

JESUS' EXPLANATION OF "THORNY SOIL"

By Roger Campbell

See if these words of Jesus sound familiar: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow" (Mark 4:3). The Christ said that as the sower sowed his seed, it fell on different types of soil. There was wayside soil, plus stony ground, thorny ground, and good ground (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8).

Remember, parables are figurative language, so as we study them we must ask ourselves, "What do the actions and people in this story symbolize?" Thankfully, in the case of what Jesus labeled as "the parable of the sower" (Matthew 13:18), our Lord explained the meaning to His disciples.

We want to focus on what Jesus said about what happens when seed falls into thorny soil, considering mainly what is written in Mark 4. The Master said: "And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:7,18,19).

What type of person is represented by the thorny ground? Like all others described in the parable, he hears the word (Mark 4:18). The thorny soil is the third type of soil mentioned in the story. The one preceding it, the stony ground, represents one who receives the word, but later falls away. The one which follows it, the good ground, also accepts the word. Our conclusion is that the thorny follower of Jesus. Notice what the Christ said happens in this person's life: "it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). It was not unfruitful from the outset, but it became unfruitful.

What happens in such a person's life which hinders him from bearing fruit for the Lord? This person is overly concerned with things/affairs of this world, and thus he does not set his heart on spiritual affairs. Whereas a committed disciple of Jesus sets his mind "on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2), this fellow fails to do that. Instead, he is worldly-oriented.

When you think about it, this kind of soil has the potential to produce a good crop. It could produce thorns, or it could produce the desired fruit, but it cannot produce both at the same time. The desired harvest will not come about as long as the thorns are in the way.

Jesus said some are “choked” by “the cares of this world” (Mark 4:19). Too much time and attention are given to the cares of this world. It is what the Bible calls being entangled with the affairs of this life (2 Timothy 2:3,4). There are many matters in life to which we need to give attention, such as working in order to provide for our own and our family’s daily material needs (1 Timothy 5:8). -

However, we must never allow the pursuit of earthly endeavors to hinder us from serving and worshipping the Lord God.

The Master said another factor for the thorny- soil-type person is “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19). Riches are deceitful in that they send a message, so to speak, promising more than they can give. The devil portrays material riches as being capable of doing everything a person’s heart might desire. The reality is, money and the stuff it empowers us to buy could never supply a person with love, inner peace, happiness, salvation, good health, or the solution to all relationship problems.

Possessing material riches is not a problem. It is when a person begins to trust in them that a problem has developed (Mark 10:23,24). Do not be deceived: those who are in love with money and stuff cannot please the Lord and will not live with Him eternally (1 Timothy 6:9,10,17).

What else did Jesus say about those who are symbolized by thorny ground? Some are choked by “the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19). These would be desires which are not properly controlled (1 Peter 2:11). In addition, Jesus said some people are choked by “pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14). It is great to enjoy life, and there is nothing wrong with resting, relaxing, and having wholesome fun. A number of people, however, become obsessed with earthly joys. They are those whom the Bible calls “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4).

Jesus identified the factors which are going on in a thorny-soil disciple’s heart and life. Slowly read them again: cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches, desire for other things, and pleasures of life. Please look once more: cares, riches, things, pleasures.

“Worldliness” is an attraction to non-spiritual matters, a desire to be like the world rather than being conformed to the image and teaching of God’s Son. The church is eaten up with worldliness today, and my fear is that many world-loving, money- loving, material-oriented members are unaware of what many folks around them observe: they are thorny soil.