foot in, one foot out, 'have your cake & eat it too' life, and expect to have any part of Himself (see also Rom. 8:1–13). These things we choose to desire in life, replace Jesus. What's your desire? Are you metal or wood, if Jesus is the magnet?

Jesus' teaching & so much of the New Testament writings center on this argument of love for the world in contrast to a love for God. **Colossians 3:1–4**, *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

**Rom. 12:1-2**, urges us to fully sacrifice all that we are bringing about full renewal & understanding of God's will.

In **Mark 8:33** Jesus rebuked Peter saying, "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

**Matt. 6:19–21** Jesus says, *19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths & vermin destroy, and where thieves break in & steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths & vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in & steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

So, we find that...

**Receptivity is paramount to bearing kingdom fruit.** According to Jesus' teaching in the parable of the sower, receptivity is everything. This parable covers everyone. The question; is the seed is taking root & growing in you?

Because some of us are the hard-packed road. No matter what we've simply decided we won't believe.

Maybe we're seekers, the rocky or thorny soil. Quasi-Christians who come occasionally or even regularly to hear the pastor & sing worship songs. We think we're really strong believers, until difficulty arises. Or the Scriptures challenge our cultural bias in the use of money, identity, sexuality, safety, comfort, or in loving our enemy. Commitment runs out in those moments. There's nothing more distasteful than being lukewarm. God says in Revelation 3:16, *<sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

Jesus is looking for the the fruitful soil. Full commitment. Only this last group produces kingdom fruit which has eternal value. Those who listen well, hear the message, receive it, are transformed by it, and in all things make effort towards it. Those who desire Jesus above all things, with an openness to truth & desire to live it out.

What attracts your heart? What's your great desire? What do you make effort towards? Take stock this week. Think on what you think on & how you spend your time. What you worry about. What concerns you. Where you spend your time, talent & treasure.

No one wants to waste time with the hard-packed road. No one wants a church full of half-hearted seekers more concerned with their comfort than Jesus. We want fertile hearts, rooted & fruitful in Jesus which leads to a white-hot faith!

We end to today with some words from Kathleen, who's going to share another spiritual formation tool with us today...