

The Parable of the Sower
Mark 4:1-20

...and turning to His word by which we have the main function and ability by which He does lead us.

By God's grace I was saved at a young age and had the privilege and joy of growing up in Valley Bible Church, greatest church in the world, and I had a great family that modeled and lived out what it meant to be a follower of Jesus Christ. I had faithful nursery workers, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, college leaders, growth group leaders all over the years of my life, faithfully not only teaching and speaking the words of truth, the good news of Jesus Christ, but also living it out. And it was God's pleasure that He decided to, by His grace, help me see at a young age the sinner I was, how I was on a path that was leading to destruction, a path that would bring me to His face one day where I would have to give an account for my ways, a path that was sure to end in His eternal wrath, righteousness and holiness being poured out on me in all fairness. God opened my eyes to see that, and He also revealed to me the glorious truths of the gospel in Jesus Christ, the One who saved me from that, the One who stepped in and bore all that wrath on the cross when He gave up His life and shed His blood, the One who took my sin upon Himself and was the substitute. God was gracious to show me that, and I've fallen in love with Jesus ever since, and I can't stop getting enough of Him, and I want more of Him, and hopefully, this is your story as well.

But it didn't take long in my life, even as a young kid, to realize and to see that there were other people around me that weren't as excited about Jesus as I was. As I went to school and participated in sports teams and interacted with other people and even maybe extended family and things like that, I realized that not everyone was treasuring Jesus the way that I saw Him and started to think this is different. Why is this? There were certain friends that, sure, at a young age, they might come to church with me, and when I talked about the Bible, they might say, oh, yeah, that's a good thing, and it seemed like we were on the same page, but as time would go on, there would be a distance. Some of these friends, some of these people, I would simply observe over time. They would just drift. Maybe something hard would happen in their life, or just as time progressed, they grew out of Jesus. Jesus was good for a phase when they were young, and they kind of needed that

fantasy. They needed that Santa Claus hero in their life, and that was Jesus. But now that they're older and intellectual and mature, Jesus's no longer has a place for them, and this is what I observed over and over and over again.

And I'm sure all of us are in that boat where we can think of people that we interacted with, that over time, we come to realize Jesus doesn't mean anything to them anymore. They either flat out rejected Him, or they're just not interested. And you have to ask yourself the question, why? Why does this happen? Why does this happen for certain people? Is it because they didn't have a great church that they attended? Is that why? Their church wasn't good enough? It wasn't big enough? The pastor didn't preach passionately enough? Is it because they didn't have a full Christian household where all their siblings and family and parents were all saved? Is that why? What is it? Is it because they didn't go to a Christian school? Why is it that these people drift and no longer have an interest in Jesus? It's a obvious question that we need to ask - what happens? Why is it that you have all these different responses to this amazing hero and savior of the earth?

It's in our passage this morning that Jesus gives us the answer, and it's a simple answer in this parable. The problem is with peoples' hearts. The problem is with mankind and our failure to accept and embrace Jesus and His word for what it says. Join with me as we look at Mark 4, and I'll read our verses for us, verses 1-20, starting in Mark 4:1; "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.’ ” 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 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. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.’ ”

This morning, we witness another, yet another, shift in the ministry of Jesus. As Jesus’s gone about doing His ministry, He has been primarily in Galilee, preaching, and He’s been preaching openly, clearly, confidently, without mistake. It’s been blunt and blatant to the people. However, we see a shift this morning, a new technique that Jesus takes up in His preaching. He no longer is the clear-cut preacher that is speaking exactly and perceptively right to the hearer. He now speaks in parables. He now chooses to teach in parables, these stories with a point. That’s what we find this morning. This first parable, the parable of the sower perhaps one of the most, probably, well-known parables. It’s also in... we find also in Matthew, and you find it in Luke as well. It’s one of the longest ones. It’s explained; some other parables aren’t explained. And it comes in the front, comes right at the beginning of this discourse, this teaching on parables, that Jesus gives. This is, rightfully, one of the most important parables here because it is the gateway to the rest of Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom through these parables. Mark doesn’t have a lot of teaching on parables. He just has a few, and that’s what we find here in chapter 4, but if you were to go to Matthew 13 and other places, you find Jesus giving loads of teaching on the kingdom through these parables, through this technique and this form.

Thus, we have a shift this morning that we’re observing, a shift in how Jesus’s choosing to teach and interact with people. We see our large passage divided up into three main sections this morning. The first we’ll see is the illustration of the parable that comes in our first nine verses - the illustration

of the parable. He just lays it out, this simple story. Before we get into that, that simple story that He lays out, let's set the scene a little bit and give a little background to what's taking place. "Again he began to teach..." Once again, we see Jesus's not able to get away from this. This is His desire. This is His passion, His purpose in coming to the people, His teaching. He longs to teach and proclaim. That's what He said back in chapter 1 very clearly; "And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.' " Jesus's had this as His aim, as His goal, to keep preaching and teaching the message. What was the message? Like we said, it was straightforward and clear. Mark 1:15; "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." This was the message. Jesus longed to go around, the same message that John the Baptist delivered, Jesus now enforced and said here it is; "...the kingdom of [heaven] is at hand..." You must respond, "...repent and believe..." This has been His task. His goal is to continue to teach and teach, and so, we see Him again in verse 1, beginning to teach, and we're still in the region of Galilee beside the sea.

Notice, we see "...a very large crowd gathered about him..." ... "...a very large crowd..." We've seen this crowd happen to come upon Jesus a couple times already. Back in chapter 3, we saw the description of the crowd in verse 7 and following, this diverse, diseased, demon-possessed, determined crowd pressing in on Jesus, and He was even fearing for His own life. Jesus was warning His disciples to set aside a boat just in case He needs to separate from this crowd that's pressing in on Him. Then, we saw Jesus actually retreat, get up on the mountain, call His disciples to Himself. But then, in chapter 3:20, as He came back down and "...went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat." This crowd was a massive and determined crowd and was affecting even Jesus' own health and well-being. This continues to show and reveal the popularity and the publicity of Jesus. There was no ignoring Jesus. If you were anybody who's been around, anybody who had even been near the nation or near the region of Galilee or Israel, they had this understanding of this figure, this public figure, Jesus, and what He was doing. We see the "...very large crowd..." gathers again. This time, He does get into the boat; "...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." So, this multitude of people now stuck on the land while Jesus's retreated somewhat in a boat out on the sea. We see that the purpose of this isn't just so He can get away and get some breathing space, but it's for Him

to teach. He wants to keep teaching. He's teaching and people are coming and filling up the space, and there's no way He's going to be able to project and communicate to everyone, so now, He puts Himself out in a boat, and He has the ability to communicate to all those on the shore of Galilee as he speaks across the waters. This is what He decides to do, utilizing this opportunity. And this is just how a sound works. Right? There's an ability for sound to travel well across water.

I found this out very clearly when I was a kid - go on vacation - go up to the lake, and you'd be, you know, on one side of the lake, and you see some people way across on the other side of the lake. They look like ants, but you could hear their conversation. You could see the dog barking, and you could see everything that's happening, and then you start to, you know, make notes and observations as you hear their conversation. And I start to yell to my brothers and yell to my family. Ha! Did you hear what he said? Aw, look at those shorts. They're so funny. That dog is so weird. And then come to realize as you get older, oh, that means they could hear everything I was saying. Ah, that's how that works. Yeah, that's right. Jesus's utilizing this, this simple opportunity here, where He's got this massive crowd, and now He can go out in a boat, and He can speak to all of them, and they can hear Him perfectly, just fine, and this is what He does. He wants to keep teaching. He wants to keep this as His aim as He's out on the boat teaching to all those beside the sea on the land.

Notice verse 2. We see "...he was teaching them many things in parables..." ... "...in parables..." This is the introduction to the change in His teaching. His teaching has been clear as we saw in chapter 1:15, and now, there is a shift. And this term parable is more of a loose term. It's loosely defined. We, kind of, could see it, almost, be a proverb at times. It could be a riddle at other moments. It is a story, an allegory, an analogy maybe at other places, and sometimes, it's defined in it's, like, details like we have here. We see every element of the story explained by Jesus, and other times, it's just a simple story with a point, and either you got it, or you missed it and you didn't get it. This is the nature of parables, and that's how Jesus uses them, in different ways. And so, we're going to see here in chapter 4 in our text, this is more of an expanded illustration, an analogy, that it gets explained by Jesus. It's a story with a point. It's a story with a point that Jesus is choosing to use in His teaching. Verse 3 - we get into it. In verse 3, He says, "Listen!" ... "Listen!" Getting the attention of the people, telling them over and over

again, this is going to be a theme throughout this passage, this “Listen!” Hear! Understand! It’s the same word used over and over again - gets translated in different ways, but you need to hear and understand and “Listen!” to the teaching of Jesus.

He begins His illustration with “...a sower...,” a farmer; “...a sower went out to sow...” A farmer that’s doing the most basic task that anyone in Israel could relate to, knowing that they have crops, and they’re familiar with this concept of farming to gain a harvest. They relied upon it. They prayed to God for the rain, that they would supply that rain, and that would, actually, be able to, actually, have food and praise God for it. This was a normal part of life. Everyone can relate to the concept of a farmer going out with seed, throwing the seed into the ground and beginning and planting his crops. This is the scene that He pictures, and in this scene, you get four different scenarios. We get four different scenarios, four different responses, four different results, that come to us.

Verse 4; “And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.” So, first, we see the seed that fell along the path - the seed that fell along the path. It’s pretty straightforward. It’s understandable that as people had fields and their grain fields and even vineyards, there would be pathways. You wouldn’t just have one large field with no path between it so you could go and gather and walk around it or walk through it. This was normal. And so, some people, actually, kind of think that this doesn’t make any sense. Why would a farmer go out and throw seed on a path? That’s a dumb idea. The path gets trampled down. It’s hard. Why would you put seed there in the first place? And that’s not, really, what’s taking place here. It’s not as if the sower’s intentionally throwing the seed there. The way that they did their farming back then, they would plow the land, break it up as much as they could, and then they would go and throw seed. Then, they’d go back and plow it again to work the seed in. And in that, there’d be times where you didn’t really know where the path was because they might break up part of it, and so, they were throwing, and it wasn’t a careless throwing, it was just some seed would obviously for natural reasons go beyond and land on the path. The story’s pretty clear that seed doesn’t stand a chance and lands on the path. It bounces around. It doesn’t go into the soil at all, and all it takes is a couple birds that are smart enough to see the sower doing it, and they come and devour it. The seed doesn’t even stand a chance. That’s one scenario.

Then we go on to verse 5; “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.” People tend to think of this next scenario, the rocky soil, as something like this - they picture this, this ground, that has just rocks in, and this was a bad thing. Normally, if you were going to take a plot of land, and you were actually going to use it for farming, you would clear the land. You would go through and you’d try and get rocks and things like this out of there. No one wanted that in there. That makes it worse. However, when Jesus’s teaching this and giving us this scenario, this probably isn’t, really, what He’s talking about. As it says, there’s a clear distinction, here, that there is soil, and it’s shallow, and then there’s rock underneath it. ...need to think of this as more as, almost, like a bedrock that’s underneath it. There’s this shallow soil that happened in different parts in the land of Israel, and you could break it up a little bit, but the reality was, not too much farther down, you hit limestone. You hit this kind of sheet of rock, and there wasn’t, really, opportunity for much depth for these seeds as they grew into the soil. So, it’s a nice layer of good-looking soil, but, really, deep down, it doesn’t go, it hits rock, and this is what happened. These seeds, actually, do take root, unlike on the path, they, actually, take some root, and they spring up immediately because of that initial soil they find. But all it takes is a little bit of heat. When the sun rose, “...it was scorched...” since it didn’t have root enough. It wasn’t able to go deep enough to find the moisture that it needed to survive the heat, thus it withers away.

Verse 7; “Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.” As is obvious and natural, weeds do not help. Weeds, that wonderful thing that came from the fall. All right. Weeds, that thing that we see back in Genesis when Adam sinned, and God told him you’re going to toil and work the ground and have to deal with this. This is the curse of man that’s been ever since Genesis 3. It affects farming. It affects this produce. We have this progression that kind of unfolds here. The first seed bounces around, doesn’t even take root. It gets devoured by birds. The second seed actually goes in the soil, but it’s not very long until it gets scorched and withered. This third seed goes in the soil and there, might find a little bit of depth, and actually starts to grow, but it’s just overwhelmed. It’s overwhelmed by these weeds and overrun by these weeds, so much so, that there’s no way that it can actually get the nourishment it needs to give

the produce. So, it yields no grain. It's worthless. No fruit comes from it. Nothing. These weeds would overwhelm the plant in this case.

Finally, we come to the good soil as we see in verse 8; "And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." Some people have a hard time with these numbers, and they think this is a little hyperbolic. It's almost too much. It's way too big. Jesus doesn't know what He's talking about. And that's probably because they're counting the wrong thing. They might be counting the stalks of grain as opposed to the actual kernels of grain. When you actually count the kernels of grain, you get a very reasonable and understandable number for that which would be a good harvest. That which a farmer would expect and want for a good harvest would be something around "...thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold..." kernels of grain from that seed. This is the good soil.

Then, we see verse 9 as Jesus wraps up this illustration; "And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ... "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Some people think, from our verses as they go on, they think this is Jesus only speaking to His followers at this point. That's it. No one else is in view. He's not caring at all about everyone else on the Sea of Galilee, this whole multitude that's there on the shore. He's only speaking... He says, "...he who has ears to hear..." I'm only speaking to the twelve. I'm only speaking to My followers that are faithfully coming after Me. That doesn't seem to, really, make sense because the reality is Jesus is teaching, and He always has been teaching with an aim of reaching everyone. This is no doubt how God interacts with Israel. God would say this with Israel multiple times that they are people that have ears, but they choose not to hear. And Jesus calls out to every single person on the shore, you have ears out there? You need to hear this. You need to take note of this. This is important.

At this point, we would expect the explanation as you and I know it - what these things mean and how Jesus is meaning to use these different elements in this simple story, but we almost have Mark putting, like, pause on this. Like, he's kind of saying hold on a second. Right? Instead, he shifts and changed the direction, and instead of going right into the explanation of this parable, we have what we find is the intention of parables. We zoom out for a second, and rather than talking about this exact parable of the sower and the soils and the seed, we now zoom out and talk about parables in general.

Mark changes the time on us. Let's look at our verses, starting in verse 10; "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.' " We now zoom out and talk just about parables in general. Mark jumps to the end of the day. Jesus has gone through and taught in parable after parable after parable, teaching about the kingdom of God, and now Mark jumps us to the end of the day where these disciples come, and they're alone with Jesus, no longer in the boat, no longer there talking to the multitude, but just this tiny group, and they ask Him why do you speak in parables? Why? What is this usage of parables? Where is this coming from? And Jesus gives them a twofold answer - He gives them a twofold answer. His answer is, on the one hand, He speaks in parables to reveal the truth of the kingdom of God to those that are actually followers, but on the other hand, a second purpose is to conceal the truths of the kingdom of God from those that had rejected Him. It's both/and. He's speaking to reveal truth to those that are true followers and to conceal and hide it from those that had rejected Him. This is what the text says.

We look at verse 11. In response to their questioning about parables. Jesus says, "...To you..." this group of the twelve, right, these followers. You think of this group and, probably, the best way to understand who this group is, is to look back at the end of chapter 3. At the end of chapter, we have the scene where Jesus is meeting with, in a kind of... this small group, again, of people that are His disciples and those that are seriously following Him and who shows up? His family. His mother and His brothers and His sisters. His biological family shows up. They let Jesus know your family's outside. They're here for You. And as we saw earlier in chapter 3, they thought Jesus was crazy, and they wanted to, actually, kind of remove Him from the scene for their own good and their own shame and name. However, how does Jesus respond? He used it as an object lesson, saying who is My family? Who is the family of God? "Who are my mother and my brothers [and my sisters]?" Is it not you right here, that are with Me, following Me, doing the will of God? Those are the ones. That's the group. And so, that same group is here, now, asking Him why He speaks in parables. And Jesus says, "To you [the followers] has been given the secret of the kingdom of God..." As I teach these stories with a point, as I teach in these parables, this is for you to understand the kingdom, the secret of the kingdom of God, but for them,

there's a different purpose. It's to hide it, to conceal it. Everything is in parables for them.

This is an understandable question for them because this is a tricky point in the ministry of Christ as these followers and disciples are coming to grips with Jesus. They're seeing enough of what He's done. They've seen the miracle. They've heard the teaching, and they are convinced that this is the Messiah, and they're following after Him. But as they look around, they're realizing not everyone's as convinced as we are about Jesus. They're seeing that not everyone else is truly following as we are, and they might be getting a little concerned because, as we just saw, the religious leaders are committing the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They're, actually, not just saying we don't like Jesus, they're saying the power that Jesus has is satanic. And then you have His own family that's not really supportive of Jesus. They're calling Him crazy and a lunatic. So, the disciples start to observe these things, and they think, well, we're convinced that this is the Messiah, but why is everyone else responding so terribly? I mean, if You are the Messiah, this is kingdom time. This is time for the Messiah to come and bring in the promises that we have from the Old Testament and to watch God reign on His earth with His Messiah. This is what we're expecting and looking forward to, but Jesus, You don't really have that kind of support. This doesn't make sense. This isn't adding up. In fact, it would lead the disciples to wonder, is the kingdom still happening? Is the plan of God still unfolding? Is this still going to go forward in the way that we should expect, that Scripture told us? And the whole purpose of these parables is for Jesus to answer them and say, yes, the kingdom of God will continue to move forward, and I'm explaining that to you in these parables, that you can understand these stories with a point, to understand more about what the kingdom of God is truly like. "...but for those outside..." as Jesus says in our text, the ones that have rejected Him and accused Him of being in league with Satan, the ones that have decided that He's crazy, the ones that are just simply there for the free bread and the show and the entertainment, for them, everything's in parables.

Everything is just concealed and hidden. Verse 12; "...so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven." Jesus makes the point very clear. They're settled. They've come to the conclusion of what they feel about Me. They know and they believe that I am not the Messiah. I am someone else. I'm

either satanic, or I'm crazy, or I'm just an entertainer, but they do not believe Me to be the Messiah. They've concluded that. That's where they're at. That's where they stand. So, in My teaching through parables, they're here. They're there on the shore of Galilee. They're hearing all these parables, and yet, they don't get it. They're not understanding. They're seeing Jesus, but they're not perceiving. They're not fully understanding who He is. They're hearing Jesus, but they're not comprehending the kingdom and what He's bringing because if they actually could, then they would turn, and they would be forgiven. They would find salvation in the Lord. This is Jesus answering the disciples' understandable question. Why are You speaking in parables? What's happening with this kingdom program? Is it still going forward? And Jesus says for you that truly believe and follow me? Yes, it is moving forward. I speak in parables for you to understand these stories with a point of the kingdom. But for them, those that have concluded that I'm not the Messiah, that choose not to believe in Me, they continue to be blind. There's a veil that's covering them, and they can't see. They're spiritually blind to understand who I am as the Messiah and the kingdom as it moves forward. This is why Jesus now speaks in parables, the wisdom of God, that just bursts forth onto the scene as Jesus does this - in this, Mark giving us the understanding of why this is taking place and why this goes down.

You might have some problems with why God would do this. Why would God be so mean in this regard? Well, in one sense, it is a judgment. For Jesus to speak in parables and to hide the message from those that don't believe in Him, it's a judgment upon them. He's giving them the very thing they want. They don't want Jesus, so He says fine, I'm not going to give you more of the message. I'm not going to give you more revelation. I'm going to cloak it in parables. But at the same time, it's not just a judgment; it really is a mercy and a grace. It's a kindness that Jesus is showing. Jesus says if I were to keep speaking plainly and openly about the kingdom to you, and you keep standing there and listening to Me and listening to Me, that's more that you're now accountable for. When you do stand before God, you're now going to have to answer for all of that teaching that you received. So, with Jesus taking parables and hiding the message from them, it actually is a mercy and a grace, and it gives them less that they're accountable for when they stand before God on Judgment Day. It's the wisdom of God that is far beyond our understanding, our ways.

Jesus' ministry is one that will parallel some of the prophets. It'll parallel even Isaiah. Isaiah has a very similar setting when he prophesies in his ministry. He gets the vision of the Lord in the temple, and God asks who'll I send? Who'll go for Me to take this message to the people, the people of Israel, and Isaiah rises up and says, "Here I am! Send me." And God tells Isaiah what kind of ministry he's going to have; "And [God] said, "Go, and say to this people: " 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Isaiah's ministry to the people of Israel was one where he would actually take a message, knowing in advance they wouldn't listen. God said you're going to be my prophet, and you're going to take this message, and they're not going to listen to you at all. They're going to continue to reject it so that they have more and more of this opportunity, and they denied it every time - every time. Therefore, when Israel was judged and the Assyrians came in, you could not blame God for His effort and His part on bringing the message to them. In the same way, Jesus has a ministry where He goes and He's already been rejected. He's already been publicly opposed and accused of working with Satan, and so, He will continue bringing the truth as Isaiah did, but now in parables - this ministry of being rejected by His own people, a fellow Jew, the Messiah coming to bring the kingdom - what they should be expecting, and they would reject Him as they did Isaiah.

At this point, after giving us this whole big purpose and understanding of why Jesus is doing this, we now have the luxury of seeing this parable go forth and be interpreted for us. Jesus interprets this parable - the interpretation in verses 13-20. Verse 13; "And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" This is important. This is the front parable. You need to understand how you listen and how you respond is of vital importance to what you do with the rest of the teaching of the Messiah. How you respond to the teaching of the Messiah is of utmost importance as Jesus will continue to speak and preach in parables. This is severe in importance. Jesus being patient, kind, with His disciples. While they did believe in Him and follow Him, they were slow to understand; therefore, Jesus is compassionate and works with them.

In verse 14, He begins, "The sower sows the word." What is the seed? It's imperative to know that the seed does not change. It is the word. So, in all

these scenarios of all these different responses of how people were responding to God and to Jesus, the word does not change. It's not the fault of the seed. The same seed is thrown along the path as it is in the soil with thorns and the rocky soil and the good soil. That does not change. The word is not at fault. It is those receiving the word. That is the key in this. Verse 15 - Jesus begins to explain; "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." This is the birds that came and devoured it as it landed on the path. These are the people that are there and excited to watch Jesus do another magic trick and to get free food from this miracle worker, and then He starts to teach, and they zone out, and they wonder when the next miracle's going to be, and they're looking forward to that. Or, maybe, they're this kind of listener - they hear it, and they go, hey, that's some good stuff. They really need to hear that. Yeah, you tell them. Oh, I know who really needs this right now. Yeah, my cousin, right, tell them. Yeah, you say it. All right. They're there and it's just bouncing off of them. It is not landing or taking any root of any kind, and that's happening for a variety of reasons. This is what sin does. All right. This is what sin does. As we allow sin to creep in, and we don't deal with it, we become hardened. As we're commanded to do, "...exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Sin unchecked, our unwillingness to deal with these things and confess them to God, will now harden the heart that hears the word, and soon, rather than even receiving the word, it's just bouncing off, and Satan is having a field day devouring it.

We go on. In 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 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." ...those that have some soil, something there, but it doesn't go deep. It's shallow. It's this initial and emotional response to the word of God. ...those that would be the enthusiast that would see and hear Jesus preach, and they would think this is exactly what I need. This is perfect. I've been down and out on my luck and life is just been terrible, but now in steps Jesus. This is perfect for my life. And so it looks like there's some response of some sort there. There's some reception of what's being taught. However, all it takes is a little bit of time. All it takes as we saw in the pictures... the heat to increase, a little bit of tribulation, some difficulty, some trial to come,

and then they wither away. They fall back. They have no strong, firm, deep root in what has been taught. They haven't received it in its fullness. They've only received it with its emotional value and excitement. This is what I learned as I grew up - this is why there are people that are here for a while, and then they leave. This is what happens. They went out from us, but they were not of us. That's the issue. They were really not of us in the first place; for if they had been of us, they would've continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they are all not of us. This is the issue with those that have some soil, but it's shallow, has no depth. They initially respond, but all it takes is a little bit of time. A little bit of time and the truth comes out of who they really are and how they really respond to Jesus and His word.

As we move on in verse 18; "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." Notice the different explanation for what these weeds are, these thorns are, that come and choke it out; "...the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things..." as Jesus describes with His perfect perception into peoples' hearts. And knowing what they were thinking and what they're desiring, He could pinpoint the very things that were causing the setbacks in their own life from following Him. As the New Testament would go on to teach, the love of money is the root... a root of all kinds of evil, and we're to beware of that. And as even 1 John would teach us in general about the world, this is the trick with living in this world that you need to be aware of and mindful of; "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You can't have both. "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." That's the difference.

James 4:4 puts it even more blunt; "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." You cannot serve both God and money. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. You can't have God and this other desire and lust of the flesh right up there, and at times, you serve that, then it's back to God, and you dip into both. It's

not possible, because trying to do that is tantamount to this plant, this kernel of grain, that grows up and doesn't bear any fruit. No fruit comes at all, and all it takes is these other new passing desires and flashes-in-the-pan that come up and get your attention, and then you're off. You, at once, were enticed by and the thought of, following Jesus and thought that was a good thing, and His word, until you found something else. And this is what people still do today. They find that other thing, and they grow out of Jesus. They're kind of done with Jesus. Jesus was for a time, and they found something better, something better to move on to.

Finally, we get to the hopeful response in verse 20; "But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." I really... I love the way Luke puts it in his account as well. Luke states it, "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." That's perfect. They're not like the path where it just bounces off them; they grab ahold of the word of God, and they cling to it. They "...hold it fast..." all right, with a "...good heart..." "...an honest and good heart..." not this shallow emotional commitment, but the depth that it requires. And they're willing to "...bear fruit with patience." They're willing to endure and continue, despite whatever else the world might throw at them and the other pleasures that might be put before them, they hang on and hold fast to the word of God. And over time, given the time, what do you have? You have the result of fruit, "...bear[ing] fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." This is a beautiful picture.

I'd like to caution you from thinking that somehow this only applies to the presentation of the gospel. Somehow, you think, yeah, yeah, I get it. There's the good news about Jesus, and I've accepted that good news. I'm a Christian. I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm the good soil. Next? What's next for you to tell me about? What's next for God to speak about? I have this down. You do realize that as Jesus says, the sower sows the word? ...that the word is something that you are inundated with at this church? We are constantly teaching from God's word Sunday after Sunday. You are in fellowship with each other where, hopefully, you're encouraging and exhorting each other with the word of God. You're in growth groups where we continue to have this teaching, and we pray for one another using the word. I mean, this is something you can't get away from if you're around us. Right? We are just

loving to have God's word dwelling in us richly as He calls us to. That's what we're doing.

But just because you're under the word does not mean that God's word is actually in you. That's a huge thing that you need to beware of. You, still, this very day, tomorrow, if you read your Bible on your own, you have to encounter this very truth that Jesus is teaching. How will you respond? Will you embrace and hold fast to the truths as you interact with them regularly? Or, will you pick and choose and find the truths that seem to fit you in your time? ...and think, yeah, this one makes sense for now. But then, once a challenge comes, maybe a little trial, a little tribulation, a difficulty, a loss of some sort, or maybe something that looks pretty good, something that's out there in the distance, and you think, wow, now that would be great. I already know what that would be like; everyone else is talking about how great that is. And you're tempted to give up on the promise of God that you've been exposed to, and it becomes revealed - you weren't ever deeply rooted in the good soil in the first place. Beware! Being exposed to God's word, a large amount and on a regular basis, is a wonderful thing, and it's what we need. But at the same time, you must take care how you respond. I encourage you - take inventory of your own heart, your own life in this past week. How will you respond? How do you respond to the truth that is getting presented to you?