

## \* Sunday School \*

### The Seed in the Four Kinds of Soil. Mark 4:1-20.

LESSON FOR JULY 14, 1912.

Home Reading.—Mon., July 8.—The seed in the four kinds of soil.—Mark 4:1-9. Tu.—parable explained.—Mark 4:10-20. Wed.—Sowing on stony soil.—Acts 17:1-9. Th.—Sowing on good soil.—Acts 17:10-15. Fr.—The doer and the hearer.—Matt. 7:15-27. Sat.—Hearing without faith.—Heb. 4:1-12. Su.—Sowing and reaping.—Gal. 6:1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—School.—Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.—James 1:21.

It will be remembered that when the Master's mother and "brethren" came to speak with him there was such a crowd in the house and before the door that they could not reach him. Probably Jesus went out to see them and shortly afterwards, in order to give the multitude a better opportunity to hear him, went out to the seaside where there was abundant room. Here the crowd pressed so hard upon him that he was compelled to enter a boat and push off a little distance from the shore. When the disciples had anchored the boat Jesus began to speak to the people in "parables."

#### LIGHT ON THE LESSON TEXT.

Verse 1. He began—this was on the day on which Jesus had healed a blind and dumb demoniac and spoken some plain words to the Pharisees who had charged that he had cast out devils "by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." The sea side—the sea of Galilee. Great multitudes—it was the popular period of our Lord's ministry. A ship—a boat. 2. Parables—see Additional Information. Doctrine—teaching. 3. A sower—the sower probably refers not only to Christ but to all who follow in his footsteps sowing the word of God in the minds and hearts of men. 4. Some fell by the wayside—some seed. The seed represents the word of God. Roads or paths in the East often lead through or along the edge of unenclosed fields. The seed was sown broadcast and some would naturally fall upon the plowed ground. Fowls—birds. Came and devoured them up—the seeds not being covered. The fields of Galilee are often covered with myriads of crows. 5. Stony ground—not places covered with loose stones, but stretches of rock thinly covered with soil. 7. Thorns—among "the seeds of thorns already mingled invisibly with the soil." The thorns grew up—"The thorus," says Abbot, "are at home; wheat is an exotic. Thorns are robust and can hold their own; wheat is delicate and needs a protector." Choked it—by drawing away the moisture which the wheat needed, and shading the plants from the sun. 8. An hundred—a hundred fold; an enormous increase, though such harvests are not unknown in the East. 11. Mystery, etc.—the deeper spiritual teachings of the gospel. 12. That seeing they may see, etc.—The words are quoted from Isaiah 6:9 not expressing the wish or purpose of God that the people should not see but apparently only stating what he knew would be the result of his teaching. The people had forfeited the right to their spiritual hearing and vision by persistently refusing to hear or see, and their power to hear or see was gone. The Pharisees were in the same condition. One may ask, however, if this is true and the Pharisees could not see, why Jesus should have taken the trouble to hide his teaching from them in parables. I know of

no satisfactory answer to this question unless it be that his direct teaching would only serve to inflame them, while the parables would make no impression of any sort upon them. But this to my mind is not very satisfactory. The truth is, there are many passages in the Bible to which the commentators have brought more eloquence than light and this is one of them. 15. They by the wayside—the reference is to those who are not opposed to the Word of God, but who, as has been said, "need the gospel plow to rip them up, tears of repentance to make them soft, and the Sun of Righteousness to make them warm;" "men who have exposed their hearts to all the evil influences of the world till they have become as hard as pavement." 16. They likewise which are sown on stony ground—they that received the word because their emotions have been stirred, not from deep conviction. 17. Have no root in themselves—no depth of conviction or principle. For the word's sake. Offended—stumbleth. 18. The thorus—the cares of this world; anxiety about things of this life. 19. The deceitfulness of riches—the riches men want as well as the riches they have are proverbially deceptive. Choke—strangle.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

1. What is a parable?—A parable is a brief narrative or representation invented or chosen to convey a truth. Some parables illustrate a truth; they are like our "Let's suppose a case." Others are used to veil the truth from minds that are not prepared to receive it. A parable is not usually a narrative of actual events, but it is always a narrative of possible events—that is, it is true to nature—in which respect it differs from a fable.

Whether a parable is a photograph of history or not is immaterial: its object is to exhibit truth, not facts. A good many pious people who have never learned the difference between truth and facts, feel compelled to accept the incidents of a parable as history, because they "cannot believe that Jesus could tell deliberately a thing that was not true." Jesus could not tell a thing that was not true, but there is no reason why he could not have painted an illustration of truth that had no foundation in fact. If, when he was asked "Who is my neighbor?" he had taken a piece of chalk and silently sketched the scene which he so beautifully described, no one would have thought it necessary to believe that the sketch represented an actual occurrence. He may have related only occurrences, but the cause of truth did not forbid his "supposing a case." In speaking a parable Jesus did not profess to relate facts but to illustrate truth, and it was a matter of small importance whether he illustrated it on a blackboard or by a word painting or a quotation from ancient history.

2. Why did Jesus resort to this method of teaching?—Because his growing popularity had increased the peril of his position until he could no longer present his doctrines with his accustomed plainness without inflaming the Pharisees to a murderous pitch. By clothing the doctrines of the kingdom in an attractive form, and by covering them with a veil thin enough to give to seekers after truth a hint of what was beyond, and at the same time heavy enough to shut out the truth altogether from those who were almost totally blinded by perversity, he could speak with the assurance that those who desired to receive the truth would come to him to find it, and that those who did not want the truth would not be offended by what they heard.

3. Eight parables were spoken at this time—The Sower, The Tares, The Mustard Seed,

The Leaven, The Hidden Treasure, The Pearl The Net, The Seed Growing Secretly.

4. In his Land and the Book Thompson tells us that in the time of Christ the farmer lived in a village or hamlet and "went forth" to sow in the open country, where there are no fences; where the path passes through the cultivated land; where thorns grow in clumps all around; where the rocks peep out in places through the scanty soil, and where also, hard by, are patches extremely fertile. "Now here we have the whole four within a dozen rods of us. Our horses are actually trampling down some seeds which have fallen by the wayside, the larks and sparrows are busy picking them up. That man, with his mattock, is digging about places where the rock is too near the surface for the plough, and much that is sown there will wither away, because it has no deepness of earth. And not a few seeds have fallen among this bellan, and will be effectually choked by this most tangled of thorn bushes. But a large portion, after all, falls into really good ground, and four months hence will exhibit every variety of crop."

5. Birds—"Descending to the plain of Genesaret," says Thomson, "we passed a hillside which was black with over a thousand crows, who were waiting there for the unhappy plowmen to move far enough away for them to descend on their fields."

6. Thorus—"Travelers tell us," says Lindsay, "that in the hot valleys on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, where the soil is good, thorus and thistles grow rapidly and luxuriantly. No horse can brake through their tangled brakes. The common oriental custom was to burn them down before sowing the seed; but the roots often remained."

#### THE LESSON STORY.

One day Jesus sat in a fisherman's boat, anchored by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Looking over the heads of the multitudes which thronged the shore his eyes rested upon the unfenced grain fields on the hillsides beyond, and there came to him a vision of the sowing time of his kingdom. A farmer, he said, went out to his fields one day to sow the grain. As he sowed broadcast some of the seed fell upon the hard path running along the edge of the field, and the birds seeing it, immediately pounced down upon it. Other seed fell on a stretch of rock that was thinly covered with soil, and quickly sprouted; but the heat soon withered the plants because there was no depth of soil to furnish the needed moisture. Other seed fell where the soil was already full of thorn seed, and when it came up the thorns came up also and soon overcame it. But other seed fell on prepared ground, and brought forth a rich harvest, some yielding as much as a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

In explaining the parable afterwards to his disciples Jesus said that the seed was the word of God; that in sowing the word it sometimes falls on hard, unfeeling hearts that are wholly unprepared for it, and that Satan snatches it away before it can find lodgment. Sometimes it falls upon the hearts of men who are soft enough on the surface, and who are momentarily stirred by what they hear, but such sowing comes to naught for the reason that the word does not go deeper than the surface feelings. Again, some seed falls upon hearts that are crowded with the cares of this life, and care, we know, has wonderful vitality, so that nothing that is good can thrive where it is allowed to grow. Nevertheless, adds Jesus, some seed finds its way into hearts that are prepared to receive it and brings forth such abundance as to make up for all that may fall upon unfruitful places.—Pell's Notes.