

Tilling the Soil
Mark 4
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I. Introduction

- A. In Mark 4, Jesus begins teaching in parables to the Jews who come to listen with open hearts. When the disciples ask why He uses this method, Jesus gently explains that those on the 'outside' will hear through parables, but He will lovingly clarify their meaning to His disciples (vv 10-11). The key question is: who are the 'listeners'? At first glance, it seems simple, but a closer look at the context and the whole Gospel of Mark shows that this group includes more people than we might initially think.

B. Listen Overview

- i. In Mark 4:1, the command "Listen!" (Greek: *Akouete*) is a strong imperative for active, transformative hearing, not just passive mental acknowledgment, calling for a receptive heart ("ears to hear") to receive God's Word (the *logos*), as illustrated by the where different soils (heart)represent varied responses to the same seed (the Word), with only the "good soil" producing fruit, emphasizing that true hearing leads to acceptance and action, not just intellectual understanding

II. The Context

- A. Mark 4 marks an important turning point in Jesus' ministry. After Mark 3, when Jerusalem's religious leaders arrive in Galilee, having heard of His miracles and teachings (1:22), the atmosphere shifts. Though Mark doesn't mention Jesus ministering in Jerusalem earlier, John's Gospel reveals that He was there, especially during His cleansing of the temple (John 2:13).
- B. "The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And within the temple grounds He found those who were selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables." (John 2:13-14)
- C. This likely explains why the scribes are so hostile (2:7, 24) and why they accuse Him of blasphemy and plot to end His life (2:24, 3:6). They see His miracles as powered by Satan, which is a grave rejection. Jesus, coming to bring God's kingdom and Himself as the Messiah, faces this rejection from those who represent Israel's religious authority.
- D. This rejection prompts Jesus to speak in parables, which serve as both a form of judgment and grace: those who believe will understand, while those who don't will be held accountable for their blindness. It highlights that true understanding depends on a receptive heart.

III. Those that are independent of Christ in Mark 3

- A. In Mark 3, Jesus mentions 'those that was independent ' right after the religious leaders accuse Him of Satan's work. When He is in a house with many disciples, His family, including His mother and brothers, are outside, trying to speak with Him (3:31-32).
- B. "Then His mother and His brothers *came, and while standing outside they sent word to Him, calling for Him. And a crowd was sitting around Him, and they *said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." (Mark 3:31-32)
- C. Mark links this group with those whom Jesus explains parables to—His true family members (3:35).
- D. Mark 3:35 Jesus made a decisive and comprehensive statement on true Christian discipleship. Such discipleship involves a spiritual relationship that transcends the physical family and is open to all who are empowered by the Spirit of God to come to Christ in repentance and faith and enabled to live a life of obedience to God's word.
- E. The independent in the group includes those who are not following Him closely or who do not believe. The scribes' opposition and Jesus' use of parables show that these groups are considered independent of God because they may lack understanding or openness to spiritual truths.
- F. Jesus' Family is on the Outdoor
 - i. Mark describes Jesus' family arriving from Nazareth, intending to speak with Him privately, perhaps worried or thinking He has lost His senses. They are contrasted with the disciples, who are inside listening and learning, sitting at His feet, eager to understand. This shows that physical proximity isn't what makes someone spiritually close. The 'inside' includes those actively seeking to obey God—believers who listen and follow Him. Mary and some of His family might be believers but are still considered 'independent of God' because they are not yet obeying fully or walking closely with Jesus.
- G. The Disciples Are Inside
 - i. Inside the house are Jesus' disciples, including the Twelve and others who sit at His feet with open hearts, eager to learn. Jesus redefines 'family' as those who do God's will—those who listen and obey (3:35). This emphasizes that spiritual closeness is about obedience, not just biological ties. Some believers may still have areas where they struggle to obey and thus remain on the 'outside' in terms of intimacy, even though they possess eternal life.
- H. Are Jesus' Family Members Spiritually Saved?
 - i. According to John, Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Him during His public ministry, which places them among the crowd for their unbelief. Their presence reflects this. The status of His sisters isn't entirely clear—they might be believers, even if they are temporarily outdoor. Mary believed Jesus was the Christ but was also concerned about His health and actions, viewing His schedule as fanatical, not necessarily unbelieving. The main point is that

believers can sometimes be with the crowded if they are not obedient or fully walking with Jesus.

I. The Will of God

J. In Mark 3:35, Jesus states that doing God's will makes someone His true family, highlighting that active obedience defines closeness. This echoes John 6:40,

K. “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.””

L. John 6:40 NASB20

M. emphasizes human responsibility in salvation. Although God is sovereign, he works through faith, so that a person must believe in Jesus

N. where believing in Jesus fulfills God's will. The 'inside' includes those who listen and obey—those who pursue obedience and closeness, while others, even believers who neglect obedience, are considered 'with the crowded The relationships of mother, brother, and sister in Mark are about spiritual closeness and obedience, not just biological connections.

O. Discipleship and Obedience

P. Believer without discipleship become independent

Q. Discipleship involves more than faith; it's about listening to Jesus and obeying His teachings. Believers can falter in obedience and feel temporarily on the displaced missing blessings and spiritual growth. Mark shows that spiritual maturity comes by listening and obeying—growing closer to Jesus (4:3, 9). This reflects the teaching that applying God's Word leads to spiritual strength (Heb 5:14).

R. “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.”

S. Hebrews 5:14 NASB2020

- T. Disobedient believers risk losing spiritual rewards and experiencing separation from Jesus' closeness.

IV. Responses to Jesus' Teachings

- A. Jesus uses the Parable of the Four Soils (Mark 4:1-9) to show how different hearts respond to His message. The seed—representing God's Word—falls on various soils: hardened, rocky, thorny, and good. Only the good soil produces lasting life and fruitfulness; the others show how unbelief or distraction can hinder spiritual growth. This parable reminds us of the importance of listening attentively and obeying Jesus.

V. Discipleship and Listening

- A. Jesus' parables are meant to teach His disciples—those who sit inside with Him, eager to learn and obey (vv 10-11).
- B. “As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve disciples, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those who are outside, everything comes in parables,”
- C. Mark 4:10-11 NA
- D. Independent of the circle are skeptics, unbelievers, and those unwilling to pay the cost of following Him. Even believers can be independent of Christ if and neglect listening and obeying—like Mary or some family members—highlighting the ongoing need for spiritual attentiveness (4:21-25). Those who listen carefully and act on His Word will grow in insight and maturity
- E. (4:23-25). Disobedience can cause loss of spiritual understanding.
- F. “And He was saying to them, “A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, or under a bed, is it? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” And He was saying to them, “Take care what

you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.””

G. Mark 4:21-25 NASB2020

H. Added Notes

I. Four Types of Soil

J. Hardened soil

K. No life Dead

L. the hardened path, is the only soil that does not bring forth life

M. it is the only soil that represents an unbeliever.

N. The issue with the rest of the soils is not whether the seed produces life, because seed always produces life when it germinates, regardless of the soil.

O. The issue is the kind of fruit that will be produced by that life.

P. The first soil, the hardened path, is the only type of soil in which there is no life. This represents people who will hear the word about the coming kingdom but will not believe it. In the parable, the birds who eat up the seed are seen as agents of Satan. The message was heard by the preaching of the word, but Satan took the seed away.

Q. “Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.”

R. Luke 8:12 NASB1995

S. Rocky soil

T. A believer who abandons their faith.

- U. The final three soils symbolize believers, thereby indicating the existence of various types of believers.
- V. The second soil, the rocky soil, depicts believers who renounce the Lord (“they stumble,” v 17, and “it withered away,” v 6) due to persecution or adversity (v 18).

W. “And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.”

X. Mark 4:6 NASB1995

Y. “and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,”

Z. Mark 4:17-18 NASB1995

AA. Thorny

BB. The third type of soil, known as thorny soil, serves as a gentle reminder of believers who, while they don’t drift away, struggle with being unfruitful (v19) due to the numerous distractions and attractions of the world around them. In Luke 8:14, Jesus explains that this soil doesn't produce fruit until it reaches “maturity.”

CC. He says it’s because “the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

DD. Mark 4:19 NASB1995

EE. Similarly, Luke 8:14 describes these as “the seed which fell among the thorns,” representing those who hear the word, but as they go about their lives, they are often overwhelmed by worries, riches, and pleasures of this world, preventing the fruit from fully maturing

FF. Good Soil

GG. Always at Jesus feet

HH. “And He *came home, and the crowd *gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal.”

II. Mark 3:20 NASB1995

JJ. “As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables.”

KK. Mark 4:10 NASB1995

LL.il, the good ground, represents those believers who obey the things the Lord has taught

MM. will be greatly rewarded in it

NN. One in the house

OO. Smaller group

PP. They were disciples of the Lord who wanted to be close to and learn from Him, and who wanted to do the will of God. These who were seeking to listen to the Lord’s teaching were rewarded with His explanations

QQ. A believer grows in his knowledge of the Lord if he is willing to spend time to learn from Him. Jesus does that with the group of disciples here. This is one of the benefits of becoming a disciple of the Lord after believing in Him for eternal life. Receiving eternal life happens through faith, in an instant. Discipleship takes time and involves a learning process (vv 24, 34). During this process, the disciple learns what the will of God is so that he can do it (3:35). It is a process of spiritual maturity. This process takes time and diligence.

VI. The Twelve as an Example

A. Later, Mark describes how even the disciples sometimes fail to understand Jesus' teachings, shown when they forget miracles (Mark 8:17-21). Their difficulty to see and hear reminds us that closeness depends on obedience. The 'outside' includes those who perceive but do not understand—whether unbelievers or disobedient followers.

Even believers can drift away if they neglect obedience, risking separation from full intimacy with Christ.

VII. Conclusion

- A. The difference between believers and non-believers is clear: believers have eternal life and are children of God, while unbelievers do not. Jesus' teaching about 'outsiders' includes those who refuse to listen and obey His Word and who are distant from Him. Not all believers are fully disciples; true disciples are those committed to obeying Jesus. Closeness to Jesus hinges on obedience, not just faith. Believers can sometimes drift away if they neglect this, risking spiritual loss, as illustrated by the parable soils. Mark, along with John and other New Testament teachings, emphasizes that true fellowship with Christ requires active obedience and listening. It's a journey that demands effort, obedience, and diligence to remain near Jesus.