

You sent in two questions during my sermon titled “Seeds, Soil, and Salvation” from Mark 4:1-20. Here are your questions and my responses to them both.

Question 1: Do you think that lives include areas of “good soil” and soil that’s not quite ready yet? Some soil (parts of our lives) that still needs to be broken up, tilled, fertilized, perhaps even left fallow. #sanctification

Yes and no. Yes, there are areas in our lives that need more growth in obedience than others. Maybe you struggle with pride more than you do with being unkind, so pride is an area in your life that God is still breaking up, tilling, fertilizing, etc...

But I also say “no” because, although the idea you’re asking about is biblical, I wouldn’t use the Parable of the Soils to communicate that idea. That would be reading into Scripture (what’s called eisegesis) rather than letting the Scripture read itself (exegesis).

The Parable of the Seeds (Mark 4:1-20) is a passage on salvation. So it’s teaching about justification, not sanctification. Justification is when a person gains a right standing with God. They go from being guilty to being not guilty. From a child of wrath to a child of God. Sanctification comes after justification and is the journey of the Christian faith after salvation. Sanctification comes in increments—becoming less prideful and more kind—whereas justification is done all at once—from guilty to not guilty.

In the Parable of the Seeds, only the good soil is the true Christian. So although a Christian may have been one of the other kinds of soil prior to their faith in Christ, once they have believed in Jesus and repented of their sin, they are the good soil. Meaning, a Christian doesn’t change from being the good soil, to the path, back to the good soil, then is among the thorns, etc...Being good soil means that you have been justified and declared not guilty by the eternal Judge.

But again, the idea that all Christians have room for growth (sanctification) is clearly taught in Scripture. Just not in this parable.

Application Tip: What are other passages of Scripture that teach on justification? What are some that teach on sanctification?

Question 2: Jesus says that his burden is light, and I believe that, but even with the Bunyan illustration today, Christianity is difficult. Why does the church so often make it sound that Jesus fixes everything immediately? To me that's setting people up for failure, allowing them to be planted in shallowly and without proper instruction.

You are absolutely right. When the church makes it sound as if Jesus will fix everything immediately people are being set up for failure. Honestly, I think most of the Christian church would laugh at the idea that "Jesus will fix everything immediately." I think that's more of a western Church (Europe and America) than a global Christian church idea. Chinese Christians who have to meet at 2am to worship God secretly together, or Somali Christians who are sought out by Muslims to be killed, or brothers and sisters in Pakistan and other Middle Eastern countries have no false ideas about Jesus "fixing things" in the way that we American Christians do.

As one poverty stricken Christian sister in Ghana told Joni Erickson-Tada, "We have joy... because we need Jesus more."¹ It seems that Jesus is enough for many Christians in the world, but for us in the United States, Jesus plus "Him immediately fixing things for us" is what we desire.

This shouldn't surprise us. After all, in our country we microwave our food, or go through a fast food place, or see ads promising to help us lose 10 pounds in a week (without even dieting!) and we take this consumeristic, materialistic, instantaneous mentality and apply it to the Christian faith. And we do this by taking the sayings of Jesus that fit our worldview (instant gratification), while ignoring the things He said that don't fit our view.

Jesus did say that His "burden is light" because His is a burden of freedom and forgiveness from the eternal weight of our sin and the wrath of God's eternal judgment. But He also said, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."² It's both of these statements—not one or the other—that should shape our view of what it means to follow Jesus.

He also said, "And you will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."³ Later He said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."⁴ Jesus wouldn't have told His disciples to not worry about people killing them unless it was a real possibility. That doesn't sound like Jesus immediately fixing things for them!

¹ Quoted in "Jesus Outside the Lines" by Scott Sauls, page 72.

² John 15:20b (NLT)

³ Matthew 10:22 (NLT)

⁴ Matthew 10:28 (NLT)

So what do we do? How can you prepare yourself for the times in life where you will wish that things were different—you will plead with Jesus to immediately fix everything—but things won't happen as you have hoped?

Darrell Scott's daughter Rachel was the first to die in 1999's Columbine school shootings. Darrel was once asked what a person should do to prepare for unexpected evil and suffering. Without hesitation he said, "Become a student of God's Word."⁵

The way the church prepares people for life in a broken and fallen world is by teaching them to read, understand, study, memorize, love, obey, and remind others of God's Word. God's Word is His greatest gift to us. For God's Word is both His Son, Jesus, and the words recorded in Scripture which give us everything we need for obtaining eternal life and enduring to the end of this one.

Application Tip: It's still early enough in the year to start a Bible reading plan. There are hundreds of options that can be found by a simple Google search. My particular favorite is the "M'Cheyne One Year Reading Plan." Better yet, find a partner or join a Community Group and read through the Bible together.

Bonus Tip: If you want to learn more on persevering when Jesus doesn't fix things immediately, I'd highly recommend reading Randy Alcorn's book *"If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil."*

⁵ From Randy Alcorn's book, "If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil", page 38.