

Palm Sunday 2022

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, April 10, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us on Palm Sunday! Whether you are here in person or online, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes as you deem necessary. We have much to cover in a short space of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

NOTE 1 – Palm Sunday is a significant holiday in the Christian faith, marking the beginning of the Easter Season. It commemorates that historical moment wherein Jesus publicly presented Himself as the long-awaited Christ or Messiah (i.e., Savior and Deliverer) to the nation of Israel. In Scripture this event is called the Triumphal Entry. You can read its four-fold presentation in the Gospel accounts (cf. Matt. 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12) at your convenience.

NOTE 2 – Thus said, I would like to consider this event and its broader context in a rather roundabout manner. Follow me closely as we take the time to establish some foundational elements. Let us begin with a seminal teaching from the earlier ministry of Christ: the Parable of the Sower (Soils). Please turn to Mark 4 and let us delve in together...

TO THE WORD

Mark 4:1–9, 13–20 (NIV)

1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." 9 Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. . . .

13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

A CENTRAL LESSON

Let us take a moment to consider v. 2a...

Mark 4:2a (Emphasis Mine)

2 He [Jesus] taught them **many things** by **parables** . . .

Q. What is a parable?

A. A parable is a short story meant to illustrate a spiritual truth.

FYI – Christ Jesus often employed this particular method of teaching throughout His earthly life and ministry. Parables were a useful tool in communicating deep spiritual truth(s) using the familiar items of nature and/or daily life and living. It is amazing how much can be communicated via a short story! Thus said...

Q. What was Christ seeking to communicate in the Parable of the Sower?

NOTE 1 – We can say that the central lesson was not related to the seed. All four soils received the same seed.

NOTE 2 – Moreover, the central lesson was not related to the sower. The sower remains the same throughout.

NOTE 3 – The core lesson, however, was related to the soils and the manner in which they each received seed.

KEY – As we shall note, this serves to illustrate four types of people and their responses to the Word or Gospel.

Let us analyze this parable of Christ one segment at a time...

SOIL PT. 1

Mark 4:4 (Emphasis Mine)

4 As he [i.e., the sower] was scattering the seed, some fell along the **path**, and the birds came and ate it up.

NOTE 1 – Ancient farmers would carry large bags of seed when sowing their fields. They would reach into the bag and throw out a handful at a time. Naturally, some seed would fall upon the path on which they walked. Of course, this ground might have once been fruitful, with good soil and potential for a crop. However, having been walked on year-upon-year, the soil compacted and became hard. Since the seed could not penetrate, the birds of the air were quick to consume the seed of the sower.

Q. What is the hardened path meant to signify?

A. Christ interpreted the meaning of this imagery...

Mark 4:14–16

14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

NOTE 2 – Some people are like the hardened path. They hear about the love of God, His divine mercy or the promise of everlasting life from faithful Christian witnesses, yet this message never has the chance to bring about life and spiritual transformation. Rather, a hardened heart shuts out the word of Christ and it is quickly taken by the adversary who whispers: “This word is not for you!”

SOIL PT. 2

Mark 4:5–6 (Emphasis Mine)

5 Some fell on **rocky** places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

NOTE 1 – As the earthly farmer sowed his seed, some naturally fell upon rocky ground. This refers to an area of ground comprised of rock covered by a thin layer of soil. The seed quickly takes root in the shallow soil, giving the promise of fruitfulness. However, since the roots have nowhere to go due to the underlying rock(s), all growth withers under the blistering sun!

Q. What is the rocky ground meant to signify?

A. Christ interpreted the meaning of this imagery...

Mark 4:16–17

16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

NOTE 2 – Some are like rocky ground. They hear and excitedly receive the message of Christ, offering evidence of initial growth. However, the moment that cost is associated with the Word (e.g., persecution), they abort belief and any spiritual growth withers. Why? Because the Word never took root within at the heart-level, only impacting the superficial layers of their life.

QUOTE – “Though the emotions are affected and the feelings are excited, there is no real depth that flows from the hearing of the Word. The impression and the hearing remain superficial and momentary. When persecution comes, they fall away because the most surface part of them is affected...but not the real depths.”

SOIL PT. 3

Mark 4:7 (Emphasis Mine)

7 Other seed fell among **thorns**, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

NOTE 1 – Some seed of the sower would inevitably fall on thorny ground. The soil herein is both fine (v. hardened path) and deep (v. rocky ground). Thus, this type of soil could sustain growth and become fruitful. However, the promise of growth is stifled due to the influence of competing forces! Good growth is choked out by the presence of weeds and thorns.

Q. What is the thorny ground meant to signify?

A. Christ interpreted the meaning of this imagery...

Mark 4:18–19

18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

NOTE 2 – Some are like thorny ground. Such hear and receive the Word, and it takes root (i.e., bringing forth initial growth). However, this is sadly choked out by competing forces that sap vitality and spiritual abundance.

SOIL PT. 4

Mark 4:8 (Emphasis Mine)

8 Still other seed fell on **good** soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.

NOTE 1 – This is the scenario the sower genuinely desires! Namely, that seed cast from their hand finds good soil wherein it can take root deeply; and free of competing elements bring forth a mighty harvest in its due season.

Q. What is this good soil meant to signify?

A. Christ interpreted the meaning of this imagery...

Mark 4:20

20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.

NOTE 2 – Some, blessedly, are like good soil. They hear and receive the message of Christ. The Word sinks in, takes root and is allowed to thrive in an unhindered manner, bringing forth the life and fruitfulness the Lord ultimately desires!

TRANSITIONS

Of course, you may well be wondering...

Q. “Pastor James, why are you offering such a word on Palm Sunday?”

Q. “Why are you NOT touching upon Jesus’ Presentation as Lord and Savior?”

KEY 1 – Great questions, I am so glad that you asked! In truth, I have been struck in recent days how relevant the Parable of the Sower is to the Triumphal Entry of Jesus and its surrounding context. That is, we see the presence of the four “soils” identified by Christ within the broader Palm Sunday story.

KEY 2 – Allow me the time to illustrate and draw forth application(s)! Please turn with me to John chapter 12...

SOIL 1 – HARDENED-HEARTS IN THE PALM SUNDAY STORY

The following is recorded after the Triumphal Entry of Jesus Christ...

John 12:37–41 (Emphasis Mine)

37 Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still **would not** believe in him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

“Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” [Isa. 53:1]

39 For this reason they **could not** believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

40 “He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.” [Isa. 6:10]

41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.

NOTE 1 – Many were excited at the presentation of Jesus as the long-awaited Christ all those centuries ago.....

John 12:13

13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

NOTE 2 – However, not everyone was excited at the Jesus’ arrival and public presentation as Lord and Savior....

Luke 19:39–40, 47b

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” 40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” . . . 47 . . .the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying [sought for a way in which] to kill him.

Q. You want to know what we see in this selection of Scripture?

A. We see the presence of those who were like the hardened paths of the Parable of the Sower. Regardless of what Jesus said or did—regardless of the wonders He performed in their very midst—they refused to believe! Ultimately, because they would not accept His word(s), they were judged and given to a spiritual condition wherein they could not receive His words. How frightening and tragic!

KEY – And all these millennia later, there are still many who are hardened against the message/word of Christ!

SOILS 2 & 3 – ROCKY & THORNY GROUND IN THE PALM SUNDAY STORY

The following is also recorded after the Triumphal Entry of Jesus Christ...

John 12:42–43 (Emphasis Mine)

42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. **But** because of the Pharisees they would **not** openly acknowledge their faith for **fear** they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved human praise **more than** praise from God.

Q. You want to know what we see in this selection of Scripture?

A. We see the presence of those who were like the rocky AND thorny ground from Jesus' Parable of the Sower.

1) Rocky Ground

We see the presence of those who inwardly believed (v. 42a), but failed to acknowledge that belief openly due to fear of persecution at the hands of the Pharisees. These should have given greater attention to the following teaching of Christ...

Luke 12:4–9

4 I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 8 I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.

2) Thorny Ground

We see the presence of those who possessed a degree of belief, but that belief was choked out through the influence of competing forces. We read in John 12:42–43 of those who prioritized human praise and the comfort of earthly connections above their faith in Christ. These should have given greater attention to the following teaching of Christ...

Luke 14:25–26

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

KEY – And all these millennia later, there are still many who act in similar fashion in relation to their faith. Many begin so well when they hear the good news of Jesus as Lord and Savior but seemingly wither once they face cost for the message of Christ. Others begin well, but their desire for earthly comfort or connections choke out the good work of God.

SOILS 4 – GOOD SOIL IN THE PALM SUNDAY STORY

However, we blessedly read the following prior to Jesus' Triumphal Entry ...

John 12:1–8

1 Six days before the Passover [i.e., the Saturday before Palm Sunday], Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Q. What do we see in this segment of Scripture?

A. We read of a woman, Mary, whose heart was like good soil...

KEY 1 – We read of a woman who came to believe in the message and power of Christ, having heard His words and seen His acts. We read of a woman who was moved to worship, though that worship cost her greatly. We read of a woman who cared not for what others thought of her devotion, for she knew to whom she belonged. We see a woman whose actions blessed Christ in the midst of imminent affliction...

KEY 2 – Ultimately, we read of a woman we are called to mimic in matters of faith, devotion and prioritization!

KEY 3 – I know which of the "four soils" and people groups I want to be like! Yet what about YOU?

SUMMATIONS

Q1. Which of the four "soils" are you in relation to Christ?

Q2. How do you respond to the ongoing presentation of His Lordship?

Q3. What say you to the ongoing proclamation of Jesus as the only true Savior?

KEY – Let us be like Mary, allowing belief to move us to a place of genuine fidelity and love!

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Those who wish to give online may do so at www.NewLifeBarre.org. Those who wish to give in person can utilize the offering boxes located throughout the church facility. Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting this local work of Christ.

NOTE 2 – We would love to have you join us for one or both of the following events...

1) Good Friday Service – This Friday evening from 6:30–7:30pm (NO Thursday Bible Study)

2) Easter Sunday Service – Next Sunday morning from 10:30–11:45am (invite a Friend/Relative)

NOTE 3 – We do have palm branches available downstairs on the front foyer tables. Feel free to take one.

NOTE 4 – Special thanks to those who oversaw service last week in my absence. God bless you for your work...

Numbers 6:24–26

24 “The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.”