

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Mark 4:26-29.**
- B. Mark's gospel does not totally ignore the teachings of X. True, Mark does focus on the events and powerful works of Jesus, but in this section we find recorded some of His parables.
- C. In some ways the parable of the soils explains why Jesus was not overly excited by the crowds. He knew that their hearts were hard soil that would not receive the word.
- D. Jesus further explains the nature of the new kingdom and the power of the gospel in the following parables.

I. THE SOWER AND THE SOILS.

- A. See **Mk. 4:1-20.**
- B. The human heart is like soil: it must be prepared to receive the seed before that seed can take root and produce a harvest. As in that day, so today, there are four kinds of hearts and they respond to God's message in four different ways.
- C. The parable of the sower and the soils:
 - 1. *The Hard Heart.*
The Enemy: the devil himself snatches the seed.
This kind of heart resists the Word of God and makes it easy for Satan (the birds) to snatch it away. Hard hearts must be "plowed up" before they can receive the seed, and this can be a painful experience (Jer. 4:3; Hos. 10:12). It is sad, but sometimes it takes a real tragedy for someone to see their need for the gospel.
 - 2. *The Shallow Heart.*
The Enemy: the flesh counterfeits religious feelings.
This heart is like the thin soil on a rock, very typical to Palestine. Since there is no depth, whatever is planted cannot last because it has no roots. This represents the "emotional hearer" who joyfully accepts God's Word but does not really understand the price that must be paid to become a genuine Xian.
 - 3. *The Crowded Heart.*
The Enemy: the things of the world smother the growth and prevent harvest.
This heart pictures the person who receives the Word but does not truly repent and remove the "weeds" out of His or her heart. This hearer has too many different kinds of "seeds" growing in the soil--worldly cares, a desire for riches, a lust for things--and the good seed of the Word has no room in which to grow.
 - 4. *The Fruitful Heart.*
The Enemy: none, the Xian grows, matures, and bears fruit.
This heart pictures the true believer, because fruit--a changed life--is the evidence of true salvation (2Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:19-23).

II. THE LAMP.

- A. See **Mk. 4:21-25.**
- B. In this parable, the Lord used a common object (a lamp) in a familiar scene (a home).
- C. The lamp was a clay dish filled with oil, with a wick put into the oil. In order to give light, the lamp had to "use itself up;" and the oil had to be replenished. If the lamp was not lit, or if it was covered up, it did the home no good.
- D. The Apostles were like that lamp; they were called to shed God's light and reveal His truth. But they

could not "give out" without first "taking in."

- E. We must take heed to WHAT we hear (4:24) as well as to HOW we hear it (Lk. 8:18). Our spiritual hearing determines how much we have to give to others (Mt. 5:14-16).

III. THE GROWING SEED.

- A. See **Mk. 4:26-32**.
- B. This parable gave the apostles both a warning and encouragement. The encouragement was that, from very small beginnings, the kingdom would eventually grow in size and in influence. While a mustard seed is not the smallest seed in the world, it was probably the smallest seed that the Jews sowed in their gardens. It was traditional symbol of that which is tiny.
- C. But the growth of the seed is only one part of the story; we must also account for the birds in the branches!
- D. The growth of the kingdom will not result in the conversion of the world. In fact, some of the growth will give opportunity for Satan to get in and go to work! One way to say it is, "The bigger the net, the greater the possibility of catching both good and bad fish" (Mt. 13:47-50).

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. Remember the three things that a parable can be:
 - 1. A picture that tells a great story.
 - 2. A mirror by which we can see ourselves.
 - 3. A window in which we can see God.
- B. How do you fit in the parables of this day? What kind of soil are you? What kind of lamp?
- C. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.