

Kingdom Seed and Soil

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[0 : 00] Man, thank you so much, Alan. Just before we jump into it, I just want to say greetings. I wasn't here last week. I was up in Washington, D.C. I was actually visiting a church called Monument Church, and they invited us up to do some ministry there, so I got to spend time with their men on Saturday morning, speaking to them, and then preaching to them on Sunday.

You may not know this, but we are part of a bigger, broader, global church, planning network, a family of churches that are committed together in planting gospel-centered churches around the globe and strengthening as well, and so they were one of those churches, so it was just a pleasure to be up there and to serve them in that capacity.

I just want to say, like, they send greetings and love from them down to here. Some of you have maybe even experienced, one of their elders, pastors, came down and preached with us a couple of times already.

It's hard to miss him. He's about six foot eight, so his name's Travis Earls. If you guys remember him at all, he's been here once or twice over the last couple of years, but we just enjoy that friendship and that fellowship and that partnering together in that broader, bigger context, and we look forward to that a lot more, so that's where I was at.

It was good, but I'll tell you what, I missed being here. We came back down on Thursday, and by Wednesday of last week, I was like, I am ready to be home, and yes, it is good to be here with you.

[1 : 23] It is good to see your faces, and I just wanna give one more shout out. Mr. Alan Bartz, who was just up here, he organized and set up the men's event that happened on Friday night. A lot of you dudes were there, and he did an awesome job.

It was really good. A lot of good food, and the sermon or the little teaching was just on point. There was some really good sharing that happened as well. So again, job well done.

It was a really good week. If you have your Bible, go ahead and turn to Mark chapter four. That's where we are going to be working out of today. Those of you who don't know me, my name is Jesse Kinster, one of the pastors of a team of pastors, and I think an excellent team of pastors that lead this side of One Harbor Church.

Those who are listening online, so glad that you are keying in. We are in this series on the Gospel of Mark, which is the story of Jesus, his ministry here on earth, and it's also a story about discipleship, what it means to be followers of Jesus.

Now, up to this point, we've been looking at Jesus's life, and we've seen him do a lot of amazing things, and one of those things is it says he teaches, and he teaches with authority, but we have yet to actually read any of those teachings, but everything is about to change today, because here in this chapter is recorded a famous snippet from one of Jesus's sermons.

[2 : 43] It's so famous that it is similarly recorded in two of the other Gospels as well. Jesus himself reckons and talks about this parable, this part of this sermon, as one of the most important ones, because he stops and actually takes time to explain it to his disciples, and this makes the sermon I'm preaching a bit more interesting, because what I typically do is I get a text, and I explain what the text means so that we can understand it more clearly, or at least I hope that's what's going on, but half of the passage we're gonna read is actually Jesus explaining his own teaching, which kind of means he's doing his job, he's doing my job for me, which means today I'm teaching on the teaching of the teaching, so I've effectively confused us all, if you could follow that train of thought, but the optimists in the room are thinking like, sweet, that probably means a shorter sermon, and I say to you, oh, when will you learn?

All right, so from verse one, let's go for it, we're gonna have some fun today. 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, behold, 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 it 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.

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 parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

[5 : 08] 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 ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive 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 world, immediately they fall away.

And others are the ones sown among 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, 30-fold and 60-fold and 100-fold.

This is God's word. One of the interesting things about Jesus's teaching ministry is it is often, he often uses parables.

[6 : 20] And I wanna draw our attention to why Jesus did this. He actually tells us, and it's found in verses 11 to 12. And he said to them, to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables, so that, right, here's the reason.

They may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven. And what Jesus is saying is that there are insiders and there are outsiders to the kingdom of God.

Now, this isn't supposed to make anyone grow arrogant or proud. If you think, hey, I'm inside the kingdom of God, sweet. Hey, too bad, everybody else.

What this is supposed to do and what these parables are supposed to do when we read them is to make us reflect in relation to it and ask the question, where do I stand?

And where do I fit in this parable? In fact, the way Jesus used parables were not simply to add knowledge to our brains, right? It's not like just you're in a science class learning about gravity, like, thank you, that's great, I can now pass my test.

[7 : 31] That's not what is going on. R.T. France, he writes a commentary on Mark and is specifically about parables. He puts it this way. He says, parables and their meaning, when discovered, is not likely to lie at the purely cognitive level or awareness or understanding level.

But will include a call to response at the level of attitude, will, and action. To understand a parable is usually to be changed or at least challenged to change, not just enlightened.

See, the point France is making is what Jesus explicitly says in verse 12. It's not enough to see and hear these words. You must perceive and understand.

There is a deeper knowledge, a hidden mystery that is revealed, and when it is, it calls us to respond in a specific way. And we've become so familiar with these parables that we're just get it, got it, I'm okay.

But let's open our hearts to be challenged today, all of us. Because Jesus says that this parable is a great way to perceive and to understand the kingdom of God.

[8 : 44] And the kingdom of God is not so much a destination like going to Disney World. It is something you receive, something that begins in you, is birthed in you, and grows in you.

It is passively received by people through faith. So firstly, let's take note that this parable rightly focuses on two things, seed and soil, because faith involves seed and soil.

In Jesus's explanation, he doesn't take any time to explain who the sower is. He doesn't take any time to talk much about the sower. You and me, we probably would.

We wanna know what he wore, how he sowed, how much he sowed, right? We wanna know all these things. What did his hair look like? Or her hair, maybe. But the kingdom of God isn't focused on who is sowing, but what is being sowed.

The seed is the gospel, which as Matthew's gospel records it, he describes it as the word of the kingdom in the same parable. And the gospel, this word of the kingdom, is the good news about the kingdom of God and its king, Jesus Christ.

[9 : 54] It is the good news of salvation by which the kingdom is received. It is the instruction and commands of the king and his kingdom. It is the promises, the word that he's talking about is the promises and hopes of this kingdom that are secured by us, or for us, by the king, that no one can take away from us.

As Paul writes in Romans 1, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It is a message of words, but it is much more than talk. It is power.

It is life-giving. And yet that same gospel, that same seed, is foolishness to those chasing the wisdom of the sage. And it is weakness to those enamored with power.

And yet that same gospel, that meaning, all of that means is that with regards to that seed that is sown, we don't genetically modify that seed.

We don't get to do that. Meaning we don't get to tamper with it. We don't get to try to make it better and sound better. This seed, it may seem small and it may seem insignificant, but we don't get to dress it up or dress it down.

[11 : 11] We declare what it is. It is salvation through Jesus Christ that brings us into God's kingdom. Now that is the seed that is sown, but that seed needs ground.

Now seed has the potential for life, but it needs a host, right? It needs soil. And that soil is our hearts. That's what Jesus is getting at. Now in the ancient world, the usage of heart or soul, interchangeable terms, it referred to the seedbed of the will and desires of a person.

They understood how much desire permeated every thought and desire and action. And it also, it was seen as to affect change. And that's how change was affected in a person.

And that is very different to our modern world, which has been influenced over the last few hundred years by the enlightenment movement. The enlightenment emphasized knowledge and reason. So now today, what we've come to believe about ourselves is that we are not mainly creatures of desires, but we are what James K. Smith calls brains on a stick.

And that is to say, we see ourselves now as merely rational beings that operate on a purely cognitive level. Any problem can be solved with just more knowledge and more study and better understanding.

[12 : 37] If there is sin or there's evil in the world, all you need is more education. And in the enlightenment, there is no category for sin, just people needing a readjustment of the mind.

But the Bible has a much more holistic view of humanity. And if you're here checking out Christianity, I think you'll find that it's actually more on the nose. It says, while we do have minds that take in knowledge and take these things in and are able to observe and understand things and are logical and reasonable, reasonable, we are primarily creatures of desire, meaning we rarely do what is logical.

Rather, we do what our hearts desire. I mean, think about this at the simplest level, right? Let's just think about food. When, yeah, let's think about food.

Amen. When I desire to have an Oreo and that box is in my house, get out of my way. Some of you are more disciplined than me.

You eat six square meals of protein and veggies. One day, when I grow up, I'll be like you. But whatever your diet is, let's be honest, there is another desire behind it.

[13 : 56] Whether I am choosing to eat Oreos or whether I am being strict in my diet and following a certain regimen, I just haven't decided that because, you know what? I got some information and I just randomly selected that for whatever reason.

No, there is a desire behind that. Maybe if you are desiring or you are eating a better diet, your desire might be to look a certain way, perhaps.

Or you want to live a longer life and a good diet will help with all of that. The point is that there is more at play than just knowing about nutrition.

There are desires that guide what we actually do with relation to food. And here is what this parable is telling us. It isn't just, it isn't enough just to get more truth.

We need a truth that impacts that place where our desires live and that is what the gospel does. But as we've read, sowing the gospel doesn't always have the same effect.

[14:59] Why? Is there a problem with the seed? Is there an insufficiency with the gospel? No. The gospel is never the problem, it's our hearts.

See, this parable describes four different soils, not four different seeds. And each soil represents a major heart issue. Mark 4, verse 15, it says, 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. So this first soil is hard packed. It is a path where people walk along.

It is well trodden. It's like a heart that has gospel deflector shields, right? The seed gets sown and it kind of bounces along. There's no depth to it. There's no place for the seed to go in and take root. It's a heart that isn't interested in the gospel at all. The gospel does not make sense. It doesn't register. It's a heart that doesn't want it. It doesn't even think twice about it.

[16:04] But there is something else to consider in this particular soil that he talks about here. Jesus says, Satan comes and immediately takes away the word that is sown.

Now, there can be stuff going on behind the scenes that we aren't privy to. But now, we aren't ignorant of that, which invites us into something, actually, that we should be doing if we are going to be sowers of the gospel.

We should be praying. If what Jesus said is true and we're sowing seed and some of that falls on path and Satan plucks that away, then we should be people that like, man, we just don't go sow and that's it.

We should be praying. You and I don't know the hearts of people. We don't know where there might be spiritual anti-gospel activity going on, but God does. And he has authority over Satan.

Now, most of what we experience when we share the gospel is probably something like sowing on hard path. Sometimes, it's just kind of rejected with a polite smile, like, mm, thank you.

[17:07] It's nice for you to believe that. And sometimes, it's rejected with hostility. But it is rejected a lot. So when it is received, man, that is very exciting, right?

However, we should look at what the rest of this parable says. While we should be excited when the gospel seems to be received, it seems like we should temper that excitement with optimistic patience.

And I chose all those words very carefully. Look at verse 16. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

And when they have no root, but, 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 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.

[18:16] What I don't want us to do is walk away from this and start doubting everybody's profession of faith. Right? Like, mm, I don't know. Maybe he's, maybe he's, maybe he's got weeds.

You know? Maybe he's just shallow soil. But, I don't want us to walk away with this, like, cynical view of each other, but what we need to realize is that there is a truth here that this points out and it's this.

People can profess faith without actually possessing it. Okay? That's the thing. Jesus teaches us two issues that reveal whether or not we possess faith.

Persecution. And he allows persecution and trials to come into our life. Persecution means being mistreated for Jesus' name and for righteousness' sake.

It's not hardship just for the sake of hardship. It's hardship particularly related to you being a disciple of Jesus. It's part of the counting of cost of being a disciple.

[19:24] Jesus said, you will be hated, you will be persecuted because guess what? They hated and persecuted me. The second issue is prosperity. The allure of living for this life, the cares of this world, the temptation for possessions and money and wealth.

Now we look at both of these things and I would say, man, these temptations are alive and well in our American context. And you know what? Every other generation has faced that too.

going, Jesus spoke about this over 2,000 years ago. But of those temptations, we have to realize that, man, these are normalized in the world we grow up in.

And we can probably recognize in our society a kind of growing pressure that is really anti-gospel and anti-Jesus. In our secularist society, as that all is happening, they have these various tribes that are beckoning us to come and be an insider with them.

And there are plenty of incentives to being one. But we are not, again, we are not the first generation of Christians to experience this kind of temptation and trouble.

[20 : 46] but that is the nature of Christianity and always has been. We have to count the cost. Actually, both of these soils can be seen in the failures of two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and Judas Iscariot.

Judas Iscariot, he rejected and betrayed Christ because he desired wealth. Remember, he sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver. You know what he did with that silver? He went and bought a piece of property, which probably means he had that property eyed for quite a while and wanted it and desired it and got in his thing and he's like, you know what?

I know how to get that. As Jesus was being put on trial to be crucified, Peter was right there, followed him close by. But when put to it, Peter saves his own skin by denying Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times.

As persecution and tribulation arose on account of belonging with Jesus, Peter failed that test. Now these guys had already went out and preached and cast out demons in Jesus' name before this and they had spent three years with Jesus by the time they had denied him and betrayed him.

But the good news is that you can fail like Peter, but your failure isn't the final word. And some of us need to hear that today because we're sitting here and we're just like, man, I relate to some of that other soil.

[22 : 11] But what happened after Peter's denial? Well, he went on to give the rest of his life to sharing the good news of Jesus and eventually being killed for it. Church history said he was crucified and he said, you know what, crucify me upside down because I am not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as my Lord and Savior.

What made Peter go from self-preservation to living and dying for Jesus? The gospel took root in his heart. The gospel grows deep roots and bears fruit in good soil.

And Peter was once among those seeing and not perceiving, hearing but not understanding, professing but not possessing faith. But then he met the resurrected king, the resurrected Jesus and his eyes and his ears were opened.

And the soil in his heart became like the good soil. And let's look at that good soil again. Verse 20, but those that were sown in the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

You and I have to hear the gospel but we have to do something else. We have to accept it. And that word there in the Greek is an intensified form of the word receive.

[23 : 43] It's like receive but in all caps with exclamation points after it. It means you really receive it. And much, it's much more like saying you receive it with fullness of joy and delight.

You are welcoming it in with great happiness. But there is another interesting thing about this Greek word. The tense of the verb implies that this intense receiving never ends.

Which means we don't receive the gospel once with great joy. What Jesus is saying by choice of the word and the verb he uses in this parable is that good soil hearts never stop receiving and delighting in the gospel.

Disciples of Jesus, let's be honest, we will be tempted and allured away to other things and chase after other things that seem so much more impressive and so much more important.

And in so doing we can loosen our grip on the gospel but this parable makes no room for loose attachment for us when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ when it comes to his word.

[24 : 52] We can either really receive it and keep on really receiving it or we can play church. We can do the cultural Christian thing that fits in more with the previous soils than the good soil.

And friends, Jesus is calling you and I to something greater in this parable. What might that look like in our lives to really receive the gospel and keep on really receiving it?

Well, prioritize sowing the gospel into your own heart. That's simply just Bible reading. When you, this is how I want you to think about this.

When you're at home and you got time, maybe it's 10 minutes, maybe it's 30 minutes, maybe for some strange reason you even have an hour, you can open that Bible and I just want you to realize when you open that Bible, what is happening is the sower is sowing seed as you read it into your heart.

Right? That is what's happening. As Christians, we are people devoted to one book. We are devoted to the apostles' teaching.

[26 : 05] Think about this. When God gave Israel his law written down, he instructed them to learn it, to memorize it, to write it on their doorposts, to like put it on their clothes, God intended his word to be with them always.

It was like, it doesn't matter where you go, have your word with you. Have my word with you. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. You know what it's all about?

Delighting in God's word. If you want to learn a good way to really receive the gospel in daily Bible reading, maybe you're just like, man, Jesse, I just, I don't get it.

I don't know how to do it. I need some help. I've tried it. I've failed. This is all confusing. I'm going to be doing a training on a method of how to do this well. This Wednesday at 6pm. It'll be right up there upstairs.

You can sign up for that. You sign up back at the desk. You can sign up on the app or the website. Another way to really receive the gospel is by sowing the gospel into other people's hearts.

[27 : 11] That is why we highly value community and small group discipleship because I need you to sow the gospel into my heart. You need me to sow the gospel into your heart. In a few weeks we're going to be kickstarting another 10 weeks of community groups.

That's our small group discipleship where we huddle around with between 8 to 14 people in homes. If you're not in one I want to say man go sign up. You can do that back there.

You can do it on the app or the website but go sign up. It is huge. It's such an important thing.

Here's the thing friends. the more regular the gospel is being sown into our hearts.

And the longer that is happening, the longer it's being really received by us in our hearts, the more likely we are going to see it bear fruit in our lives.

And for this we need to not only be faithful but we need to be patient. We have to be careful that we don't give up on people too soon. We have to be patient with them.

[28 : 12] And we don't give up on ourselves too soon. Jesus didn't give up on Peter. That turned out pretty well. Amen. Jesus sowed on a lot of hard packed paths.

He sowed on a lot of rocky and weed ridden hearts. Even some of his disciples showed signs of poor soil. But here's what we need to remember.

The gospel is what we sow. the Holy Spirit is what makes it grow and bear fruit. We are called to be faithful. But God brings about the fruitfulness.

Galatians 5, 22 to 23. If you're wondering like what is this fruitfulness? This is a great place to get some fruitfulness. It says this about it.

But the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of God that dwells in you because it is a gift that is given to us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 15] It's part of the salvation package. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

All those things sound really good. I wish my life looked like that. By God's grace, it can.

By God's grace, I have to keep letting the gospel be sown into my heart and trusting the Holy Spirit is making it grow and these things are growing up in me to bear fruit.

That's what I'm hoping for. By God's grace, let's hold fast to the confession of our faith without wavering. As the Hebrew writer says, for he who promised is faithful.

As the band comes up, let's consider how to respond. I just want to say to you, if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, you can't just suddenly change the soil of your heart.

[30 : 23] It isn't like, well, let me go out and try to be good and kind and peaceful and gentle and good and self-controlled. that only happens by really receiving the gospel.

That Jesus is the Son of God who came to die for your sins to save you. That there is no other way that you can be saved. And in a moment, there's going to be an opportunity for you to respond.

There'll be a prayer for you up on the screen that you can pray. And we're all going to take time to respond to God. And I just want to encourage you, if God has been working on your heart and you're just like, man, Jesse, I feel like I'm getting it for the first time, then I would say pray that

prayer.

And you will be saved. That is God's promise to you. If you're here and you're already a Christian, I want to say to us in the room in a moment, we are going to take communion. And communion is a wonderful way we receive Christ through the Holy Spirit as we take it in faith.

faith. And it is a meal of participation in his body and blood. But before we do that, the Bible commands us to prepare ourselves first by examining our hearts in the light of God's truth.

[31 : 42] So how is God calling you to respond? If it is clear that there's sin, maybe it's a sin you've committed that you need to go and repent to God. Maybe it's a sin against somebody else.

Repent to God, repent to that person. repent to that because that's what we are called to do. We are called to recognize those things and go and repent because you know what? When we repent, what we are doing is we are stepping into the grace and forgiveness God already has for us.

And he says, come and bring what you have and you will find forgiveness. I can wash all of that away. Remove it as far as the east is from the west.

His promise is I will remember it no more. No more. Not going to bring it up again. It doesn't go on a rap sheet. God's not keeping a rap sheet on any of us.

Come to him. So let's take about 30 seconds if we can right now. Let's close our eyes just for some privacy.

[32 : 52] Let's do business with God. Let's do this Thank you.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have heard these prayers, these cries of the heart, that you receive them with kindness and grace.

That you're a God who forgives and delights. You're a God who loves restoration and reconciliation. You love to be with us.

You love to be near to us. Amen.