

The link between the parable of the soils and the events that follow in the gospel of Mark

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Updated 24 July 2020 A.D.

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The foundational parable in Mark 4:3-20, the four types of soils are illustrated in the next five encounters mentioned in the gospel.

The first soil is the path where the birds eat the seed. The birds in Scripture often/always represent evil spirits/Satan. After this parable, Jesus crossed the lake and healed the man with Legion, a huge number of evil spirits. The seed of the word could never grow in this man because Satan stole it. When Jesus healed him, he went and preached to the whole Decapolis region. He becomes fruitful.

The second soil was stony ground. Stony ground may represent our stony hearts, but the stony ground allows the seed to grow rather than wither. Jesus encountered an incident where a twelve-year-old girl is dying/or has died. This girl illustrated the seed that sprouts up but fails to produce fruit. When the girl is nearly ready to marry and reproduce, she dies, cutting off all change for fruitfulness.

The third soil is a crop choked by thorns that produce no fruit. Thorns in the Scripture represent sin (Adam, soil to produce thorns; Jesus, the crown of thorns). The third story is of the woman who had blood flowing for twelve years. The blood would make her unclean symbolic of sin. Since Jesus calls her daughter, she must have been younger than him. Therefore, I assume that the flow of blood had been going on since she reached womanhood at menses. Never had she had children because of the flow of blood would have made it unlawful to have marital relations; therefore, she was childless or unfruitful.

The fourth soil type is the good soil that produces thirty, sixty, or one hundredfold. The next incident is Jesus going to his hometown. Here we assume that if there is any possible illustration of good soil, it is Jesus. But, at his hometown, Jesus, even though he taught with great wisdom, produced little fruit. The fourth soil has a second illustration. The next story is Jesus sending the twelve out to preach repentance, to heal and cast out evil spirits. This final illustration results in many healings, many evil spirits cast out, and by implication, much fruit.

Further insight into the soil types and encounters in Mark 4 and the following

If the soil on the path is illustrated by the Gadarene demoniac, then the path may represent people unable to redeem themselves. They must depend on the sower to get some seed past Satan. The demoniac lived in a graveyard—a place that vividly illustrates residing in and among mortal sin. He became fruitful when he was redeemed and set about telling the Decapolis what the Lord had done for him. (It could be that he had evil spirits driven out more than once because he was infested with so many as when one evil spirit was driven out seven more return.

The second soil type—the stony ground would illustrate that it is not typically possible to be fruitful until maturity is reached. When applied to the spiritual life, one must be growing for a minimum amount of time before fruit can be expected.

The third soil type—choked by weeds, the woman with the flow of blood shows that it is sin which chokes off our fruitfulness. It also illustrates that we cannot rescue ourselves from sin, and it is a spiritual problem, not a physical problem. Only faith in Jesus can help us. The woman spent all her resources without being cured and instead grew worse. Years of striving without the proper minister will leave us bereft of resources and worse off.

The fourth soil type and Jesus illustrates that no matter how good we are as the soil, there are conditions outside ourselves that limit our fruitfulness.