

Mark 4:1-20

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and turn to the Gospel of Mark chapter 4. As you're doing that, you've heard it said already that we had our men's retreat this weekend, and everyone's a bit tired from that. I'm feeling this as well. My soul is very awake this morning, and glad to be here. I'm trying to get my mind and my body to catch up to that. So, if at any time during the sermon I just suddenly fall asleep and fall over on the stage, what I want you to do is drag me by my feet to the back corner, put the chair rack in front so no one steps on me and just leave me alone. Wes will come up and maybe do an extra song, and we'll close the service up that way. But I'm sure by grace I'll stay standing in this process.

We finally find ourselves back in Mark. We ended up taking a little bit of a three-week hiatus from it. Not really intentionally, but previously when we were in Mark we talked about what the purpose of the parables were. We looked in chapter 4 verses 10 through 12, and we saw how it was that Jesus used these parables. He laid these truths that were understood to them alongside greater truth to help them understand it in expanding degrees. And that the parables were designed, as we can see as he quotes here, from Isaiah chapter 6, there in verse 12, to both conceal and reveal things about the kingdom of God, this gospel message that he was preaching.

So we did that together, and now we're going to actually back up a little bit and look at verses 1 through 20. So join me reading along as I read out loud. Again he began to teach beside the sea, and a very large crowd gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them, Listen, a sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.

Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and yielded no grain.

And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. And he said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

[2 : 34] And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parable, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven. And he said to them, Do you not understand this parable?

How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word, and these are the ones along the path where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground. The one who, when they hear the word, immediately receives it with joy, and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while.

Then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among the thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. Please join me in praying.

Father, we praise you this morning for Christ, and we praise you for your word to us in the scriptures that speaks of the word of God who became flesh, who came and dwelt amongst us, who lived a sinless life on our behalf, bore your wrath for us who will believe in him, that we might have

life and be set free from the bondage and slavery of sin. We praise you for the gospel of Mark, and the opportunity to look at the life of Christ as recorded here by Mark, who was carried along by your spirit. We accept this this morning as your word to us. It is holy, and we come to you in reverence, asking that you work change in our lives by its power, and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So we find Jesus again, likely close to Capernaum on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, and he has gone out again in more remote places, but these big crowds keep following him, and we see this kind of repeatedly throughout the story here. And so

Mark pauses at this point to set a little bit of a scene for us. He gets into a boat. He goes out a ways into the water so that the crowd isn't pressing in on him so much, where he can stop performing miracles, which validated the message, and preach. He got out and he began to teach them. And the gospel of Mark, I've said to you before, is a work of rhetoric. It's a work. Mark's intention as he's writing by the power of the Spirit is to access our hearts through our minds to have us be devoted followers of Jesus Christ. And it's action-packed. He moves, and he moves very quickly through the events that are happening in Jesus' life. But he pauses on a couple of occasions to record his teaching at length, particularly chapter 4 and chapter 13. We see Jesus dropping truth along the way in the midst of these stories, but he really stops and pauses in these places, which should give us reason to stop and pause and really question how is it that this teaching, how is it that this parable in particular is incredibly important. This parable is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, along with Jesus' explanation. It's one of the few parables that we get a recorded explanation of exactly what it means.

[6 : 22] Quite fascinating to come to a text. Often I come to a text and I have to get its bearing, try to understand what it means, and then say, okay, now we know what it means. What does it mean for our people? And Jesus just does the work for me here, right? We know exactly what it means, right? He tells us. He continues his sermon. He goes right on. And so the challenge before us today is then to apply it as well into our lives. Notice verse 13. As he responds to his apostles, we kind of see two settings. By the sea, he's preaching from the water. And then later on, when he was alone, his disciples come to him and ask him this question about parables. And he says to them in verse 13, do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? So this kind of seems to be a paradigm-shifting parable. We must understand this one if we're going to get the others right.

And so it's a parable about soils. This would have been a very commonly understood parable. The general population would have got this symbolism, this agrarian symbolism. So the challenge before us is to say, okay, this is an important parable. By it, we must understand other parables. So what does it mean for us? What does it mean for us today? And I want to give you two objectives of this parable that means something for us today. Firstly, to have us question which type of soil we are.

In the parable, Jesus is the sower. We find him in this stage in his ministry right now, going about sowing the Word, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. And he says to us that there are types of soil. And those are those who hear the message of God. And so we must ask ourselves, which type of soil we are. This is the greatest question we could ask. How do we find ourselves in the category that will be damned for eternity because of our sin against the most holy God? Or those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ? You must answer that question this morning. We are commended in the Scriptures to test our faith. Do that today as you reflect upon these different types of soils? Our fruitfulness matters a great deal. We want to find ourselves as good soil.

Those who have received the Word and who have bore fruit thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. The fruit matters. Our salvation is a great work of grace that Christ has bought on our behalf.

[8 : 51] We cannot earn our salvation in any way, but yet the fruit is the evidence of the work of God in our lives. So it matters. Matthew 3.8, Jesus says, Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, in evidence of your repentance.

And later in Matthew 12, verse 33, He said that a tree is known by its fruit. Good trees produce good fruit. Bad trees produce bad fruit.

At the end of chapter 3, we looked at kind of some beginning parable, but there's a lot of activity happening as He's likely back in Capernaum. And we see an interaction with a number of different types of people here.

And He's elaborating. Mark, being led by the Spirit, is giving us this parable in following the way He's treated by His family, as He's treated as a lunatic. They come to Him, if you look back up in verse 21 of chapter 3, and when His family heard it, that He was back in town, they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, He is out of His mind.

Then we see Him interacting with the scribes, who thinks that He's a liar. He's saying that He's the Son of God, and they're saying, You can't possibly be the Son of God. You are working by Satan. And then we see those that He recognizes are His mother and His brothers and His sisters, in verse 34 and 35, those who do the will of His Father.

[10:11] John 6.4, He says, For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life. So, our faith is not merely an outward activity.

Thousands of people were following Him around, but they followed Him for the benefits that He could provide for them. They wanted to be healed, or they wanted to see healing happen. They wanted demons cast out, or they wanted to see that happen.

It was a spectacle that was going on. And many people today, and you may find yourself in this position, that you follow Jesus for what you think He can offer you, in this world, but not for what He actually came to offer.

And that was the redemption of our souls. I love you, Dad. This is why we come to Christ, for the redemption of our souls.

And we receive immense blessing in Him. Immense, immeasurable blessing. But often not the way we think. You don't follow Jesus for a new car or financial success.

[11:22] The prosperity gospel is damning untold millions to hell. They're just air conditioning the trip there. That is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must ask ourselves, if we're good soil, do we have the seed of the Word in us, and is it producing fruit as evidence of that? Secondly, if we are good soil, this parable helps to prepare us for the way the world will receive the gospel of grace.

If you want to complicate the parable a bit, you certainly can, to say that we're now sowers, sowing the Word. I like to think that Jesus is still the sower, and He uses us as His tools of sowing seed, right?

Spreading the Word amongst the world. And not all people are going to receive the Word the way we would hope that they would. The way we think they ought to. And this is to help us to understand what that's going to look like.

Because the major task of every disciple of Christ is to sow seed. This is it. You want to know God's will for your life? Believe in Him, and sow seeds so that others might believe in Him.

[12:36] This is the task that has been given to us. Many people call it the Great Commission. Properly, aptly called that thing. In fact, all the instruction that we receive in the Scriptures about holy living, the ways in which we ought to glorify God, is giving validation to that message.

The same way that Jesus went around and healed people, and showed that He had a power from above, validated His message, is what we do as we love one another, as we live holy lives, as we put to death sin, as we pursue righteousness, all of these things validate this primary thing of sowing seed, sowing the Word in the world.

This is the primary task. We are to propagate to the glory of God. Propagate to the glory of God. Sow seed so that others might bear fruit.

I think it's behind me. I'm pretty sure it is. Our vision statement for our church. That we exist to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

That is our way of saying that in all of our activity, our experience, in our proclamation, and the things we do together, we are to show Jesus Christ as supreme.

[13:49] To show Him as He is. To sow the Word in the world, in everything we do, to the ends of the earth. I hope that you're working on memorizing this statement.

It's there for you. Remember it. Remember it. The Canons of Dort, which quite interestingly, was the response to Arminianism. So, if you got a little bit uncomfortable with the song we sang beforehand, and if you get uncomfortable with this particular parable here, a group of men met together to look at the claims of Jacob Arminius, and they wrote responses to that.

We often call them the doctrines of grace, but in the Canons of Dort, it said it this way. The Word should be declared and published to all nations and to all persons promiscuously and without

distinction.

I love that. Right? Promiscuously, the Word should be sown. Massive handfuls of seed thrown everywhere. This is our response to this great gospel of grace.

I challenge you when you get home, next time you're on your computer, type into Google evangelism methods that work. Just watch the stuff that pops up.

[14:56] Watch the stuff that pops up in that. We have, as American Christians, I believe with the best of intention, try to come up with our own methodologies for how it is that Jesus saves souls.

Right? We don't want there to be any types of soil. Right? We want to say there's one type of soil, and if we can just be convincing enough, right, if we can just get the game just right, and what we end up doing is we end up modifying the seed itself.

Right? It no longer becomes the seed of the kingdom of God. It becomes some weird distortion of it that has no value that will ultimately be ripped up by its roots and thrown into the fire. Right? It doesn't produce more fruit.

It's not the thing that's good for nourishment. I was thinking about this this past week, and I just started thinking about all of the genetically modified food that we eat these days, and we could go off on a big, huge tangent about that, but there's lots of genetically modified foods, and they are modified to produce better, to make more.

We may never see this side of heaven, the effects that's having on our bodies, drought resistant, different things like that, but I came across a story of Monsanto, which is a bad word in some circles, an organization that had genetically modified some wheat that they found to be incredibly bad, and it was discovered just this past year on a farm in Oregon.

[16:24] They had withdrawn it, weren't sending it anymore, but it somehow was found that this plant was growing on this farm in Oregon, and as a result of that, our wheat export was boycotted by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan at the tune of \$8.1 billion.

in revenue this past year. They recognized that this was not weak as it should be, and they rejected it. And here we find ourselves as Americans modifying the gospel, right, and then exporting it all over the world.

And we're finding that there are places that are rejecting much of the gospel, the modified gospel that comes out of America. Praise God that there are countries that are now being missionaries to the states.

South Koreans are a good example of that, who have said, what an evil, wicked place that needs the light of Christ. We will go there and preach the gospel to those people. Fantastic.

Absolutely fantastic. You remember these people, the people that Jesus is talking to here, his disciples, had much messianic expectation. Right? They were waiting for the Christ.

[17:34] They didn't know that this was him in various forms quite yet, but they were waiting for him to come. They knew the messianic prophecies. They were expecting Jesus to come to be a king who would restore the Davidic dynasty and usher in a time of justice and peace.

And he will, but it just didn't happen the way they thought that it would. They were oppressed by Rome. They thought he was going to come, put Rome back in its place, restore the glory of the Davidic kingdom.

They were familiar with Isaiah 9, 6, and 7. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts, will do this. Jesus Christ has, in fact, restored the Davidic dynasty. He was in the lineage of David and he has come and he's reigned.

[18:45] He's seated now at the right hand of the Father and he reigns in our hearts. The kingdom of God looked much different than they thought it would. And here he is setting up a paradigm-shifting parable to understand what this would look like.

You see why this is really important for us to get as followers of Christ. As evidence of this, in Luke chapter 12, verse 23, his record ends. Someone who was following said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few?

Will those who are saved be few? Here's the parable that helps us to understand what's going on and happening in this world. I said to you before this agricultural symbolism may be a little bit lost on us, but they totally understood it.

This was an agrarian society. And they got this parable both physically and mentally. And let me explain what I mean by that. Physically, they got the picture. They understood what he was talking about as he talked about this field and what it meant to sow seed.

We talked previously at the end of chapter 2 when the disciples and Jesus are chastised for picking the heads of wheat and walking and eating. And I told you that there were paths that kind of crisscrossed around the edges of these fields.

[19 : 57] And this is where people traveled. They have highways that they were traveling on. They would walk these beaten paths between the fields. And it was permissible by law that you could gather as you were walking along. So the person sojourning through the country could gather and eat as they went along.

And this is what they were attacked for was doing that on the Sabbath. So these fields were set up in some form of a grid and had these hard paths around it. And the fields would be tilled. Much the same way we do now, but we do it with big machinery.

They would till the fields up so you would have had a nice big blank plot of land with the soil turned up ready to go and they would sow seed in a bag. They would put it in a bag, carry it over their shoulder, and they would cast the seed like this.

Any of you have ever done that? I've seeded a lawn that way, hand seeding a lawn. And you threw it out there. And you can't, you can kind of control where it goes, but if you want it to get to the edges, you've definitely got to do some overlapping.

It's got to play out a little bit beyond that. They would have totally understood. The picture of this would have been in their heads. They possibly could have looked at somebody doing it. Jesus may have. Jesus may have seen somebody doing it and said, I've got one for them.

[21 : 01] The sign of a natural teacher is that they've always got some beautiful analogy to speak about something of a greater truth. These people also would have known of the promises of God, which were very agrarian in their symbolism, of Psalm 126, Jeremiah chapter 31, Hosea chapter 2.

Spend some time looking at those. They also would have known of some of the symbolism of the judgment of God using these kind of agrarian symbols. Isaiah chapter 34 is an example of that. So it was a very timely way for him to speak to these people. Note that there are six soils. Don't spend a ton of time racking your brain about six.

I think you counted four already. Don't spend a bunch of time thinking about that. I'll get you to that point here readily. But let's talk one by one about these different soils. Firstly, we see the soil that is along the path.

The soil that's at the edge of the path. The part that would have been beaten down. The person that didn't walk down the middle of the path but walked a little off to the edge of the path would have beat the ground down quite well. We see that in verse 4 and then the explanation of it in verse 15.

[22 : 13] This would have been hard. Hard packed. Hard as a rock. This area of the world is very dry for most of the year. Nothing's saturating. Our paths would have been mud here in Georgia.

But in this place it would have been hard as a rock. As if it was paved. And so we see verse 4 that he sows it and some of it falls onto the path. And immediately the birds follow the sower along and they snatch it up.

It's food for them and they eat it. In verse 15 we see that this is Satan. Comes and takes the word away that they might not believe. In the same account in Luke chapter 8 I like the language here in verse 15 of chapter 4 it says and takes away the word that is sown in them.

In Luke chapter 8 it says the ones along the path of those who have heard then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that it may not believe and be saved.

One thing for us just to hear the word in our heads but the word must come down and penetrate into our hearts. It must plant itself in us and for these people this word is snatched away before they can believe.

[23 : 20] Secondly we see the rocky ground in verses 5 and 6 and then the explanation in verses 16 and 17. It falls on the rocky ground where it didn't have much soil and immediately sprang up since it had no depth of soil.

And when the sun rose it was scorched and since it had no root it withered away. Now the picture here is not that there's rocks on the surface or that there's chunks of rock in the soil. They would have fixed that. They wouldn't have let that remain in their field but that there was rock underneath the soil.

That they had tilled it. It looked good and fine on the surface so the seed was sown there. But there's rock down below that prevented those roots from going down deep. And again in this area it's very arid and roots had to go down.

They had to get down deep into where the water table would be when the water was before they could start putting up height. If you don't know much about plants that's the first thing that plants do. When you put a seed in the ground it sends out roots first that it might have nourishment.

Then it begins putting energy into setting up the stalk and setting it up above the ground. So in this case they would have looked out across the field and they would have had all their little plants and wheat maybe in this case coming up.

[24 : 28] But these plants would have come up higher and they would have known. Planted that one on rock. Because they would have jumped up. They would have sprung up even higher because the plant not able to! Put roots down any deeper.

would have been putting all its energy into shooting a stalk up high. And those things would have certainly been pulled out and burned. It would have been pointless. It would have never produced any fruit whatsoever. Just vegetable matter at that point.

So this would have been rock up underneath the soil. And you can see in the explanation that Jesus gives us. They hear the word and they immediately receive it with joy. It springs up in them. Praise God for the growth in this person's life. Some of you may know these type of people. I know quite a few. You rejoice in this transformative work. It seems like God has done a great mighty work in them.

But then, because they have no root, they endure for a while. And when tribulation or persecution arises because of their faith, everything doesn't go hunky dory, everything isn't great the way they think it's going to be, they fall away.

[25 : 30] They're scorched by the sun and they fall away. I would say to those of you, especially those of you who are young and on college campuses and seeing people come to repentance and faith, push new believers out into the sun.

We tend to coddle new believers a lot. And we must disciple people. We must build foundation of truth in them. We must help them be able to stand firm.

But the truly regenerate soul does not reject the gospel when tribulation comes as a result of the gospel. So push them. Kick them out into the sun. Push them out there and see what happens. Press them into sharing their faith.

Press them into speaking freely about the work of God in their life and see what happens. They may get a little bit knocked down. You want to be there to help them in those times.

But we'll see very quickly whether or not they're truly regenerate. Those of us who are found in Christ welcome tribulation.

[26 : 36] Rejoice in tribulation. It gives evidence of our faith. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 12. Actually, please turn to Hebrews chapter 12 with me. This is enough text for you to look at it with me.

This is good if you've been feeling disciplined by the Lord. If you've been experiencing tribulation of any kind. Hebrews chapter 12 beginning in verse 5.

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Now you might be saying, but wait, tribulation is not of God.

Sure, it's permitted by him. You are chastised. You are reproved by the actions of others because everything is held in God's sovereign hand. Verse 7. It is for discipline that you have to endure.

[27 : 42] God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Now this is a general truth. Some of us may have had fathers that did not discipline us.

But because I love my sons, I discipline them. Because I want what is good for them. I want what is right for them. I teach that because they do not know it on their own.

Leave our little kids alone, they become absolutely wretched. Absolutely. I discipline my sons because I love them. Verse 8. If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

God leaves you alone and doesn't discipline you, then you are not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. Speaking of my son.

[28 : 42] For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. This is good.

The son of tribulation, if our roots are down deep, if we're good soil and our roots are firmly planted and we're drinking deep from the goodness of God in our lives, the son of tribulation causes growth. That's how plants work. They send up the shoot because they need the sun to continue that process of photosynthesis and all the things that go along with that. We won't get into a science lesson at that point. But the sun is then good for us.

And so that's the rocky ground. Those who appear, they appear to be regenerate. They appear to make genuine confessions of faith. I have been duped. I don't think it was any fault of mine, but people that I really thought were regenerate and ended up not being at all.

We've had members of our church were that way. Fooled us. I mean, there's just no way we thought that they weren't not Christians. Christians, right? Allowed them into our fellowship and later had to ask them to leave our fellowship because they were evidently not.

[29 : 51] By their own admission were not. They say to them, it doesn't make sense for you to be a member of a believing church if you're not a Christian. They say, I agree. We loved them in parted ways in that.

We take sin seriously here. So this is the rocky ground. Thirdly, there was seed that fell among thorns. Now get here. Again, the picture is no farmer in his right mind is going to sow seed amongst thorns and let thorns naturally grow.

I shouldn't say naturally. Let them just propagate in his field. He's going to pull them up. In that tilling process, he's going to pull them up. So here you find seed that's going to land on ground that has thorn seed in it. It's been blown from a neighboring field.

It's come out of a ditch somewhere. We all experience that in the southeast. Weeds are everywhere where we are. And those plants, in competition for sun, sinned up quickly.

I mean, boy, do they ever sinned up quickly. They sinned up their greenery. They produce seed like crazy so that they can go and go and go and go and go. If you've ever tried to have a garden in the southeast, you know what this looks like.

[30 : 54] It comes up before. You've got to get out there and start weeding before your good plants come up to make sure they don't get shaded out. So here we find in verse 7, seed falling among thorns. And the thorns grew up and choked it.

And it yielded no grain. They grew up and they shielded out the sun. Right? And they sucked up all the nutrients from the ground. Jesus' explanation says that they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

I really fear this type of soil is prevalent in our churches. That people hear the word, make some sense to them, seems to have some effect in their hearts, but all of the cares of the world, this deceitfulness of riches, the desire for things, comes in and chokes it out.

Beloved, being a disciple of Christ comes at a cost. It comes at a cost. We've been given free grace, but pursuing Him, being a disciple, comes at a cost.

We must give things up. You cannot love and serve the world and love and serve God. Right? They're at odds with one another. That isn't to say that we have to be monastic.

[32 : 22] That isn't to say that we have to take vows of poverty. But you need to really check how much do I love the world. So often, even for those of us who are good soil, who are regenerate, who have faith in Christ, so often our love for Christ gets trumped by our love for this world.

We are absolutely inundated at every turn by materialism where we live. Right? I hate going down to the Mall of Georgia area because every time I go down there, I'm usually driving one of the crummiest vehicles down there, and everyone's clothes are more expensive than mine, and there

are billboards everywhere, and every store is new and flashy and nice, and I can feel this pressure. It kind of presses down on me to want more. Right? I'm glad I live up here where people drive crummy vehicles, and I'm just thankful that my truck is running as you see them broken down on the side of the road, and I'm like, praise God I'm getting from point A to point B.

This is all around us. Ask that God would test your heart in this regard. Are you good soil? Right? Are you good soil that's just been distracted by the world?

Or are you this seed thrown among the thorns? Seed sown among the thorns? Say that five times fast. Right? 1 John 2:19 John says, They went out from us, but they were not of us.

[33 : 47] For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain, that they are all not of us. If we're going to be a community of faith, right, disciple-making disciples of Jesus Christ, we are going to look different from this world.

Not that we're going to wear special outfits to look different. But all of our activity, our experience, our proclaiming, displaying, is going to look different from this world. And people who come here and want to sit amongst us are going to have a couple of emotions.

They're going to stay, feel incredibly uncomfortable. These people are so different than I am. Look at the way they press. Look at the way they give freely. Look at the way they don't love the things of this world.

And I do. They're going to pull in the parking lot in their car and go, my car is a lot different than all these other cars in this parking lot. They're going to walk in here dressed a particular way and say, I am dressed very strangely compared to these people.

They're going to be here and they're going to be uncomfortable. That is an option. Secondly, they could change. They could pursue Christ with us in a community. We could press them towards that type of thing.

[34 : 53] Or they could leave. And I'm not suggesting that everyone who leaves our church is a seat among thorns. I'm not saying that at all. But speaking of this particular issue of loving the things of this world over Christ, those are the options for them.

We ought to be that kind of people. This shouldn't be the kind of group where you can come in and meld. People who love the things of this world shouldn't be comfortable here. It should be the case. Right?

People should walk in and be amongst us and spend time with us, hear what's on our hearts, and they should go, these people love Jesus more than anything. There is no doubt in my mind of that fact.

And we pray that that causes change in everybody's life. Which brings us to our last three soils. Good soil. We see good soil that yields thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

There's your three different types of soil. And I have to say that I'm a little bit encouraged by this just as sometimes in my Christian walk I want to see more things happen. I want more fruit to happen.

[35 : 54] But to see that God has particularly gifted people in different ways and that I don't need to be Billy Graham. I would like to be. I would like to be that effective for the kingdom.

God wants to use me in that way. I am willing to do that. But I don't have to be Billy Graham.

There's not a pressure to that. Like the measure of my faith is not that I am Billy Graham.

That I accomplish what he has accomplished by God's grace. But that I could just be one that yields thirtyfold. Now understand that this terminology for them, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and hundredfold would have been astronomical crop yield.

Not like normal crop yield. I tried to read up on this. I really didn't understand what I was reading when I was trying to figure out the percentages that it would be. But essentially this would be a yield of like three thousand, six thousand and ten thousand percent.

What they're measuring I'm not sure. Probably weight of crop versus weight of yield. But just get this was huge. Right. The gradient of society would have gone thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold. Are you crazy?

[37 : 00] But this is the kind of fruit that Christians yield. That we sow the seed. We put the seed out in the world. God does this work that causes this propagation to happen.

The growth of God's church. Right. That his people amass and amass and amass and amass. And sometimes I get a little bit discouraged as an American Christian running in the circles that I run in. That we don't see massive regeneration. We've been praying as a church for quite some time for revival. We want to see a big movement of people towards God. And that's a good thing to desire

and we should continue to press into that.

And sometimes I feel a little bit discouraged as if God's not moving and working in the world. But you only have to open your eyes a little bit and read some of the accounts of some of the things that are happening around the world. The last time I kind of checked in on what was going on in China it's reported that about 10,000 people a day are coming to faith in Christ in China.

10,000 people a day God is at work. Right. Seed is being sown and it is meeting good soil. Right. It is growing up and it is producing more.

[38 : 10] And hear this. The way that God came into this world that brought the kingdom. He brought it through His Son Jesus Christ who picked a little band of brothers. Right. Inadequate for the task.

Totally uneducated. Just normal guys. Right. And He left them with the task of being disciple making disciples and from this little place in the Middle East the fire of the kingdom of God has spread rampantly across the world because these people got that the task of propagating the truth of sowing seed was theirs.

What is happening to us in America? Have we forgotten that that is what we're supposed to be about? Right. Not merely about learning things knowing who our God is but knowing who our God is so that other people can know who our God is so that we can sing His praises more accurately and more loudly for the world to hear.

I want a big bag of seed. That's why I should be studying the Word of God. Right. I want to spread it everywhere. I want to feel speaking to people's lives at every turn and at every occasion. So we see this good seed and I hope genuinely immense desire in my heart that everyone in this room can say I'm good soil.

I'm good soil. I may be distracted often. I may not live and be devoted to Christ the way I should be today but I'm good soil and I can say that with confidence. I know for a fact that the seed of the Word is taking root in my heart and it's working on me and it's changing me.

[39 : 43] I feel conviction for sin. I desire to be more holy. I want to give my life for the kingdom. I hope that's true of you. 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14 and 17 Turn there with me if you will please.

Now I don't try to like to play with symbolism too much in the scriptures.

So often we try to draw these neat little connections between various parables or various analogies that Paul gives to us and they're not really always meant to be done. So I just want you to hear that clearly.

Don't draw connections between my analogies because analogies fall short at every point. There's always something that kind of doesn't quite. A lesser truth meant to expose a larger truth just doesn't quite get there all the time.

But in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 14 through 17 Paul says But thanks be to God who in Christ Jesus always leads us in triumphal procession there's a great victory in that and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.

[40 : 57] I love that language. Spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. And as I was reading that these last couple of weeks the idea in my mind is that we're talking probably about wheat in this parable here but that as fruit the way that fruit gets on the ground and then like an apple tree for example as it falls to the ground and it rots and apple trees smell amazing when they're doing that for a while they can stink after that rot goes too far so there's the analogy falling short so you walk by an apple tree that's got apples on the ground that are rotting and it just smells wonderful because those fruits have gotten riper and riper they've got all that good sugar in them which is there to nourish the seed in its beginning stage it starts to break down so that seed can get in the ground and make a new apple tree and so there's my mixing of analogies for you today verse 15 for we the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing to one a fragrance from death to death to the other fragrance from life to life who is sufficient for these things we've been given the task of propagating of sowing seed who is sufficient for these things for we are not like so many peddlers of God's word but as men of sincerity as commissioned by God in the sight of God we speak in Christ right we are sufficient for these things because we are in Christ we're sufficient for them because Christ is sufficient

Christ is more than sufficient for these things Christ is the great sower now as you think about all of this I mentioned before sometimes I get depressed being an American Christian oh I want to see good soil springing up and fruit being produced and we see these different types of soils just to give

you some comfort in thinking well it seems hopeless it seems hard you shouldn't be hearing it that way you should be hearing that there is good soil right and that the sower puts the seed in the good soil and that it does in fact produce fruit but let's listen to some other promises that the sower will yield his harvest turn with me to the book of Hosea Old Testament book of Hosea just after Daniel if that helps you if you're flipping back and forth Hosea is referred to as a minor prophet which doesn't mean he's less important but just that the book is shorter major and minor prophets this is a minor prophet my favorite of the minor prophets really really love the book of Hosea

Hosea is commanded by God to go and take a wife who's a harlot she's said she will cheat on you she will not be faithful to you and it's meant to be this picture this great display of the way that Israel betrayed God the way that Israel was unfaithful to God and they have three children that are recorded here it's presumed the way the account speaks of it in chapter 1 you'll notice in verse 4 they have a son together God tells Hosea to name him Jezreel which means to scatter then it would appear she has a daughter not likely with him but it's also Hosea's daughter because he is a good husband and father in that way and God tells him to name her Lo-Ruhamah which means no mercy your translation probably says no mercy then again likely she has a son not with him because he's a good husband and father calls him his own and God tells him to name him

Lo-Ami which means not my people or those for kid names for you to scatter no mercy and not my people but then turn to Hosea chapter 2 we see in this great pageant played out God calling Israel back to himself in the same way as we get further on in Hosea chapter 2 and then into chapter 3 Hosea goes and calls Gomer back to himself it's such a beautiful picture but listen to what God says beginning in verse 21 and in that day I will answer declares the Lord I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth and the earth shall answer the grain the wine and the oil and they shall answer Jezreel now remember first son is named Jezreel which means to scatter but it also meant to plant what do you do to plant seed you scatter it right so it had both a negative meaning as well as a positive and he's putting the positive application here at the end of verse 22 they shall answer Jezreel we are planted verse 23 and I will sow her for myself in the land and I will have mercy or ruhamah on no mercy and I will say to not my people you are my people or ami and he shall say you are my God isn't that a beautiful picture of him sowing and establishing his people in his land after Jesus teaches about the drinking of his blood and the eating of his flesh in John chapter 6 verse 65 he says this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the father this is a great example of this right after this many of the disciples turned back and no longer walked with him he explained to them that what it meant to abide with him what it meant to be in Christ and it was hard for them to understand it it's hard for them to understand it and he says this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the father is granted by the father right this is the evidence of that you don't understand this because it was not given to you by the father that you should come to me and the disciples left verse 67 so Jesus said to the twelve do you want to go away as well and Simon Peter answered him

[47 : 02] Lord to whom shall we go where would we go where would we go you have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God good soil right the word had taken root in his heart where are we going to go right they followed him to death right through various circumstances but they followed him to death the disciples martyred on his behalf Isaiah chapter 55 gotta go here too Isaiah chapter 55 Isaiah is a major prophet again because of the length of the book Isaiah chapter 55 there's some classically quoted texts here that that I hear by themselves very often but not together all that often and

I was very invigorated when I saw their nature together and why it is that that God spoke through Isaiah in this way it says in verse 8 for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways declares the Lord for as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts so as you're contemplating this soil condition right as you're trying to work through the schemes of man to bring about salvation right hear this my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways your ways declare the Lord verse 10 for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth making it bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purchase purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it the rain will accomplish what I sent it to do right we use this we speak of this speaking of the word of God all the time right it is my prayer before I preach that God will accomplish what he intends to accomplish on a Sunday morning right

in spite of all of my frailty and all of my inability and all of my insecurity right that he will accomplish what he intends to accomplish by that in verse 12 for you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace it's in this promise to those of us who believe in the gospel the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands right the knowledge of the glory of God being spread amongst the world instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle and it shall make a name for the Lord an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off there's promise in this that there is good soil right it exists in the world and therefore as the synod of Dort concluded we ought to be sowing seed right promiscuously such a negative word so often right but we ought to be throwing it in abundance we ought to be going out being people of the word that sow the knowledge of Jesus Christ everywhere so what kind of soil are you you must ask yourself that question you must pray if you are not good soil if you don't have a confidence in that you must pray that God would save your soul repent and believe recognize the depth of your sin your offense to God and turn to him right he's a loving God he has a bounding mercy to pour out on you there's nothing you can do there's no great sin that would cause God to not want to show you mercy so cry out to him if you're good soil you may find yourself this morning and I would imagine that most of us do not bearing fruit thirty fold and sixty fold and a hundred fold right but cold in our affection for Christ pray this morning that God would work in you right that the roots would go down deeper sprout up more that you might produce and produce and produce and I promise you if you will do this you will never regret it to the end of your life wherever God takes you to the hardest places of the world the great trial and persecution even possibly to death for your faith you will never regret trading the things of this world the lesser joy for the greater joy that is found in Christ let's pray together a lot of times a lot of times a lot of times a lot of times a lot of times a lot of times a lot of times a lot of times