



## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

### Mark 4:1-20 The parable of the sower (13 June)

Understanding this, the first of four parables in this chapter, is the key to understanding all of Jesus' parables (v.13): everything depends on how one hears (v.3,9,23,24).

This should perhaps be called 'the parable of the soils' since the focus is not on the sower but on the way the fate of the seed depends on the type of soil it lands in. It answers the question which the disciples may well have been asking: "Why is Jesus' message getting such a mixed reception?"

The parable portrays acceptance and rejection; but it also portrays two examples of shallow, half-hearted acceptance which, in the end, proves inadequate. Whole-hearted acceptance of the word of God – the message of the kingdom – results in abundantly fruitful discipleship.

The crowd hear the parable; to them it is a challenge to hear and receive the word. Jesus then explains it to his disciples; to them and others who spread the word, it is an encouragement that, although they will meet much unresponsiveness, some will respond and that response will bear much fruit.

In v.11, Jesus points out that his parables have a double effect: to people who are like the good soil and respond positively, they make the good news of the kingdom clearer; to people who are like the other types of soil and reject Jesus, they make things less clear and may lead to half-hearted discipleship or even falling away or rejection.

1. How does Jesus explain the inadequate responses depicted by the seed falling on the rock and among the thorns? What today are most likely to be the reasons for people's failure to stick with their Christian commitment?
2. With what attitude and what expectations should those who seek to spread God's word today approach their task?
3. How should we react when people seem indifferent to what we tell them about Jesus and his message? Or even respond with keenness and enthusiasm but fail to grow and in the end give up completely? Have we failed in our witness? How does this parable encourage us to keep going?
4. If we feel disheartened or are tempted to give up in our efforts to witness for Jesus, and do something easier or more comfortable, how might this parable help us?
5. Read another parable about growing seed in v.30-32. What is Jesus' teaching here?
6. Many parables illustrate aspects of the Kingdom of God – the nature of the rule of God over individuals and the community of God. Summarise what this parable teaches us about God's work and those who hear the gospel message.
7. On what grounds are people included or excluded from the kingdom of God?
8. What kind of soil are you? What can you do to become the kind of soil Jesus wants us to become?