

**Why do people reject the gospel and others accept it?**

## **Introduction**

Have you every wondered why you get so many varied responses to sharing the gospel?

Have you wondered why some may initially be excited about the gospel, appear to embrace it, yet you don't see a transformed life and when life gets difficult they seem to fall away?

Have you wondered why some will reject the gospel and others will accept it, be changed and bear much Christ like fruit?

Our passage today answers some of those questions

## **Historical background**

The nation of Israel in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had an eager expectation for the Messiah.

A Jewish deliverer that would rescue them from the oppressive Roman occupation

So, when John preached in the wilderness declaring himself the forerunner for the Messiah and announcing the one coming that was mightier than himself, the people flocked to see John. (Mark 1:3,7)

However, when the Messiah came to His own, the nation rejected Him.

***<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.***

***John 1:11 (ESV)***

Peter would later declare

***<sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. Acts 3:13–15 (ESV)***

His role as a **suffering servant did not correspond** with the **nationalistic expectation** of a warrior king that would overthrow the Roman empire.

- His family said **he was out of his** mind Mark 3:21
- The Jewish leaders were **rejecting him saying he was doing** ministry by the power of Satan (Mark 3:22)

Yet His disciples had on many occasions **seen proof of Christ the Messiah** exercising His authority over demons, disease and death.

They had heard his authoritative teaching and saw his popularity with the large crowds thronging to see him.

Surely many would believe in him and follow him.

Yet at the end of Christ ministry, His followers numbered about 500 in Galilee and about 120 in Jerusalem. Why so few? Some one did ask that question.

***23 And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” ... , Luke 13:23 (ESV)***

Jesus had already answered that question in the sermon on the mount.

***13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.***

***14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Matthew 7:13–14 (ESV)***

Jesus emphasised the **narrow exclusivity of the gospel**.

Even so the believers may have wondered why the majority of their fellow countrymen **rejected the Messiah**.

To help his disciples to understand the cause of Israel’s growing rejection of Jesus, he shared an **explanatory parable drawn** from the agricultural world.

- In Mark 4:1-9 He tells a parable of a sower sowing into various soils
- In Mark 4:10-13 he explains the reason for using parables
- In 4:14-20 He explains to them the point of the parable.

And so, I have broken this sermon up into these same three sections

I. The parable about soils

- II. The reason for teaching in parables
- III. The explanation of the parable

But its only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> point that we get the main point of the parable and answer the core question:

## Proposition

**Why do people reject the gospel and others accept it?**

- 1. People reject Christ because of their own heart condition
- 2. People accept Christ because of Divine heart surgery

## Read the passage Mark 4:1-20

### I. Section 1 1-9 The parable about soils

#### Situation

***1 Again he began to teach beside the sea And a very large crowd gathered about him,***

On the day that Jesus **Family had attempted to take** him back to Nazareth Mark 3:21,32 saying that he had lost his mind=He was insane/ **Lunatic**

On the day the religious leaders **had accused him of casting out demons** by the power of Satan(Mt 12:24, Mark 3:22) to try and dissuade the crowds from believing in Christ.

Yet despite this **Jesus remained popular** and large crowds gathered to hear him teach.

And Jesus **responds to adversity** not by **isolating himself from ministry**. Instead we see **him diving straight back** into ministry teaching the crowds.

You and I can **learn something from** that, that to follow Christ example, even in adversity and difficult times, **not to isolate yourself** , not to **become self-focussed**, but rather to be engaged in the Lords work and other people focussed.

***Vs 1 b so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land***

To address the crowd Jesus climbed into his moving pulpit. a boat to have some distance between him and the pressing mob.

He sits down, most likely for more stability

***<sup>2</sup> And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching, he said to them:***

But we notice that something has changed.

Jesus from this point onwards uses parables as His primary tool for teaching the people.

Parable = from 2 GK terms para=alongside and Ballo= place = to place side by side.

A Parable means something that is placed alongside something else for the purpose of clarification.

Parables are narratives of daily life or saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile, comparison, illustration

But parables are like stained glass windows in a church, dull a lifeless on the outside but brilliant and radiant from within.

The actual narrative in a parable may be clearly understood, but the spiritual truth it was meant to clarify is concealed to the hearers unless explained by the story teller.

Its only as an insider, a follower of Christ that Christ the splendor and the brilliance of the spiritual truth of His kingdom is clearly explained, seen and understood.

***<sup>14</sup> The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)***

**So, Jesus tells them a parable of a sower sowing into different kinds of soils**

***<sup>3</sup> “Listen!***

Jesus starts with a command to listen (hear and understand) the message.

The Grammar indicates they are to do this continuously. vs 3

This is also an indication of what the parable is all about, the ability to hear and understand.

***Behold, a sower went out to sow***

Everyone in that society would have had firsthand experience with sowers sowing in the field in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel.

Grain fields covered many parts of Galilee.

And men hoisting seed bags over their shoulders and scattering seed over these fields would have been a familiar sight.

This is something they would have understood.

He sows the seed on different kinds of soils.

**1 Kind of soil: seed fell along the path**

***<sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured***

Narrow paths crisscrossed the landscape and were the routes that travelers used to walk through the country side.

Due to repeated foot traffic, the paths were dry, unprotected and were hard packed like pavement making it impossible for the seed to penetrate the ground and take root.

Birds would follow the sower and would wait until the sower had moved to another field to sweep in and easily eat the seed.

**2<sup>nd</sup> kind seed fell on rocky ground.**

***<sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.***

Israel is a very rocky land and much of the rocks lie beneath the surface.

Farmers would remove the loose visible rocks but there were always places which the limestone bedrock was not seen that was covered by a shallow layer of soil.

When seed landed there, because the soil was warm and the bedrock trapped moisture and nutrients, the seed would germinate quickly.

But because there was **no depth of soil**, the roots were unable to develop properly and the **scorching desert sun** would cause it to wither and die.

**3<sup>rd</sup> kind seed fell among the thorns.**

***7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.***

Here the ground looked **good after it was tilled** but it was actually **infested with thorns.**

So that when the grain began to sprout, **a crop of thorny weeds** grew up with it and would overwhelm the **good seed.**

The thorns would **suck out the nutrients, moisture away** from the good plants and would **choke them that they yielded** no crop

**4th kind: seed fell in good soil.**

***8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.***

This soil was **not hard packed like the road**, or **shallow like the rocky** soil or thorn and weed infested.

Rather it was **soft, deep**, rich in moisture and nutrients.

When seed landed there it produced crops **30, 60 and 100-fold.**

In ancient Israel farmers could easily **expect a six to 8-fold yield** at harvest time.

A crop yielding **10-fold would be above** average.

When Jesus spoke of **thirty, sixty and hundred-fold**, these percentages were **unthinkably high.**

Jesus ends the parable again with the **imperative again** to continuously hear /understand the parable

***9 And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."***

What stands out here is

- It's the **same sower**

- There is no qualitative difference in the description of the seed.
- The difference is seen in the type of soil and the different kinds of yields it produces.
- But significantly: Jesus tells the parable to the crowds, but does not explain its spiritual meaning and thus veiling the spiritual truth of the parable.

He is commanding them to hear and understand yet not providing the explanation for the parable for them to understand.

You as the reader are also left hanging why does Jesus not tell the deeper truth of the parable? (Jesus explains)

## II. Jesus then explained the reason for teaching in parables

The crowds understood the story, but no one understood the spiritual truths behind the story.

*<sup>10</sup> And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.*

Notice that the setting changed.

When he was alone= refers to the fact that the crowd had left

those around him = refer to a narrower group than the crowds, those described in Mark 3:35 who were described as doing the will of God, believers and followers of Christ

with the twelve = refer the 12 persons Jesus had selected in Mark 3:13-19

asked him about the parables.

These people themselves did not understand the deeper spiritual truth and that's why they come to Jesus.

Its only by coming to Jesus that His followers receive explanation and understanding in the spiritual truth of the parable

They wanted to know why Jesus told stories without explaining what they meant?

***11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, Mark 4:11 (ESV)***

Jesus stated that the **spiritual** truths of His saving **kingdom had been given to them.**

The grammar indicates that the **secrets are revealed from a specific** time with **continues effect.**

The secret = GK term(Mysterion/mystery) means a knowledge of God that cannot be obtained by natural means.

***27 Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. (Daniel 2:27–28 (ESV)***

The Secret is explained as truths **of the kingdom of God**, referring to His spiritual or redemptive kingdom.

This is the kingdom one enters in by by the work of Christ gifting you salvation.

***13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13–14 (ESV)***

The truths more specifically reveal Jesus as the son of God that what he would do through His death and resurrection.

It is only when God he shines light into a darkened heart that people **see who Christ truly** is , **their personal saviour, Lord** and king.

***6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV)***

***but for those outside everything is in parables, vs 11b***

**Those outside** = refers to unbelievers **outside of Christ kingdom**, in the domain of darkness.



All those (crowds) who in the stubbornness of hearts **refused to accept Jesus** as the Son of God,

One example would be the religious leaders who had **hardened their hearts**, and continued to accused Jesus of doing miraculous by the power of Satan (Mr 3:22)

It would have included Judas, one of the twelve, that later would be used by Satan to betray Christ.

They had heard Jesus proclaiming the gospel, had seen Jesus do the miracles, heal the sick, deliver the demonic and still had hardened their hearts.

To them the **truths of Gods kingdom** would be continuously veiled.

Jesus then taught the shocking purpose for using parables, that has many commentators scrambling to try and soften Christ words.

***12 so that “ they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.’ ”***

***Mark 4:12 (ESV)***

In other words

The parables veil the truth so that they **might not repent** and be forgiven.

The grammar indicates that there is a **degree of doubt** that they would repent, but it does **allow for some to repent**.

To understand this one needs to first look at the old Testament passage referred to.

**During Isaiah's ministry**, Israel had **ignored the prophet's** warnings, had openly **disobeyed God**.

The **spiritual condition of Israel required** that God be faithful to His covenant with Israel and **send Judgment** upon them.

God in chap 6 calls Isaiah and sends him with a message in which Isaiah would tell the people to

***9 And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ 10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their***

***eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Isaiah 6:9–10 (ESV)***

This was **divine judgment would continue** until all the cities were devastated vs 11,13 and all the houses were without people and the land subjected to burning.

History **records Nebuchadnezzar armies conquered** most of Israel and later the **Babylonians came and took** the last tribes away into exile.

Jesus parables represented a **similar kind of judgment**.

in 70 AD Titus came and destroyed Jerusalem **killing more than a million** Jews.

Due to the people **repeated rejection of His clear teaching** and His undeniable miracles, **Jesus would frame his** teachings in such a manner that they could not understand.

Unable to comprehend the truth, they **were** on the **broad path towards** the everlasting torments of hell.

But in the **larger scheme of things** the parables can also be seen as acts of Divine mercy.

Since these people had **hardened their hearts**, who were resolute in their commitment not to accept Christ, **more truth would only make them more** accountable to God and **would increase their punishment** for all eternity in hell.

So, we see the usage of parable to the unbeliever was in fact a tool of judgment but also a **display of divine mercy in limiting the eternal punishment** they would obtain through further exposure to truths of the kingdom of God.

God's truths are dangerous if we become forgetful hearers and don't apply them

We continue

***<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? Mark 4:9–13 (ESV)***

Jesus then by usage of a question connects **the understanding of this parable** with the **key to understanding** all His parables.

Failure to understand this parable meant the failure to understand his parables in general.

Its only through faith in Christ that one becomes an insider into His kingdom and its only as an insider in the kingdom of Christ that you come to understand the truths of Christ and the Gospel and its implications for your life.

To you this this morning, that has heard the gospel, over and over again, yet keeps on hardening your heart, be a warned, to stop hardening your hearts, repent and entrust yourself totally to Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

### III. The explanation of the parable

Finally we come to the main point of the parable in which Jesus answers the reason why people reject the gospel or accept it.

#### Why do people reject the gospel and others accept it?

Two answers are given:

1. People reject Christ because of their own heart condition
2. People accept Christ because of Divine heart surgery

#### 1. People reject Christ because of their own heart condition

<sup>14</sup> *The sower sows the word.*

In the explanation no details are given of the sower

In Matthew 13:37 (ESV) while explaining the parable of the wheat and the tares Mathew notes that the one that sows is the Son of man.

<sup>37</sup> *He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.*

Jesus mission was to proclaim the gospel Mrk 1:14,38.

So, paralleling that parable we deduce that the sower most likely refers to someone who is preaching or proclaiming the gospel message.

According to Mat 13:19 The parallel story, **the soil represents the hearts** (the inner control center-mind, will, conscience, emotions) of those who **hear the gospel** preached to them

***19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. .... Matthew 13:19 (ESV)***

**What is sown is the word**= This refers to what Jesus had taught in Galilee, which refers to the gospel of God and the teachings about the kingdom of God as presented in parables. mrk 1:14,15,38,4:2

Jesus then explained the mixed responses people had to the gospel.

**1.** There were those who **were unresponsive to the gospel**, they had **Hardened hearts.**

Satan immediately comes to such a heart and continuously takes the word away.

***15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.***

These are people with calloused unbelieving heart- heart unresponsive to spiritual truth.

They are **practiced** in denying the gospel, practiced in exchanging truth for the lie, and worshipping the creature rather than the creator Rom 1:25

The gospel does not penetrate.

The problem is not with the gospel or the preacher, but rather the wilful unbelief.

They like the pharisees would rather embrace that false religion of Judaism, system of traditions and human works than the gospel.

Their continued resistance to the truths of God's **word produces a heart** that is **hard like a pavement.**

***4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the***

***unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)***

Satan uses different means to take away the word.

Satan continues to **uses false teachers, false religions**, and **cults**, and a world system under his power

**Are you such a person this morning, whose heart has become so calloused, so hardened that the gospel has no effect upon your heart?** (repent and appeal to God that he might soften and transform that heart- before it's too late)

2. Then there are those who have a superficial response to the gospel.

***<sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.***

The superficial stony soil - **Shallow heart** based on **emotionalism** which is short lived.

These are the people who hear the gospel, **have ecstatic and even joyful emotional experiences**, which **when it dissipates seek** the next emotional experience.

The initial response to the **gospel is dramatic** and for all intents and purposes it appears to be a **genuine conversion**.

Their **excited by the gospel**, but **ultimately reject it**.

Their faith is not genuine.

The difference with the hardened heart is that it's **not initially apparent**.

Their **feelings are affected** but the **heart is not transformed**.

Beneath the thin veneer **of outward enthusiasm** lies an **impenetrable** layer of unrepentant unbelief like a layer of bedrock

When afflictions and adversity arise, when the true cost of being a follower of Christ surfaces, their true nature becomes evidenced.

Their **faith collapses** at the **first sign of trouble**

Unable to persevere because their faith in the gospel goes no deeper than a **superficial knowledge of the gospel** and an **emotional experience** of the gospel.

They Fall away= Gk skandalizo means to cause to stumble to cause to be brought to a downfall, cause to sin.

When these people's faith is brought to **the test they stumble and fall**.

They lack a **genuine sorrow for** sin, a sincere repentance, heartfelt hunger for righteousness and a deep love for Christ.

**That's why adversity to a believer is so good, it proves the genuineness of your faith (1Pet 1:7)**

**Is your faith in Christ simply based on emotional and ecstatic experiences, - adversity and trials will reveal it?**

**This is a warning to all those who respond to the gospel and pursue church just for an exstatic emotional experience,... that is not genuine faith?**

**This passage is a warning to you?**

Then there is the Worldly response: the thorny soil- the Crowded heart in which worldliness crowds out the word of God

***18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.***

Unlike the hardened heart or the **shallow emotionalism** of the rocky soil, these represent the **double minded people**.

They don't have a **singular love for Christ**, but their **hearts remain captivated** by the love of the world.

They're **not storing up treasures in heaven**, rather their **storing up treasures** on earth.

There is a love for the world, a love for money a concern for the things of the world.<sup>1</sup> John 2:15–17 (ESV)

The love for the world and a love for the word mutually exclude one another and the worlds system, desires etc end up choking the word.

Is your heart crowded with the concerns and worries of this world.

Is your only pursuit money?

Is your desires more things, more games, more entertainment, more pleasures of the world?

What do you spend your time on and your money on?

Is it God or does the things of this world crowd out God's word in your heart?

Those who love the world will forsake Christ and be spiritually unfruitful.

Finally we come to the answer for why do some people accept the gospel?

## 2. People accept Christ because of Divine heart surgery

Here we discover the good soil – the receptive and Fruitful heart- The God prepared heart that responds to the gospel, receives it and is transformed by it.

***<sup>20</sup> But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."***

The good soil describes a heart prepared by God the Father

- Its good because God had chosen this person in Christ before the foundation of the world

***<sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)***

- Its good because God had drawn this person to himself

**<sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44 (ESV)**

- Its good because God had opened the heart to respond to the gospel.

**<sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. Acts 16:14 (ESV)**

- Its good because God had shone into the heart giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

**<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV)**

- Its good because its a HS cultivated heart.

Its a heart Convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment John 16:8-11

Jesus was saying that even though many hearers will reject the gospel due to hardness of heart, shallowness or worldliness, there are always the God prepared hearts that receive the gospel, accept it and bear fruit.

**<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:5–8 (ESV)**

True believers are characterized by fruit bearing and marks true disciples of Christ.

Examples of fruit

**<sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Matthew 3:8 (ESV)**

**<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:11 (ESV)**

**<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV)**



**<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35 (ESV)**

**<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

The surprising element of the parable is the description of the harvest.

The harvest is described as thirty, sixty and hundred-fold.

These figures represent a yield of 3000, 6000 and 10000%.

When the gospel goes forth empowered by the HS, the results are supernatural.

### **In application**

If you are a believer that shares the gospel, this passage teaches you to have realistic expectations.

You can expect 4 basic responses to preaching the gospel

Those with hardened hearts will outrightly reject the gospel and Satan will remove the word from their lives

Those with a shallow heart will emotionally initially in joy accept the gospel, but when trials, persecution and adversity arises will soon fall away.(Flesh)

Those with a crowded heart will receive the word, but the cares of the world, the concerns for money, things and worldly concerns will crowd out the word, choke it and make it unfruitful.(worldliness)

But then there is the receptive hearts, those hearts prepared by God and His spirit who will genuinely receive the gospel, will humbly turn from their sins, wholeheartedly embrace Christ as Saviour and King and bear much fruit.

The genuineness of their profession will be seen by the abundant fruit and transformed life.

What is the condition of your heart?

Some of you may be saying my heart is hardened, or my heart is shallow or crowded.

To you I say, repent, hear the words of Christ, come to Him, and ask Him to take that heart of stone and make it a heart of flesh.

If He could save Mark, if He could save Paul, if He could save Mathew, He too can change your heart and save you.

May this encourage you to pray and ask God to prepare your heart to be receptive to the Gospel, to be fruitful and bear much fruit.

The parable of the soils prepares disciples to expect some people to respond positively to the gospel while others reject it.

Those who reject it do so by their own doing

Those who accept it is due to God's doing,

## I conclusion

**Why do people reject the gospel and others accept it?**

1. People reject Christ because of their own heart condition
2. People accept Christ because of Divine heart surgery

***<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)***