

The Parable of the Sower
Mark 4:1-20
May 26, 2024 Pastor Jeremy Cagle

Good morning, everyone. Well, why don't we go to the Lord in a word of prayer, and we'll begin our study of the Scriptures today?

Heavenly Father, as we come before You this morning, we are asking for Your grace and Your help because we are coming to a story, a parable, on the topic of listening, and being teachable and humble in heart. And, Father, if there's anything we struggle with, most probably in the Christian life, it is this issue. We all have hearts that are naturally hard for various reasons, maybe because of sin, maybe because of distraction, maybe just because of just our ignorance of our need to pay more attention to what we find in the Word of God. So Father, we just pray this morning, that You would soften our hearts, You would take away the callousness that is there and remove our minds from distractions, so that we could put our mind on the things of the Spirit. And Christ would be glorified as we study His amazing words, in this text. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, if you would, please take your Bibles and open them to the Gospel of Mark. That's the book that we're in this morning, we are continuing our studies in the Gospel of Mark. And as you're doing that, I want to introduce our sermon this way by telling you several years ago, I heard the Pastor Chuck Swindoll, tell about the time he was overwhelmed in the ministry to the point that he was snapping at his family. All dads can relate to this, but we all know what it's like to kind of start losing our patience with our kids. So his younger daughter said to him, "Daddy, there's something I need to tell you, but I'll be quick." To which he replied, "Honey, you can tell me whatever you want. And you can take your time." To which she replied, "Then daddy, you need to take the time to listen." And Chuck Swindoll brought that story out to his congregation to tell them that when you love someone, you do that, don't you? You take the time to listen to them. You don't snub them or slight them or ignore them the way some people do with their kids. You make sure to drop whatever you're doing so you can focus all your attention on them.

And that's what our text is about today because in Mark 4, Jesus tells a parable called the Parable of the Sower, in which there's four types of soil, and only one of them is good. And what makes the good soil good is this. They take the time to listen to God. They don't work for His approval; they don't earn it. They don't gain His acceptance through the law first. First and foremost, verse 20, says they hear the word and accept it.

And if you're wondering why Jesus talks about that here in the book of Mark, the answer is because way back up in the middle of Mark 3, Jesus had warned us about the danger of committing the unforgivable sin. Remember that from last week? And what was the unforgivable sin? Well it's the sin of not listening and believing. The scribes committed an unforgivable act when they saw what Christ was

doing, and they ignored it because they compared His works to Satan's works. And they said He's not the Messiah. And Jesus said that a man can be forgiven of anything but that. Rest assured that a man can be forgiven of the sin of pride if he listens to God. He can be forgiven of the sin of lust, he can be forgiven of the sin of coveting, greed, whatever, put it in the list. But Jesus says he will never be forgiven if he continues to do this to the Son of God. That's where God draws the line.

It's important to remember because a lot of us struggle with this today, don't we? I just prayed about that. But we're so used to coming to church and doing this that it's become like second nature to many of us. And if you don't believe me, let me just ask you to do a survey and show you what I mean by asking you to raise your hands if you remember everything I said from the sermon last week. Anybody? Nobody? I've worked pretty hard on that. What about the sermon before that? Anybody remember everything about that one? No, of course not. Right? What about the sermon Quentin did before that? Anybody remember what the title was? What about men's Bible study, women's Bible study, youth Bible study, care group, Girls of Grace, some of you families do daily devotionals. Do you remember all that? See, we forget these things because we're so distracted, aren't we? That's why it's so easy to come in here and tune it out. But the truth is, you can't do that. You have to be on guard against that sort of thing because there's disastrous consequences if you don't. And that's what this passage is going to teach us this morning.

I mean, in this passage Jesus is going to give us one of the most remarkable parables, I think, in the Bible. And it'll be about one thing and one thing only, and that is the need to unplug your ears, and pull your fingers out and listen, it all starts here. The Bible says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, which means the Word of God needs to go through your ears into your mind until it sinks down deep into your soul. That's the key that unlocks everything in the Christian life. Get that right, you get everything right. Get that wrong, you won't get anything right.

And that's what we're going to talk about today by looking at four types of soils that are mentioned in this parable. I just told you there's four types of soils in the Parable of the Sower, we're going to walk through them one at a time. So this is our outline. In the Parable of the Sower, there are four types of soils.

The first one is the roadside soil. So the first type of soil Jesus mentions in this parable is the roadside soil. And this lays out so clearly in the text, if you're not even writing these all down, you can follow along very easily. But the roadside soil is the one that's so hard, nothing penetrates it. Like the ground that's found beside the side of a road.

And before we get into that, I want you to see the setting of this. If you look in your Bibles in 4:1, it tells us that Jesus began to teach again, teach all these things, by the sea. Do you see that phrase there? I want you to see that because that's the backdrop for this event in the Gospel of Mark, it occurs near the Sea of Galilee. It's a body of water that's about 13 miles long and eight miles wide, located in the northern most

part of Israel. And the significance to it is that it was the largest supply of fresh water in the country at the time, making it a very popular place. That tells you why there's so many things in the book of Mark that occur there. For example, Mark 1:16-17 tells us Jesus called Simon and Andrew to be as disciples while they're fishing there. Then in verses 18 through 19, He calls James and John. Then in chapter two, He calls Matthew, the tax collector from Capernaum, which was near the Sea of Galilee. Then in chapter three, He ministers to crowds in that region. And then He appoints the 12 disciples all in the same vicinity.

And now here in chapter four, it says He began to address this crowd from a boat in the water because verse one says the crowds were so large, it caused Him to go out into a vessel of some kind, just so He could address them. If you've ever seen pictures of the Sea of Galilee, there are certain areas of the coastline that have mountains going up that make a natural amphitheater. And we don't know exactly what part of the sea Jesus was at, but if He was at one of those areas, His voice would have bounced off, kind of like you're hearing in the gym right now. And it would have been a perfect place to do this. Some of you have seen paintings of this. There's a very famous one by an artist named Gustavo Doray, in the 1800s, which showed Christ talking to a small handful of people on the shore, while He sat in a boat. But I want to tell you, it really wasn't like that because this is not a small handful of people. There are hundreds, maybe 1000s, following Him at this point.

And as He spoke to them, Mark says, Jesus does something unusual in verse two. He was teaching them many things in parables. Now I need to stop and say a few words about that because like I told you last time, the word for parable, this is one of the first times it appears in Mark. It's *parabolēs* in Greek. It's a compound word from *para* alongside and *bolo* to throw. It refers to a story that throws an earthly image alongside a spiritual one to teach you a lesson. Because Jesus' audience couldn't take notes while He's teaching so to help them remember what He's saying, He often told them stories about things they could relate to. There's other reasons for the parables, too. I'll get into that in a moment, but one was to drive the message home by using objects they were familiar with.

At another time, when He was talking to them near the Sea of Galilee. He told them the Parable of the Fishing Net, that was something they could relate to. They'd all seen fishermen casting their nets into the Sea of Galilee before. He also told them the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Everyone knew what it was like to see a shepherd chasing his sheep in that region. Another time He told him the Parable of the Wedding Feast, the Wheat and the Tares, the Fig Tree, Mustard Seed, Leaven, Talents, those were subjects that were part of their everyday life. If He was in Chilliwack, maybe He would talk about trucks. Something we're familiar with, I don't know, there's lots of things we could talk about here.

But in this parable, here, Jesus says this, He says, listen to this, if you look in your Bibles, "Behold, the Sower or farmer went out to sow his seed." The reason Jesus does this is because this is another familiar object. The province of Galilee was covered in farmland so the sight of a man putting seed into the ground was very normal for them. They saw it every day, like you do here in Chilliwack. Except they

didn't do it with big tractors like we see in the Fraser Valley. They sowed their seed with the help of a man who would drape a bag across his shoulder and go out doing this, kind of like an arc, like people feed their chickens. The kernels would fall here, there, and everywhere because the intention was to cover as much ground as possible. This was not neat, tidy farming. We have neat tidy farms here. This was farming that was just done to cover every bit of soil that could find, which is why it says as this man is sowing, some seeds fell beside the road. The picture here is of the farmer scattering seed, while the seed is dropping along paths that the Jews put between their fields for travelers to walk upon. In other words, this seed doesn't sink into the ground or take root. It sits there on top waiting for the birds to come and gobble it up because it's so hard.

And Jesus says, some people are like this with the Word of God; they're hard to it all. Their soul has become so callous that it doesn't sink into them, goes through one ear and out the other, bounces off their heart.

In fact, if you're trying to figure out what this part of the parable is talking about, you're not alone because later on, verse 10 tells us the disciples do that too because they go to Jesus and ask about it. They're wrestling with it; they can't figure it all out. And down in verse 13 He explains it to them this way, says, "And He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Well, how will you not understand all the parables? The Sower sows the Word.'" In other words, the Sower represents someone who brings the Word of God to you. Jesus doesn't give you any more details here so that could be maybe a preacher, a teacher, a friend, someone who speaks the truth into your life. And He goes on to say the ones who are like the roadside soil are those who when they hear immediately, Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

Now, when it tells you this, that doesn't mean that Satan comes and takes away the word because these people really want to listen, and he stopped them. That's not what this is saying. It doesn't mean that Satan comes and takes away the word even though these are really good, honest people. It means he takes away the word because they don't want to listen. So all he has to do is show up and just that's it. He didn't have to fight them. On the contrary, all the devil does bend over and pick it up because as soon as they hear the word of God, these people forget about it anyway.

And let's make this real applicational here. These are the kinds of people you preach your guts out to in church, and afterwards, all they want to do is talk about hockey. It's playoff time, right? It's very common. You met anybody like before? Of course you have. We all have These are the kinds of people that you meet with afterwards in order to counsel them and shepherd them and pour into them and what do they do? They just want to talk about politics, or the latest thing Justin Trudeau did, because their soul has become callous to the Word of God. And let me tell you, this must have been something that resonated with Jesus' audience because remember who He's talking to here. These are Jews. These are people who knew the Old Testament and they studied it every day. And some of them had copies of it in their home because many of the Jews at this time put a small copy of the Bible over their doorpost called

the Mezuzah Scroll. And others carried a small leather box, they would put over their forehead, or on their right arm called a phylactery that had pages of it as well, which is fine. There's nothing wrong with that. But Jesus' point is that none of that is going to do you any good if you don't listen. You could put a thousand phylacteries on your forehead, it won't help you if you don't listen. You can put a million Mezuzah Scrolls over your doorway, it's the same way. This is your number one priority as a believer. You can't be like the kind of person who comes into the synagogue and said, "Who cares about all this? I just want to hear John MacArthur preach." John MacArthur is old but he's not that old, by the way. He wasn't around in the first century, just an example. You couldn't be like the man who sits down in the pew and says, "Why do I even bother with this anymore? I've already heard it." Well, maybe you have. I don't doubt that. Many of you grew up in church. Many of these people grew up in the synagogue, but God wants to know, has it made an impact on your heart? If not, you need to hear it again.

This was such a big deal to Christ that when you survey His words, in the Gospel of Mark, you find the word "listen" is found about ten times because the Jews kept forgetting to do that. They were so prone to say, "I know" when they heard Him preach. "You need to believe." "I know." "You need to repent." "I know." "You need to go to the synagogue, go to the temple, pray, read your Bible. Take it seriously." "I know. I know. I know. I know. You don't need to tell me all that." Jesus said, "Yes, I do. Because some of you," He said, "look like roadside soil to Me. I tell you these things and it bounces off. I preach these things and you sit there like a knot on the log." And you don't need to do that anymore.

That brings us to another type of soil that's mentioned in this parable. All these are convicting, by the way, I think, but that's the rocky soil. First one we've looked at would be the roadside soil, but the second one that Jesus mentions in the parable is the rocky soil. And this is the kind that's that has no depth in it. This is superficial soil. It doesn't refer to soil that was rocky on the outside. This is soil that's rocky on the inside, where it really counts.

If you look in verse five, it says, "Other seed fell on the rocky ground." And what that tells you is that Jesus is not just describing one type of ground in this passage, but several types. Because as the Sower went out to sow the seed, it falls on all kinds of places.

Again, our farming is not quite like this. Our tractors today have GPS, they have all kinds of equipment that makes sure you do it in nice, neat rows far off the road and far away from any traffic. But this just wasn't like that back then. This is just going everywhere, the seed, and this one goes on ground that's stony because it does not have much dirt underneath. Because no self-respecting farmer at this time would have left his field covered in rocks after he plowed. They all would have done their best to get the rocks off the surface. But the problem is that since a lot of Jews in that area farmed in the mountain side, there was a layer of limestone down below the ground that the plow couldn't get to. Plow could cover, I don't know, several inches, six inches or so. But not anything below that. And this is what it's talking about here, which causes a curious problem to occur. And if you look in your Bibles again, the problem is that immediately the plant springs up because it has no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it

was scorched. And because it had no root, it withered away. Because the Jews had a dry season that started in the month of May, at which time the rain would stop and the sun would come out and just burn everything because it got too hot there. And the Lord said as that happened, the seed died because as long as the rain came, everything's fine. And as long as the showers fell and times were good and things were well, the plant was doing well. But once it stopped, it all began to go sideways.

And in a similar way, Jesus says here, some people are like this. When they hear the word of God, they shoot up and grow. And they get excited about the Bible, excited about the Lord, excited about worship, until times get tough, and then everything goes sideways. But then interestingly enough, if you're trying to understand this part of the parable, Jesus helps us with that as well, because He explains it later on down in verse 16. Here's the explanation for this one. He says that the seed, which was sown on rocky ground, are those who, when they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. And one thing that strikes you when you read that sentence, is that these people actually receive the Word of God, didn't they? That's different than the former one. The former one didn't listen. The former one paid no attention. They didn't care. Well, these people cared. The problem is that it didn't last because it says they had no firm root in themselves, but only temporary. Then when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.

And the key word there is that last phrase, "fall away." That's one word in Greek *skandalizō*. It tells you a lot about what's happening here. We get the word "scandalized" from this because this is what happens when affliction and persecution comes on these people, it shocks them like a scandal would. They can't believe it. They came to Jesus hoping to get their felt needs met. They came to Christ wanting their best life now. They came to church so He would fix their life, fix their family, fix their kids, fix their husband, fix their wife. And when He didn't, and He brought trials into their life, what did they do? They threw their hands up in the air and said, "I quit. I didn't sign up for this. You can keep this Jesus thing to yourself." And just by judging the look on your face, I can tell some of you have met people like this before as well. We've had them pass through our doors here at Grace. And they tell us that they're on fire for God because they're listening to John MacArthur or R.C. Sproul or somebody on the radio. And they're on cloud nine because they're reading their books. And they're studying the Bible and telling their wife about it, which got them so excited until they find out that their wife didn't like that very much. And she can't stand it when they keep quoting the Bible to her, which discouraged them so much that they just quit and threw it all away.

And the principle here is that you can't do that if you're a Christian. It's not enough for you to get excited about the Word of God once. You have to do it over and over again. I mean, Jesus doesn't want you to study it in the good times only, He wants you to study it in the good times and the bad, thick and thin, sunshine and the rain. If you want to write this verse down, Matthew 24:13, says, "The one who endures until the end will be saved." And that means it's not those who start the race that win. It's those who endure.

I would say that of all the different soils we're reading about in this passage, this is one that we can really relate to in Chilliwack because this is still the Bible Belt, which means that if you talk to a lot of people in town, they'll tell you that they used to be a Christian, what whatever that means to them. And they'll say they used to go to church. They made a profession of faith when they were young. And as a result, they got baptized. They learned the Catechism. They went to youth camp, church camp, family camp and VBS. All to later throw it all away when they hit a few bumps on the road. But Jesus says here, there's only one thing to say about that kind of faith. "I don't want it." He says, "I'm not interested in a fly by night kind of religion. I only want people who will remain faithful."

I'll never forget the time I talked to a friend of mine in high school who had just gotten saved, he said, but he disappeared a few months later. And I asked another friend, "Why? What happened to the guy?" And he said, "It's because he got a girlfriend who wasn't a Christian, so he decided to give it up for her." Friends, can I just tell you that a Christian doesn't give Jesus Christ up for anybody, amen? Not a girlfriend, not a boyfriend, not a million dollars, nobody. Take the world but give me Jesus. When the trials of life come, this is what they do to a Christian, they push us closer to Him. And when the sun comes out and burns everything, it shoves us further into the ground next to His side. It's been said, "The same sun melts the wax, hardens the clay." And the same trials that send one man that way away from Christ, push another man that way straight into His arms. And the question here is which one are you? It's a humbling thing to think about. I mean, this whole passage is given to make us do some soul searching.

And it brings us to another type of soil that the Lord mentions here, and that's the thorny soil. A third type of soil the Lord mentions in the parable is the thorny soil or the soil that's choked out by thorns and distractions. If you look back up at the first part of the passage, verse seven says, "Other seeds fell among thorns."

And that's not talking about little thorns. These are big thorns that are two to three inches in length. The word is *akantha* in Greek, and it's the same term used to describe the crown of thorns Jesus wore on the cross. Because the land of Israel was located in a desert region. And this sort of thing was common here. The Jews had thorn bushes growing everywhere, especially in the fields. Because your typical plow couldn't, again, it couldn't go very far into the ground to get rid of all that. It could scratch the surface, which would allow certain dangerous shrubs to start growing down there. And they would come up and choke out the plant. It wouldn't happen quickly; it would be kind of a slow process just like your weeds probably.

And Jesus tells us now some people are like this, everything looks good on the surface. It's all fine when the plow goes by, but all the while there's a hidden evil lurking somewhere down in their heart, waiting to rise up and snuff out the light. It may not happen today, may not happen tomorrow, but it's happening on the inside.

In fact, if you look down in verse 18, this is where this group is described again, and this is one of the most vivid descriptions in the passage. When Jesus says that “The ones who are sown among thorns are those who hear the word, but the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

And if you notice, Jesus says that there are three things that choke out the word, as it's presented to these people. You could call them the three thorns. And it might be good to look at these one at a time.

The first one is the worries of the world. As you hear that, let me just ask you, what is that? What are the worries of the world? Well, anything that causes you to worry is a worry of the world. Does your job cause you to worry? Then it can become a worry of the world. Does your house cause you to worry? Then it can do the same. What about your money? What about your health? What about your possessions, savings, the economy, the future, all that can fall under this umbrella. Because the truth is there's nothing wrong with those things. Jesus is not saying that here. You need to have a job. You need to have a house. You need to take care of your health, but not to the extent that it chokes out your affection for God. That's the issue. Anytime something does that it's wrong.

Secondly, He mentions, the second thorn is the deceitfulness of riches. Not riches or wealth, the deceitfulness of it. You say, “Okay, well, what's that referring to pastor Jeremy? How can my wealth deceive me?” Well, it deceives you by promising you things that can't deliver and telling you that if you make one more dollar you'll be happy. Not true, is it? I mean, you know, if you don't think this is a problem here in Canada, drive around certain neighborhoods and count how many things they have in the driveway. One car, check, because they thought it would make them happy, but it didn't. So what do they do? They go buy another car. Does that make them happy? No. So what do they do? They buy another one. That doesn't work, what do they do? They buy another or maybe they buy a motorcycle, or boat, or RV or trailer to haul it all. And some of them go get another wife, another husband. Some people get kids so it'll make them happy. Kids are wonderful, by the way; but don't put that on them. They get so caught up in a relentless quest to find satisfaction in things, which is foolish, you can't do that. But they try because they're falling prey to what the Lord is describing. That is the deceitfulness of wealth.

All of that is followed by another thorn, that chokes out the word in this passage and that's just simply the desire for other things, or the constant longing for more. And that phrase is left open-ended because you could put a lot of things into that category: longing for more things, more stuff, more objects of any kind, whether they be personal, or impersonal, you can make an idol out of anything.

And having said that, if we were going to back up for a moment and put this soil next to the other ones, I think you would find something interesting, I alluded to this earlier, but that is, while it was a quick death with the other ones, this soil is not like that. It's a slow death. And what I mean is that the spiritual life was crushed out of these people gradually over time; that's what thorns do. They don't swoop in and

take away the seed like a bird or burn it all out in a few days, like the sun. They wrap their tentacles around you gradually until there's no room left to breathe. It's like the age-old problem of the frog in the kettle. Have you ever heard of that before? They say if you put a frog in a kettle of water and you turn up the heat right away, he'll jump out quickly. But if you put the frog in the kettle and you turn it up slowly over time, he will stay in that kettle until he's roasted alive. That's the image here. Some people come to church, hear the Word of God, and all of this stuff just roasts them alive.

Their job does that, they get so caught up in work that it consumes everything until the verse here says they become unfruitful, which means they no longer do anything worthwhile for God. They don't pray, they don't witness, they don't serve anybody, because they're putting so much time in the office that there's nothing left over to spare. And just like everything else in this chapter, this is a massive problem. I mean, I talked about the temptation of being a workaholic, but that's not the only distraction you have. When I read some statistics on this some time ago, which said that the average American home has 300,000 items in it. All of them can be a distraction. And the average size of an American home has nearly tripled over the past 50 years, and it's still not big enough to put all the stuff in. Which is why one out of every four Americans rents off site storage for that purpose. And we can pick on the Americans all we want to, but Canada's not much better. I mean, just think about how much people spend on their homes around here. You know what's going to happen to that home one day? It's going to burn. You know what the next person will do with your house? The chances are they might tear it down and build another one, just like they'll do with your motorcycle, just like they'll do with your boat, just like they'll do with your RV. Which means if this part of the passage tells you anything is that you shouldn't put much stock in those things. Look, it's fine if you own a home, but it's not fine if your home owns you. If it does that something has to change.

And all this brings us to one more type of soil in this passage and that's the good soil. If you want to do a review of these other ones, so far, we talked about the roadside soil that was hard, nothing penetrates it. Then we talked about the rocky soil that was superficial; it had no depth, springs up and dies. Then the thorny soul that was distracted. But as you're looking at the first three, you have to admit those are all bad, aren't they? Those are all what you don't want to be as a Christian. That's why they're put in here. They don't honour God. They don't listen. But in the last group it's different because Jesus has one thing to say about this last group, and that is that it's just good soil.

This is the kind of ground you want to imitate. In fact, if you like to take notes in your Bible like I do, you could pull out your pen and underline this verse or put a star beside it because verse eight says, "Other seeds fell into the good soil." And that just sticks out right off the bat. This is the only type of ground Jesus had anything nice to say about. It's good, or the word in Greek is *kalos*, means beautiful, lovely, excellent and choice.

I don't know if we have any farmers in the room today, but if there are, you guys can all relate to this because you know farming is like real estate. It's all about location, location, location. If you have good

soil, you can grow anything. That's what this is. Jesus says here the seed grew in the soil, and it yielded a crop and produce 30, 60, and 100-fold because the farmer put this much in, and he got that much out on the investment. That's what made it so wonderful. I looked it up this week and found the average yield of a crop in Israel this time was something like tenfold. Anything over that was considered to be a success of a harvest. These guys crushed that. They went way beyond the asking amount and the normal amount.

And if you want to find the explanation for this one, it's down in verse 20 where it says that the good soil are those who, this is what makes them good, hear the word and accept it. In other words, they listen to God. That's why Jesus is so positive about them. Remember, this is what the parable is all about. I mean, in the context, way back up in Mark 3:29, Jesus warned the scribes about the danger of the unforgivable sin, and it was the sin of not listening, not believing, not putting your faith in Christ. And now Jesus says, "If you want to avoid what those guys are doing, there's a simple way to do that. And that is to unplug your years. Pay attention. Hear what I'm saying to you and bear fruit as you do." So if you look in your Bibles, you can see that there at the end.

And this idea of bearing fruit, it could be a reference to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, all those types of things. It could be a reference to the fruit of the vine in John 15, where Jesus says, "My disciples abide in Me." That's the kind of good fruit He's talking about too. It could be a reference to the fruit for God in Romans 7 that we manifest when we deny our sinful passions. But if you want to sum all this up, the word fruit really refers to works because a Christian is someone who hears the word of God, and they live it out with their works.

Now the works don't come first, faith comes first. And we're not saved by works. You're saved by grace alone, but the Bible says as you trust in God's grace alone, this is what God does. He generates good deeds in us for all to see: 30, 60, and 100-fold.

And if you notice, that's it. That's where the parable stops because after verse 20, Jesus doesn't go on to give you a fifth, sixth, and seventh type of soil. He doesn't need to. He's made the point, that this is how you are to respond to the Word of God by letting it produce something in you. That's what a seed does. It produces something; it doesn't say the same. A seed starts off in the dirt, it rises up to God. It begins with a small little shell of a thing. It expands into a great big tree because it can't help it. It has the power of God living in it just like you do.

I mention all this because I've had people read this passage, and they're really discouraged at the end. Because they tell me Pastor Jeremy, "I'm not the good soil." So I asked them, "Are you growing? Then you're the good soil? Is God producing good fruit in you? Then you're the kind of person Jesus is talking about here." Pay very close attention. This is not about perfection. This is about direction. The issue is what is the trajectory of your life? When you look back at the last 10 or 20 or 30 years, can you say there's been progress in me by the grace of God? Yeah, I struggle with sin. I struggle with thorns; I

struggle with a hard heart, and when the sun comes out, it's not a pretty picture. It's pretty ugly at times; but by God's grace, I'm handling it better each and every day. If you can say that you need to be encouraged. This passage has your name written all over it.

I've heard even pastors say they still struggle with the same sins they did when they were first saved. But they don't struggle with them in the same way. They've grown. Listen, friends, every plant does not bear fruit the same way. Some do it quicker than others. And every plant doesn't bear fruit at the same time. Some do it when others don't. There are seasons. Every plant doesn't grow in the same areas. Some grow here, while others grow there. But here's the thing, they all grow. That's what plants do. That's what Christians do.

In fact, just to show you how important this is in the context of our story, you probably noticed in the middle of this section between the parable and the explanation. There's a section that says this in verse 10. It says,

As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve *disciples*, began asking Him *about* the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those who are outside, everything comes in parables, so that while seeing they may see, and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear, and not understand, otherwise they might return and it would be forgiven them."

Now, if that's the first time you've ever read that passage, it sounds very strange. But it means that at this point in his ministry, Jesus began to use parables on a regular basis because the people would not listen to Him. When He was alone, He would speak clearly to the disciples as He does in verses 13 through 20. But when He was surrounded by crowds, He would do it in a veiled manner because some of them refused to hear the word and accept it and grow. They just wanted to ignore Him. Verse 12 is even capitalized in some of your Bibles because that statement is a quotation from Isaiah 6, where the Lord sends Isaiah out to preach. And He tells him that the people won't listen to you, because they didn't listen to Me. God says, "I called out the Israel for years, they didn't listen. I sent them one prophet after another, they turned them all away." And so the Lord says, "Fine, if you don't want my word, Israel, I will hide the meaning from you." And the lesson here is that you don't want to act that way. God may give you the same form of judgment.

I mean, to be honest, like the Jews, for some of you in the room, God may have been calling out to you for years, sending you preacher after preacher, sermon after sermon. And the question is, what are you doing with all that? Like I said at the beginning, can you remember some of the things you've heard? When you look back at the past several months, can you recall what you've learned here at Grace, not just by me, but at the men's Bible study, women's Bible study, youth Bible study, all this stuff? Because the truth is, if not, there could come a day when the Lord takes the opportunity away from you. But look,

you only get so many sermons, and that's it. And the Lord only gives you so many teachers, and that's all. You need to respond by being the good fruit that we've seen here.

Next week, just to give you a foretaste of what that's going to be about, we're going to see several other parables that deal with this issue because starting in Mark 4:21, the Lord will present four of them back-to-back. And there's going to be the Parable of the Lamp, the Parable of the Measure, the Parable of the Seed, and the Mustard Seed, which are all unique in their own special way. But they have one thing in common, and that is that they talk about the subject of taking care what you listen to, down in verse 24. Because apparently Jesus is not done with that subject yet. He's going to cover it again. So please come back and join us as we look at that together next week.

But for this week, let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer and ask Him to help us apply the things that we've heard in this amazing parable for today.

Heavenly Father, we come to You this morning and I just want to echo the same prayer that we had at the beginning of all this and that is, Lord, please help us to be the good soil.

Father, it is a blessing to be in a church where the word of God is preached and it's taught and proclaimed. But at the same time, Father, that gives us a great responsibility. And the responsibility is to respond in the way You're describing here. Father, help us to do that. None of us can grow in our own power. None of us can change by our own mind; we need the help of the Holy Spirit, to soften our heart to come inside of us and transform us and melt us and mold us into the things that would honour You. We pray that You would help us to do this.

Lord, thank You for the words of Christ. Thank You for such a powerful image of the Sower and the seed. It's one that really resonates with us, and we can apply it all day long to the things that we see around us and to the things we struggle with. But at the end of the day, Father, we don't want to just talk about these things theoretically, Lord, I pray that it would penetrate our hearts and convict us to grow in Christ's image for His glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.