

Introduction: Hugh Ross, physicist and cosmologist, in one of his books describes an interaction he had with a colleague after analysis of data from the Hubble telescope indisputably confirmed the events in the 'Big Bang Theory'. Hugh's co-worker approached him and said: congratulations! You were right. There was a moment of creation for the universe. Therefore, there must be a Creator. However, I can NOT believe in your Creator! *** This illustrates the truth of a good saying. It goes something like: The physical distance from the head to the heart is about eighteen inches, but the spiritual difference can be infinite. Hugh's colleague intellectually conceded the existence of a Creator; but, his heart could not surrender fully to The God who died for his sins and rose to give him new life. *** People find it hard to surrender what they call 'freedom', which is actually bondage to sin and self, to be mutually 'bound' to God to experience true freedom IN Him. Freedom is to live life as God intends all people to live life: experiencing His amazing LOVE in even the greatest trials and afflictions of life. *** Jesus penetrated the hearts of people with parables. Rather than direct propositions and proofs, He used poetic stories and illustrations from everyday life. When people pondered these in private, letting them percolate in their hearts, they would produce real change. *** His first and greatest parable was about a sower who sowed seeds everywhere. The point is that the results of the sowing depend on the condition of a person's heart. A corollary to this is that each person's heart is made up of varying degrees of all four soils. *** The secondary parable this morning illustrates the power of a small portion of Scripture to be used by God to grow His Kingdom exponentially. *** Finally, the Psalm encourages God's people to sow His Word, even when they are in great sorrow. God wants His people to know that they will eventually rejoice in the harvest He will provide. *** Let's now go deeper together.

I. Jesus spoke a parable to a multitude about a sower who sowed in four places; and, the Twelve asked Him to explain, and He answered. (Mark 4:1-20)

- A. Jesus spoke a parable to a large multitude by the sea about a sower who went out to sow in four places with four results, and He commanded them to hear. (Verses 1-9)
1. He began to teach by the sea, and a great multitude gathered to Him, having entered a ship on the land, He was teaching in parables. (Verses 1-2)
Setting: Jesus is by the Sea of Galilee, and so many people are drawn to Him, He was sitting in a boat on shore and teaching in parables.
 2. You all must be hearing: Behold! One sowing went out to sow (seed). (Verse 3)
Command: Jesus commands all the people in the crowd to hear Him so they respond to His teaching.
Sower: There is just one person in the parable: a man sowing seed.
 3. It happened, some (seed) indeed fell by the way; and, birds came and devoured it. (Verse 4)
Way: Commonplace, birds eat seeds. A path is very hard and smooth. Easiest meal for hungry birds!
 4. Other (seed) fell on rocky ground, where not having much earth; at once it sprang up because it had no depth of earth; but when the sun rose it was scorched; because it had no root to it, it was withered. (Verses 5-6)
Rocky ground: The layer of soil over rocks is often shallow. Plants with deep roots have access to water well below the surface. Without such access, plants wither.
 5. Other (seed) fell into thorn plants that grew up and choked it, and it gave no fruit. (Verse 7)
Among thorns: The thorn plants had a head start on the sown seed, so they choked out the growth from the seed before it could yield any fruit.
 6. Other (seed) fell on good ground and it was giving fruit, growing up and increasing, and it was bringing forth: one thirty, one sixty, one a hundred. (Verse 8)
Good ground: The excellent soil (deep, wet and with minerals) produced from thirty to a hundred times the fruit as the seeds sown, differing by the amount of these variables present.
 7. (Jesus) was concluding: He having ears to hear, he must be hearing. (Verse 9)
Command: On the surface, Jesus is telling every farmer what he already knows. But Jesus is saying something very important below the surface of this story. He is demanding action on the deeper truth.

Application: We must always be praying to be given ears to hear The Holy Spirit in God's Word to obey Him IN The Faith of Jesus.

- B. When He was alone with the Twelve they asked Him about parables, and He answered generally and specifically. (Verses 10-20)
1. When He was with (them) alone, they were asking Him, those around Him with the Twelve, (about) the parables. (Verse 10)
Twelve plus: Later, when the crowd was gone, His disciples ask Jesus what He meant with the parable.
 2. He was saying to them: To you all the mystery has been given of The Kingdom of God, but to those outside in parables all is being. (Verse 11)
Mystery: The truth of God's Kingdom is not discernable by human means alone. It is a mystery to those who are self-sufficient.
Two kinds of people: Some people know their spiritual needs and are open to all God is, especially in His Son, The Savior. But others are unwilling to give themselves over to God in humble faith.
 3. So that, seeing they may be seeing and not perceive; and, hearing they may be hearing and may not be understanding; otherwise, they may turn and they may be forgiven to them. (Verse 12)
Isaiah: Jesus paraphrases what was said through Isaiah to Israel about their hard hearts turning away from God (Isaiah 6:9-10; c.f. Matthew 13:14-15). Some people have calloused hearts; but, some people are given hearts to understand and turn to God to be healed. Parables reach their hearts.

Jesus teaches with stories aimed at the heart

4. He is saying to them: Not you all have known this parable?! How all the parables will you all know? (Verse 13)
Challenge: With these two questions, Jesus challenges His followers.
5. Then, Jesus explains the parable. (Verses 14-20)
 - i. The one sowing, The Word is sowing. (Verse 14)
Word sown: So, the parable is not about plant seeds, but The Word of God – the TⁿN^aK.
 - ii. Those being by the way, where is being sown The Word, when they have heard, at once the adversary is coming and is taking away The Word that had been sown in them. (Verse 15)

(Path)way: The soils are the hearts of people. People with hearts as hard as a beaten path, upon hearing The Word, the adversary of God and people takes away The Word.

- iii. Those being on rocky ground, when they may have heard The Word, at once with gladness are receiving it, not having root in themselves; afterward, having been affliction or persecution because of The Word, at once they are being led to sin. (Verses 16-17)

Rocky ground: People with shallow hearts do not have deep roots. When the trouble all followers of Jesus will experience comes, they cannot resist sin.

- iv. Those being among thorns, having heard The Word, the anxieties of the age, the deception of riches and other passions, entering, are choking The Word, and unfruitful it is becoming. (Verses 18-19)

Among thorns: Thorns are the things of this world that must be overcome by a full-hearted trust IN Jesus. People must pray that He will always 'weed' their hearts so they are fruitful (John 15:9-16).

Application: Every day we must prayerfully examine the condition of our hearts to repent of hardness, shallowness and wrong desires.

- v. Those being upon good ground, are those hearing The Word, receiving and bearing fruit: one thirty, one sixty, one a hundred. (Verse 20)

Upon good ground: People with open and good hearts so as to have humble, dependent and obedient faith IN Jesus will bear much fruit for Him. This is the point of the 'parable of the sower'.

Jesus teaches with stories aimed at the heart

II. Jesus compares God's Kingdom to a small seed producing a shade tree and gives more parables which He explains to His disciples; He restores captives of sin, making them joyful seed sowers. (Mark 4:30-34; Psalm 126)

A. Jesus compares The Kingdom of God to a grain of mustard, the least of seeds, being sown and growing into a shade tree. (Mark 4:30-32)

1. He was saying: In what way may we compare The Kingdom of God, or in what parable may we set it? (Verse 30)

Kingdom: Jesus asks a rhetorical question about The Kingdom of God, before giving a parable about it.

2. Like a seed of mustard, which, when may have been sown in the earth, is least of all seeds. (Verse 31)

Smallest seed sown: Jesus is comparing God's Kingdom to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds.

3. But when may have been sown, it is growing up and it is becoming greater than all garden herbs and making great branches, so to be able, under its shade, birds of heaven to dwell. (Verse 32)

Greatest growth: The Kingdom of God started as very small, but would grow to give protection and life even to birds, how much more to His people (Matthew 6:25-33)!

B. Jesus spoke many such parables to those being able to hear; but, to His own disciples He explained all things. (Mark 4:33-34)

1. Of such parables many, He was speaking The Word to them, even as they were being able to hear. (Verse 33)

Many parables: Jesus told some forty parables that are recorded in the Gospels.

Able to hear: Those able to hear have hearts wide open to God, willing to surrender all to do His will.

Jesus teaches with stories aimed at the heart

2. Without parable, He was not speaking to them; privately, to His disciples, explaining all. (Verse 34)

Parables to all: To a mixed crowd, Jesus aimed at hard hearts with parables to perplex hard hearts.

Explain to own disciples: But He granted a privilege to His disciples as He built up their hearts with full explanations so they would continue to love: Him, His Word, His ways, and doing His will for them.

Jesus teaches with stories aimed at the heart

C. The Covenant God restores His people from captivity to teach them that He can turn tearful sowing to joy. (Psalm 126)

1. When turned again Yahweh the captivity of Zion / we were as dreamers // Then will be filled (with) laughter our mouth / and our tongue (with) ringing cry. (Verses 1-2b)

Restoration: God's people recall their emotions when they returned as a remnant to the Temple Mount after the Babylonian exile.

Laughter: They were laughing and shouting out with voices that rang!

2. Then they will say among the nations / He made great (things) Yahweh to do with them // He made great (things) Yahweh to do to us / we have become joyful. (Verses 2c-3)

God great: The returned remnant proclaims the great things Yahweh God did for them.

Joyful: They were made joyful as they rejoiced in the greatness of their Covenant God!

3. Thou must turn again Yahweh our captivity / as the stream-beds in the south. (Verse 4)

Supplication: Here they strongly petition Yahweh for their full restoration as every spring the water fills the streams in the dry southland (Negev). Jesus gives Living Water (John 4:10-14).

Application: Let us learn to accept that affliction and anxiety are part of life, and can be overcome in Jesus, The Giver of Living Water.

4. Those sowing in tears (in) ringing cry will reap / he indeed going forth to weep bearing a trail of seed / he will indeed come (with) ringing cry, bearing sheaves. (Verses 5-6)

Tearful sowing: Using synonymous images, the psalmist describes sowing seeds in tears.

Jesus may have based His parable of a man sowing on this Psalm.

Shouts of joy: Sowing in obedience to God, even in trials, will result in such a harvest that God's people will shout for joy with ringing cries!

Application: Let us live our lives encouraged to sow The Word in sorrow for the joy that will come as people held captive to sin are restored to God IN Jesus

God can turn tears to joy

Conclusion: Jesus told a large crowd a parable about a sower who sowed on four soils with differing results. Then, alone with His disciples, He explained its meaning. He also compared God's Kingdom to the lowly mustard seed which grew into a shade tree; these parables were spoken to those with 'ears to hear'. The Psalm teaches that tearful sowing turns to joy when God restores those who had been held captive.

Jesus teaches with stories aimed at the heart