



**Sermon Series:** Holy Crop  
**Sermon Title:** Promise  
**Scripture:** Mark 4:1-20  
**Speaker:** Reid Robinette

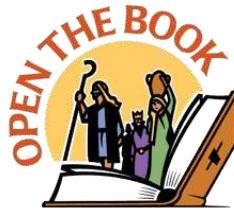


**Before your group study begins, share your first impressions on the message.  
Did the message raise any particular questions?**

*IF YOU WERE NOT ABLE TO ATTEND THE SUNDAY SERVICE, WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SERMON AT  
<http://www.crossroads140.com/sermons/>*



**Summary** – The beginning and the end of the growing process get a lot of attention, but the middle is where most of our time is spent. Spiritual growth is often slow, gradual and hard to see.



**Each week you will open the Bible and explore the Scripture for the week. While you're there, take a look at the verses that surround your text for the week. As you read, you might want to make a list of observations. Try to put yourself in each of the character's shoes. Make a list of questions you may not have answers to. Ask God what He may be trying to teach you.**

READ MARK 4:1-20

**My first impression of the passage:**

**Observations:**

Scripture surrounding your text-

Characters (Who's listening? Who's in the story?) / Setting / Culture-

**My Questions:**



1. Have other people ever noticed changes in you that you were unaware of?
2. Why is waiting for change so hard?



1. What would you ask God to change immediately if you could?



Take some time this week to pray for those changes you wish to see in your life.

## Go Deeper

### Unpack the Biblical Text

**Have a volunteer read Mark 4:1-9.**

**What did Jesus describe in this particular parable? Is this a parable about the sower, the seeds, or the soil? Why?**

**What were the dominant characteristics of each kind of soil?**

In an agricultural society, everyone would have understood what happened when a sower went out into a field to sow his seed. At least one path ran through most fields, and much of the terrain in Israel was rocky under a thin layer of topsoil. Dropping seeds along such paths was futile. Many fields had thorn bushes along the perimeters. Seeds falling there had no chance to grow and survive until harvest time. Others, however, did fall on fertile soil and produced a bumper crop (100 times what was sown).

**Have a volunteer read Mark 4:10-12.**

Jesus' disciples could not understand the point of the story, so they asked Him its meaning. Quoting from Isaiah 6:9, Jesus explained that He used parables—stories that give new meaning to familiar

objects or scenarios—as a way to reveal the truths of the kingdom of God to believers but that the story by itself actually concealed the meaning from unbelievers.

**Why do you think so many people heard the words of Jesus but then didn't understand them?**

**What about Jesus' identity and/or mission made Him hard to listen to?**

**Do you see similar things happening in culture today? In what ways do you see people hearing the words of Jesus but not really listening to them?**

Many people suffer from selective hearing. They either hear only what they want to hear or they refuse to understand what they do hear. Far worse are those who hear and understand but do not act on what they hear. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 9) is a challenge to carefully consider the story and its hidden meaning and practical implications.

**Have a volunteer read Mark 4:13-20.**

**Based on Jesus' interpretation, what character traits would be representative of each kind of soil?**

**Which of the soils produce similar results? What do these results portray?**

**Which soil is unique and how so?**

In His parable, Jesus described four types of soil, with soil representing people who hear the gospel. The first three soils were unproductive. Some seed fell on the path or well-traveled ground. The hard soil prohibited the penetration of seed. Birds ate it. This illustrates people who hear the gospel, but it rolls off their back. A second unproductive soil type, rocky ground, diminished the harvest too. Some people initially hear the gospel joyfully. These joy filled hearers, however, make only a shallow response. The pressure of obedience reveals their superficial faith. A third kind of unproductive soil, that infested with thorns, also produced no real fruit. The thorny growth choked out the young plants before they could mature. Normal daily stresses afflict even those people who commit to the Lord. They suffer from the worries of this age.

A fourth type of soil, good ground, returns a different product. This indicates people who hear the truth of the word with a view to how it can change their lives. The word sown in the world is the first step in the Christian growth process. Once received, God continues to reveal Himself to those who want to experience Him.

**What kind of "soil" best represents you now? Five years ago?**

**We all fit into the "thorny soil" category from time to time. What are some of the chief concerns that choke out your ability to listen and respond to God?**

**Based on Jesus' teaching in this parable, how should we respond to the worries of life?**

Normal daily stresses afflict all of us. Countless things every day try to rob us from the joy of living for God. The seduction of wealth and desires for other things also hinder spiritual growth. Acquisition of

material possessions creates a false security. The stuff with which people surround themselves never lasts forever. It can, however, divert attention from eternal truths and make a person unfruitful. In other words, they show no evidence of the Christian life.

### Commentary

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

4:1. Surrounded as usual by the crowds, Jesus taught from a boat while the people listened from the shore of the lake. This would allow a greater number of people to see and hear. He sat in the boat. Teachers traditionally sat when they taught.

4:2. The word parable literally means “to throw alongside.” Thus, a parable is an extended metaphor comparing a spiritual truth with something from the listeners’ everyday world. The phrasing here means that Jesus’ speaking in parables was a repeated action, something that took place on more than just this occasion.

4:3. The word Listen! introduces the rest of the parables in the chapter. It invites the listeners to participate, drawing them into the story. It arrests people, stops whatever other conversations are going on. It says, “Pay attention because this is important.”

This first parable is the key to the other parables. It does not describe the kingdom of God as the other parables do. Rather, it describes the condition of the hearers. This first parable also followed directly on the heels of the religious leaders’ misunderstanding of the person of Jesus. Jesus was describing their spiritual condition. He set the scene by referring to something His hearers were familiar with: a farmer sowing seed.

4:4. Sowing during this time period was done by hand rather than machine. Therefore, it is easy to see how some seed would end up on the path. There was nothing there for the seed to grow in, so the seed remained on the path until the birds ate it up.

4:5-6. Nothing would grow on rocks. So it was important for farmers to remove the rocks from their fields before planting. No matter how diligent a farmer was, however, it would be almost impossible to get them all out. Seeds scattered on the rock would spring up quickly in the shallow soil that covered the rock. However, when the sun scorched the seedlings, they would die because they did not have a root system.

4:7. Some of the seed was scattered among thorns and weeds. Again, these seed grew because of the life of the seed, but they yielded no harvest.

4:8. Good soil produces good crops with an abundant return. This is truly a sign of the kingdom of God. There will be a glorious return on the scattered seed, a literal filling of the storehouses of heaven.

4:9. Because this parable describes the hearers, Jesus gave it this special ending. This ending sets the tone for the entire chapter. Everything that follows must be seen in the light of this verse. While this

verse is only listed once in this chapter, each parable has the feeling of the words of the verse. It is a phrase that seems to be echoed throughout the entire New Testament. This verse calls for the hearers to evaluate their own response. What does Jesus mean by the parable? And if they know, the next question becomes, What kind of soil am I for the Word of God?

4:10-11. As soon as the disciples got Jesus alone, they asked Him why He was teaching in parables and what this particular parable meant. Jesus acknowledged that the mysteries of His kingdom were being revealed to them and not to everyone. The disciples were privileged to hear Jesus interpret this parable. This was not because of their superior spiritual state, but because the Lord Jesus had chosen them.

For every parable there are two levels of understanding: the physical and the spiritual. Everyone received the parable at the physical level, but the disciples were granted understanding at the spiritual level. The disciples—and this now includes us as believers—had been chosen, as were the chosen people of God in the Old Testament. We have been given a sacred responsibility.

4:12. The outsiders Jesus referred to are probably the religious leaders who accused Him of acting by the power of Beelzebub. They would not understand; they would not hear. They were responsible for the truth they had heard and rejected.

The theme of secrecy runs throughout Mark's Gospel, and it is no different here. Parables, which typically revealed truth, are shown in this context to conceal it. Is this a contradiction? No, because parables are more than illustrations; they are also spiritual tests. They hide the truth from those who do not seek truth, but they reveal truth to those who seek it.

4:13. Jesus' question was a gentle rebuke to the disciples. If they did not understand this parable, the key to all parables, how would they understand the rest of them?

4:14. The word that the sower sowed may be understood in two ways. It may be the word of God that Jesus had been preaching. This was the message of John the Baptist: Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Word, however, may also refer to the person of Jesus. The word sown would therefore be the people's response to Jesus: would they accept Him or not? At this very moment, Jesus was sowing the Word. He was preaching to the people. His miracles had preached to them. What kind of soil would they prove to be? Note that there are really only two types of soils—productive and nonproductive. But Jesus gave three examples of the nonproductive type.

4:15. The Word of God never makes an impact on some people. It rests on the hardened soil of their hearts until Satan comes and snatches it away. These are the people who will never even think to question their response to the gospel.

4:16-17. The seed sown on rocky soil is like those who hear the word and accept it gladly. Their faith seems to shoot up overnight, and they have great joy in the Lord. Some of Jesus' audience may have been in this category. These are the people who followed Jesus from place to place and longed to have Him heal them or feed them.

But Jesus' teaching eventually became too demanding for them (compare John 6:66), and they turned away. There was not much moisture in their soil. When the going got tough, they got going. Persecution, trouble, or even hard teaching shriveled the word until it became as nothing in their hearts.

Some people might think that this means Christians can lose their salvation. The parable, however, does not teach this. The parable actually encourages those who will be sowing the word in the future. Jesus was saying that we are to sow without looking at the results. Sometimes the results will be snatched away and sometimes the results will be shriveled because of circumstances. But at other times, our efforts will mesh with God's divine activity and a rich harvest will result.

4:18-19. The seed sown among weeds at first grew and looked like a healthy plant. But worldly things choked the life out of this hearer. Worries represent a lack of faith—unbelief in the One who said not to worry because God would take care of us. Wealth gives people a sense of self-sufficiency and little need of God. We are to ask God for our daily bread and live in the knowledge of His mercies which are “new every morning.” Wealthy people do not need to live hour to hour because they believe their needs are taken care of. Likewise, their desire for the things of this world crowd out the things of the heavenly world. Jesus declared that we cannot serve two masters. The soil or wealthy hearer in this parable had chosen what master it would serve.

4:20. Others hear the word and act upon it. They produce fruit by increasing numbers. God will take what we give Him and produce a bountiful crop from it. The average yield of a crop is seven and one-half times more than the seed that were sown. The huge numbers reported here—thirty, sixty, or even one hundred times what was sown—show that the harvest provided by the Lord is miraculously abundant.

The harvest is typically symbolic of divine activity, and here we have the key to the parable. The parable encourages Christians who have not fallen away, those who remain at Christ's side—then as well as now. While we may get discouraged that our evangelistic efforts are not producing the fruit we would like, we can be encouraged that God is working in the harvest and that it will be a rich harvest. The emphasis in the parable is not on the soils but on the harvest. In spite of failures, setbacks, and even persecution, there will be an abundant harvest for those who remain faithful to God.



*There are free Go Deeper Devotionals available at our Resource Center. The Go Deeper Devotionals will take you through the Bible over a period of three years. There is a commentary for every chapter of the Bible. Reading the commentary will give you some background before reading the scripture text. We encourage you to use the devotionals. Grab as many months as you wish. Share them with your friends, neighbors. Dive into God's word. **Psalms 119:105 - You're word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.***