

Mark 4:20-34

Tonight we are going to begin things a little differently than we usually do in that we are going to be working to build on something that we started to look at last week and just didn't quite have the time that we needed to finish it. So if you were not here last week I would just encourage you to go back and take a listen to the previous teaching on Mark 4:1-20.

If you remember last week we began to look at a new thing that Jesus was beginning to do as he began to teach in parables. And if you remember a parable was really a story that Jesus would tell and as He told it He would use everyday common situations that the people of His day would have been familiar with. The story could then be applied to someone's life spiritually if they had the right heart to hear what the Spirit was saying through it.

As people heard the parables we saw that they would have different reactions. Some had a hunch in their hearts that there was more to the story than Jesus had told and they were seen seeking Him out and asking more questions about it. A large majority however when they heard simply went on about their business.

So last week we looked at what is probably the most well known parable that Jesus told as He spoke of a sower who went out to sow some seeds in the earth. As He told the parable Jesus spoke of four different kinds of soil that the seeds could fall on and we later learned as Jesus explained what it meant to his disciples that the parable meant that the four different soils were actually four different kinds of hearts that God's Word falls upon.

Some of the seed fell on hard ground and the birds of the air would quickly come in and take that seed. The hard ground is the kind of person that refuses to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and as they have that hard heart the enemy who is Satan comes in and steals the seed that could have changed their lives.

The second kind of soil was the rocky soil and if you remember that kind of soil gets nice and warm in the spring and as the rain falls and the sun then comes out that little seed just takes off BUT the roots of the plant can't get past the rocks and when the summer time rolls around that plant has no depth and it quickly dies.

The heart of a person with stony soil is quick to receive the truth, they receive it emotionally often times and they initially show some incredible growth in their lives but when the trials of life, and the difficulties of being a follower of Jesus show up they quickly wither away.

The third kind of soil was the thorny soil and that kind of soil when it receives God's Word begins to grow but the thorns and the weeds grow up right next to it and eventually if those weeds aren't dealt with they will creep in and kill off the plant.

Those with hearts like this were said to be those that eventually get smashed and choked by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches...I suppose a great many believers today might fall into this category as we have so much available to us and it is so easy to be pulled away and distracted. If you remember we looked at what Jesus said when He said the following in Matthew 6:24 ²⁴ **"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or**

else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

And that brings us to the fourth type of soil that Jesus talked about and we'll begin here today as I wanted to expound on verse 20 a little bit more...So let's look at that as it says the following ²⁰ But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

Now I think we would all agree as we look at these four kinds of soil that the best kind of heart to have is the heart that can bear 30, 60 or even 100 fold. I mean who wouldn't want to have a spiritual life that is abundant and blessed?

This kind of soil has all the right nutrients, it has the right amount of moisture and as the seed hits this soil it finds a home that is hospitable to abundant growth.

I would mention to us today that every seed has the potential within it to grow and bear fruit and we talked about this last week as we said that the Word of God never changes, it always bears the same abilities within it...the real question is what kind of soil will it find.

And so the question becomes how do I have that right kind of soil in my heart spiritually and if I do have that right kind of heart how do I stay in that place and continue to bear fruit in my life?

As I was thinking about it this last week I was reminded of what Jesus had to say over in the Gospel of John in chapter 15 and I would just say for homework you should really read and meditate on that chapter.

Let me just share some verses from there and I'll relate it to the good soil that our hearts can be.

Let me start with verses 1-2 of that chapter which say this **"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.** In these verses Jesus is going to call himself the vine and His Father the vinedresser...and He begins by just letting us know that there are certain parts of our lives or branches of our lives that aren't bearing fruit and He will prune those branches not to punish us or inflict pain but so we can bear even more fruit.

I know that's a hard thing to think about but one of the best things we can do in our lives is to submit to the changes Jesus wants to make in our lives. Sometimes the Lord may look at us and begin to work on a particular sin or attitude in our hearts and He will work to cut that out of us and it can hurt and be a hard process but when we submit to His pruning in our lives it only results in us bearing more fruit.

I think that's a key to having a heart that is considered "Good Soil" as it means we are flexible to His will and the sanctification process He wants to work in us.

In verse 4 of John 15 we read this **⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.** When you think about a tree and the fruit it is bearing that fruit must be receiving its nourishment from the vine...Without being attached to the vine the fruit won't survive...and so it is with us...There must be a dependency on Jesus in our lives and a recognition that we cannot bear spiritual

fruit without finding everything we are in Him. A person with good soil in their heart will know that they have nothing in themselves and they will be completely dependent on Jesus to work in them.

And then verses 5-6 of that chapter say ⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. The person with good soil in their hearts is just abiding in Jesus, finding their strength and their hope in Him, taking their cues in life from the One that gave His life for them...Those that don't find their sustenance in Christ will quickly shrivel up and will eventually be cast out.

I think we could ask ourselves today are we finding our life and our being in Christ or are we trying to do things in our own strength. I believe that if you have the right heart you'll be saying on a daily basis that you need Jesus and Him alone and you'll be focused on His work in your life and not the things around you...You'll find your nourishment in Him and not from the things the world has to offer. And as you do so you'll bear fruit like you wouldn't believe for the kingdom of God.

I did have just a few more practical things that we can be doing to help our hearts to stay in that place that they are considered good soil...The first one we talked about last week and that is that we need to keep our hearts diligently and I think we should be asking the Lord regularly to search our hearts and to help us since you and I don't even really know the depths of our hearts.

The second thing we talked about last week also but we need to be careful that we don't drift in the faith and I think the best way to do that and I do think we need to be reminded often of this but we should be reading the Word of God everyday, we should be spending some time in prayer each day, we should be regularly attending a local fellowship of believers and we should be spending time regularly in worship of the One that gave His life for us...and I think if you are just regularly doing these things with a humble heart and you are not just attending church but engaging in church life that you are going to see the Lord just doing a great work in and through you.

And so to close out the parable of the sower and the soils I would just encourage you to think about which of these soils you are and if you don't find yourself as having the good soil in your life that you would just come to the Lord and ask for His help in your life and that you would ask Him to break up the hard ground in your heart and that He would rid you of the stones in your life and the thorns of your life that you could grow unto His glory.

Moving forward here today in our study we'll see that Jesus had a few more parables that He shared with the disciples that Mark records and the first is found in verses 21-23 of chapter 4 and it says this

²¹ Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? ²² For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

Let's work towards building on the context of the first parable we looked at and remember the focus of that parable was really on the Word of God and how it is sown into the hearts of men.

As we begin to look at this let me just give you a little cultural background. We shouldn't think of a lamp like you and I have in our homes today. The lamps of biblical times were usually little small clay pots that would have oil in them and then they would use some kind of fiber as the wick and you can just do a little search online to bring up multiple photos of similar lamps.

And so now the Lord begins to speak about a lamp and how when you have a lamp you would never put it under a basket or a bed...What would happen if you did that? Well in all honesty you would probably have a fire but I don't think that's the point...The point the Lord is making though is that the light that came from the lamp would do no good if it was put in a place that it was covered. A lamp when used properly illuminates a room and exposes darkness.

I think a good way to apply this is to look at how the seed is sown in the parable of the sower and how it is sown liberally all in the hopes that one day a beautiful crop will grow.

You and I just like the disciples of Jesus all carry within us the incredible message of Jesus Christ...and I think that as we go through life we have a decision to make and that is to allow our lives to shine brightly for Jesus or to cover up and conceal the light that is in us.

I believe Jesus would say to the church today that we need to let the Light shine out of our lives and sadly I think there are some today that have really quenched the fire of the Holy Spirit and the reason for this

is that many of us have become afraid to share the truth of Jesus Christ with the world around us.

I think we often forget the great commission that Jesus has given us in life that says this which is found in Matthew 28:19-20 which says **¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.** You and I have been called just like the disciples were to share the truth with the world around us...to allow the light to shine through our lives.

As we do so we should understand that the light of the gospel is going to expose darkness and when that darkness is exposed it will have numerous reactions.

We learn this over in John's Gospel in John 1:1-5 which say this of Jesus it says **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.** Jesus truly is the light of the world...It's not us but the message of Jesus that brings light to every person. You and I like John the Baptist testify of the light as we reach out to the world and we should be looking for the world to be brought to our Lord.

Sadly though as we share we often find the following true from John 3:19-21 which say **¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light**

has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

So often as the light shines into the darkness those that love evil reject the truth, they refuse to allow the evil in their hearts to be exposed and they refuse to bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

I do want to exhort us as a church that we should be looking for every opportunity that might come our way to speak the truth of the love of Jesus Christ to those around us. The world needs hope and there is only one hope and you and I who believe can testify of the light of the world.

We need to have the following mentality in our hearts when it comes to sharing Jesus. 1 Peter 3:15 says ¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; I think our hearts should be ready, willing and able to share with those around us...and I would just say that to be able to do that we do need the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This world will often reject us for our message of Jesus and it is in these times that we can subconsciously shut down and choose to stop telling others about the Lord.

The apostles were faced with something difficult in their lives in Acts 4 and what happened was Peter and John were both arrested and they were dragged before what was called the Sanhedrin and these guys

were the elite of the elite when it came to those who were religious. They were powerful men indeed and they told Peter and John that they were to be quiet about Jesus and preach His name no more...and the apostles responded in verses 19-20 of Acts 4 where the Word says **this** ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” And then right after this they were released and they went and found the other disciples and they prayed and cried out to the Lord for strength and in verse 31 we see the Lord respond in this way which says ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

I don't know about you but I certainly need the Holy Spirit to fill me and give me strength so that the light that is in me who is Jesus could shine brightly in the world. I don't want to conceal Jesus but reveal Jesus to those around me.

One final comment and we'll move on but listen to what 2 Corinthians 5:20 says ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. You and I as ambassador's for Christ have a responsibility to represent Him well to the world around us. It's an incredible privilege indeed that we are the vessels God wants to use to reach the world. So I would just remind you that we need to share Jesus with those around us and the light within you is meant to be revealed and not concealed.

Let's look at verses 24-25 which say ²⁴Then He said to them, **“Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. ²⁵ For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”**

Not only do we as disciples of Jesus have a burden to share the truth but we also have the burden of being careful about what we hear. If you remember Jesus as He was speaking to the multitude said He that has ears to hear should hear...and I do think that just the simple fact that we are in this room today means we have a great responsibility for not only hearing the Word but also making sure that we are careful about what we hear.

Let's just be honest that often times the world has a way of introducing false truths that often sound pretty enticing on the outside but so often what is shared is filled with false doctrines and false hopes.

You and I need to be careful that we are like the Bereans who are found over in Acts 17...they not only heard the Word that Paul preached but they then sought the scriptures to make sure what he said was accurate.

I want to caution you today that just because a TV show talks about Jesus doesn't mean they are representing Him properly. Just because a church is full of people doesn't mean the pastor is speaking truth. Paul the apostle warns over and over that we need to be aware of false doctrine. The Bible warns of those who are wolves in sheep's clothing who look to take advantage of the people of God.

Over in Galatians 1:6-8 Paul had this to say about those that bring forth a different gospel. He said ⁶I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Over in 2 Thessalonians Paul warned of those that were teaching that the Resurrection of the dead had already taken place and those who were left had missed it.

Even today false teachings abound.

You and I bear a responsibility to know the Word of God so well that when we hear something contrary to it we can pick it out and discard it. It's like that analogy I have used often that a bank teller doesn't study fake currency, instead they study the real thing and they know how the paper feels and all the security features of real money and when something fake comes along they can quickly point it out.

As we listen carefully, as we look to properly take in the Word of God Jesus then says that those who have more will be given. We should just know that like the seed on the good soil that then produces much so is the man or woman that hears well...They will be blessed.

And then Jesus says that the one that doesn't have even what He has will be taken away and again I just point that back to the parable of the sower and how the enemy came in and snatched that seed away that fell on the ground that was hardened.

We might ask ourselves the following question...If God has given us so much in His Word and we choose not to apply it and seek to understand it then why should Jesus give us more spiritual truth? We should understand that there is great accountability for you and I who regularly have the privilege of hearing what He would say to us.

If you just look at how privileged we are in this church to just be surrounded by the study of His Word then we should take to heart that we will be held to a higher standard.

So be careful how you hear, be careful what you hear, when you do hear the truth then hear it with your whole heart and understand as you apply it properly that more will be given to you...

Finally, make sure you use what you have been given...If you don't use the truth of God's Word then it will be taken from you...Just to illustrate that you might think of playing a sport or riding a bicycle or speaking a second language. If you don't continue to use the skills you have they slowly but surely erode from your life.

Let's move on here if you look at verses 26-29 which say ²⁶And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. ²⁸ For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Have you ever stopped and thought about how amazing the kingdom of God is in a person's life? And have you ever thought about the

amazing process that takes place in someone's heart as they come to know the Lord Jesus.

So many of us when we are young we hear the truth of God's Word and it takes an awful long time for that seed to take root and begin to grow doesn't it? I know for myself that I sure did reject the truth for a time in my life.

And yet at the same time I can look and see that God was calling me to Himself...Little changes were taking place in my life and even my friends I ran around with could see it. Perhaps on the outside people couldn't see any changes but below the surface lots was happening. And then suddenly the seeds of the gospel in my heart began to grow and I began to bear fruit.

I like what the Word says over in 1 Corinthians 3:5-7 which says this

⁵Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

I want to encourage you who are here tonight that are faithfully sowing seeds in your loved ones and your co-workers and those you run into and just let you know that God's Word has a way of working even when we can't see it. We ought not grow weary in doing good the Word says and so I just encourage you to just continue on in the work of sowing the seed of God's Word in people's hearts.

In my life there were a few that were faithful to just plant the Word in any way they could and in time they did see that spiritual harvest in my life.

It's amazing how God's Word can do so much in a life. The Word of God cleanses us, empowers us, rebukes us and does so much that we can't see. We must trust that even when we can't see big things coming from our lives that faithfully sowing the Word in our hearts is going to pay off in the long run.

We much like the farmer must sow the seed and then wait and walk by faith and then finally we'll begin to see the plants growing and the Lord when the harvest is ready will take that fruit from our lives and use it to minister to others.

And then we come to our final parable of this evening if you look at verses 30-32 which say ³⁰Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; ³²but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."

So the Lord is clear here in this parable that it is a parable about the kingdom of God and the Lord is using this picture here of a mustard seed to describe how His kingdom works here on the earth.

The mustard seed is not the smallest seed in existence on the earth but during Biblical times it was known that it was just a very tiny seed and what many would say was one of the smallest. And this mustard seed Jesus spoke of when it was planted became a plant so large that

its branches reached out and it became greater than all the herbs that grew...So large it became that the birds of the air were nesting in its shade.

Now the mustard seed does not usually grow into what we consider a tree...It can get somewhat large being about 6 to 20 feet but it is not a tree like the maple we have over in my front yard. The typical mustard plant does not have woody trunks or thick bark nor do they have big branches.

Now what I think that this parable is pointing to is how the kingdom of God started out quite small really with just one man being Jesus and then the twelve apostles and before to long the kingdom of God was seen affecting the whole earth and really influencing the whole earth in many ways and we could say that indeed God's kingdom does grow abnormally.

And then we see in the parable that there were birds that began to nest in the branches and there are many who interpret this to mean that these birds represent the people of the earth and how God's kingdom provides nourishment and shade...I do have to say that I disagree with that interpretation and really the reason for that points back to the parable of the sower and the seeds.

If you remember Jesus said of the parable of the sower and the seeds that it was the key to understanding all the other parables and if you couldn't understand that parable then none of them would make sense...and I would just ask you did we see any birds spoken of in the parable of the sower and the seeds? We did actually when we saw the hard ground that was impenetrable and the seed of God's Kingdom

would hit that ground and the birds of the air or the agents of Satan would come and snatch that seed away.

My opinion is that the birds that are nesting in the kingdom of God's miraculously growing branches are the false religions and teachers of this world. And I think if you just look at history you can see that the birds of the world have tried to come in and distort the truth of God's Word.

So many false teachings have come and attempted to nest in the branches of God's Kingdom...I ran across a quote about Joseph Smith the founder of Mormonism about this very parable and it falsely interpreted it saying the following **"Let us take the Book of Mormon ... ; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth, yea, even towering with lofty branches and God-like majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, ... and God is sending down His powers, gifts, and angels to lodge in the branches thereof."** What a crazy distortion to take with this parable and really in trying to say this the Mormons are giving a literal fulfillment of what the birds try and do while they nest in God's kingdom.

The truth is that there are many false gospels in the world and there are two that come to mind that really are prevalent in our society today in America...The first is the prosperity gospel and this is the idea that God wants you to be rich, that He wants you to be healthy, that He wants you to endure no trials or problems in life and if you just have enough faith then you are going to just have no problems what soever.

Any student of God's Word should know this isn't true. There is no promise for wealth, health and prosperity in the Word of God...Jesus died with no home, with no wealth, with no inheritance in this world. So many of the early church fathers left this world happily with nothing.

And then the second false gospel that goes around our country is the progressive gospel message that goes out...This says that God's Word doesn't really mean what it says, that it is outdated, that it no longer communicates truth, that it needs to be updated to fit society today. How backwards can we get things?

One of my brothers in the church here had a shirt on the other day that had a verse on it from Psalm 119:89 and that verse says **Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.** I would simply say that God's Word never changes, that the real problem with society is that it has walked away from God's truth rather than embraced it. The world needs to change and be transformed rather than the Word of God changing to fit our sinful positions.

We must be careful therefore how we hear God's Word and what we allow in our lives for the birds of the air will attempt to distract us and take us away from the glorious and supernatural work of God's kingdom.

And then look with me here at verses 33-34 which say ³³**And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.** ³⁴**But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.**

So the disciples and those that had ears to hear they were privileged and blessed to be able to hear the truths that God was trying to communicate as He spoke to the multitudes by parables...I don't think we have nearly half of the parables Jesus told, I expect there were many more that we don't have recorded in the gospels and yet God has watched over that which He desires that you and I would have as we go through life.

So just to recap this evening let's make sure that we have hearts that are in good condition that when God's word is sown within us He can bear fruit in our lives that is 30-60 or even 100 fold. Let's make sure that we allow the Word of God to shine brightly from our lives that we might light the world with His truth...Let's be careful how we hear the Word of God and understand that the way we listen and the intensity we listen to His Word will then allow us to walk into more truth...Let's be careful about what we hear and make sure we line every teaching and every statement up with God's truth...Let's make sure that we liberally spread the seeds of the gospel and let's pray over those seeds that God would cause them to grow as He sees fit...and let's be aware that while God's kingdom grows supernaturally that the birds of the air will be right there to sow false teachings right next to it and even in it.

Lots of lessons for this evening...Let's pray.

Mark 4:20-35 “Let The Light Shine”

Introduction

Matthew 6:24

Verse 20

John 15:1-2

John 15:4

John 15:5-6

Verses 21-23

Matthew 28:19-20

John 1:1-5

John 3:19-21

1 Peter 3:15

Acts 4:19-20

Acts 4:31

2 Corinthians 5:20

Verses 24-25

Galatians 1:6-8

Verses 26-29

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

Verses 30-32

Psalms 119:89