

SOUL FOOD

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MARK 4 SOWING AND GROWING

The so-called parable of the sower could be called the parable of the soils since the focus of the parable is the variation in the land onto which the seed is thrown. These various "hearts" into which the seed falls communicates why there are various responses and levels of fruit.

Because Jesus provides the interpretation of His own story, its primary message should not be in doubt. The seed is the "word," i.e., the word of God, which here is equivalent to the Gospel, the good news of the kingdom. Like a farmer scattering seed by hand in the ancient world, this word is scattered widely. As is expected, some of the seed falls on ground that for one reason or another is unfruitful. The parallels with the way people hear the word are obvious. Some are hard and repel any entry of the word. Others are soon distracted by the worldly temptations Satan quickly casts up. Still, others find that worries and wealth squeeze out all concern for spiritual matters. However, there are others who hear the word with joy and seem to be the most promising of the crop, but never sink the deep roots necessary to sustain life. But thank God for the soil that produces fruit, sometimes even abundant fruit.

What do we learn from this teaching? First of all is that this parable, like many others, adjusts the commonly held perspective that when the Messiah came an earthly kingdom would be set up that would defeat all of the enemies of the Jewish people, especially the rule of Rome over them. But Jesus pictures the dawning of the kingdom a little differently. Through many different kingdom parables we learn that the kingdom grows in almost imperceptible ways like through very small mustard seeds or through the influence of just a little bit of leaven in the dough. From small beginnings come substantial growth. As depicted in Scripture, the process that God follows in building His Kingdom is Inauguration, Growth, and Consummation. So also the parable of the sower: for the time being, the word is going to be scattered widely, and people will respond to it in different ways, with widely different yields.

We must never look down on small beginnings in ministry. Remember, the ultimate hope is that the Kingdom will encompass the whole earth.