

Sermon Title: The Problems for the Harvest Laborer

Sermon Text: Mark 4:2-20

Sermon Purpose: To call the hearer to understand the problems facing harvest laborers.

Sermon Proposition: There are 3 problems harvest laborers of this age face.

- I. The problem of the sower. Vv. 1, 13:4:26-29
- II. The problem of the soil. Vv. 2-9; 14-20
- III. The problem of the scenario. Vv. 10-13; 33-34

Introduction: Matthew 13; Luke 8:4-15

“In many ways, current evangelicalism is similarly confused. I have often noted that the dominant myth in evangelicalism is that the success of Christianity depends on how popular it is. The perceived mandate is that, if the gospel is to remain relevant, Christianity must somehow adapt and appeal to the latest cultural trends.

That kind of thinking used to be limited to the seeker-sensitive crowd, but it has recently made the leap into more Reformed circles. There are entire movements that would agree to the truths of predestination, election, and total depravity, but then also, inexplicably, demand that pastors act more like rock stars than humble shepherds. Influenced by the emotional rhetoric of bad theology, people tolerate the idea that the cultural shrewdness of a pastor determines how successful his message is and how influential his church will be. Current church growth methodology claims that if an evangelist wants to ‘reach the culture’ (whatever that means), he must emulate the culture in some way. But such an approach runs contrary to the biblical paradigm. The power of the Spirit in the gospel is not found in the messenger, but in the message. Thus, the motivation behind the seeker-driven mind-set might be noble, but it is seriously misguided.

Any effort to manipulate the outcome of evangelism by changing the message or stylizing the messenger is a mistake. The idea that more people will repent if only the preacher were cooler or funnier invariably causes the church to suffer through a ridiculous parade of entrepreneurial types who act as though their personal charm can draw people to Christ.

This error leads to the harmful notion that a pastor’s conduct and speech should be determined by the culture in which he ministers. If he is trying to reach an ‘unchurched’ culture, some would argue, he should speak and act like the unchurched, even when their behavior is unholy. There are many problems with that kind of logic, but foremost is the false assumption that a pastor can manufacture true conversions by looking or acting a certain way. The bottom line is that only God is in control of whether or not sinners are saved as a result of any preaching.

In reality, the hard truths of the gospel are not conducive to gaining popularity and influence within secular society. Sadly, however, many preachers crave cultural acceptance so much they are actually willing to alter God’s message of salvation and His standard of holiness in order to achieve it. The result, of course, is another gospel that is not the gospel at all.

Such compromises do nothing to increase the church’s witness within the culture. In fact, they have the opposite effect. By creating a synthetic gospel, they facilitate filling churches with people who have not repented of their sins. Instead of making the world like the church, such efforts succeed only in making the church more like the world. This is precisely what Jesus’ teaching in Mark 4 was designed to avoid.”

[[John MacArthur, *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2011, p.3-4](#)]

- I. The problem of the sower. Vv. 1, 13:4:26-29
 - A. The sower’s commitment factor.
 - 1. The sower must be born again. **John 3**
 - 2. The sower must be branded by the Spirit. **Acts 1:8**
 - 3. The sower must be burdened by man’s sinful condition.
 - a. The compassion of Christ. **Matthew 9:35-36**
 - b. The compelling love of God. **2 Corinthians 5:11, 13-15**

- B. The seed confidence factor. (**1 Corinthians 2:1-5**)

1 Corinthians 2:13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. **17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Acts 4:3 And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

Acts 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

Acts 11:1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

Acts 12:24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

II. The problem of the soil. Vv. 2-9; 14-20

- A. The statement about the wayside soil. V.4

Matthew 13:19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, **3** among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

These are the hard hearted people, reflective of the Jewish leaders of Israel in this context.

- B. The explanation about the wayside soil. V.15

- C. The statement about the wretched soil. Vv.5-6

These are the superficial responders who are not willing to endure sacrifice and suffering for Jesus, the church, or the gospel sake and advancement.

- D. The explanation about the wretched soil. Vv.16-17

1. They respond positively to the message.
2. They endure for a time, but have no deep roots.
3. They forsake Christ because of tribulation and persecution as a result of the Word.
4. They stumble - Greek (*skandalizo*) means to offend or stumble, our English scandalize is the idea. These false believers stumble, fall when faith is put to the test as a result of persecution. (**Hebrews 11**)

Luke 9:23-25 Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. **24** "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. **25** "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

- E. The explanation about the **wrestling** soil. V.7
The word thorns (akantha) refers to thorny bramble common to the land of Israel and frequently found in cultivated soil, also used in (**Matthew 27:29**) to refer to the crown of thorns on Jesus head. These are the double-minded, who do not possess a single-minded devotion to Jesus Christ and the advancement of the Good News.
- F. The statement about the wrestling soil. Vv.18-19
1. They are unfruitful because of the worries of this world.
 2. They are unfruitful because of the deceitfulness of riches.
 3. They are unfruitful because of the desire for other things.
James 2:12-18; 1 John 2:15-17; Matthew 6:19-21, 24
- G. The statement about the **wow** soil. V.8-9
- H. The explanation about the wow soil.
1. They hear the Word. V.20a **James 1:19-20; 21-22**
John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.
John 6:65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."
 2. They accept the Word. V.20b **1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:6-13**
1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.
 3. They bear fruit reflective of the Word. V.20c
John 15:5-8; Galatians 5:22-25; Matthew 28:16-20
John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

III. The problem of the **scenario**. Vv. 10-13; 33-34

- A. What is a parable?
A common method of teaching in Judaism. A parable is a long analogy, often cast in the form of a story. Their meanings were fairly clear in Jesus teaching context.
- B. Why teach to them in parables? Vv.10-13
Parables in the Old Testament are connected to judgment. 2 Samuel 12 David and Nathan Here (**Psalms 78:2** I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old,) is reflective of vv.10-13.
Jesus employed parables to obscure the truth from unbelievers while making it clear to His disciples (reflective of the good soil). Vv.11-12. During the remainder of His Galilean ministry, He only spoke to the multitudes in parables (**Mark 4:34** But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.). Jesus veiling the truth from unbelievers was both an act of "judgment" because it kept them in the darkness they loved (**John 3:19** "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.). But it was also an act of "mercy" because they had already rejected the revealed light, so any exposure to more truth would only increase their condemnation (v.13) ("to whom much is given much is required").

Thirdly, it is an invitation to revelation for Jesus disciples, who are the laborers and His friends.

John 15:9-17 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. **10** "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. **11** "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. **12** "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. **14** "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. **15** "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. **16** "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. **17** "These things I command you, that you love one another.