



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 4:1-20

Mark

“The Parable of the Sower”

TRANSCRIPT

Our text is Mark chapter 4 and we will look at verses 1 through 20. Mark 4: “And he began to teach again by the seashore. And such a very great multitude gathered before him that he got into a boat in the sea and sat down and all the multitude were by the seashore on the land. And he was teaching them many things in parables and was saying to them in his teaching, “Listen to this. Behold, the sower when about to sow and it came about that as he was sowing some seed fell beside the road and some birds came and ate it up. Another seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. After the sun had risen, it was scorched and because it had to root it withered away. And other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no crop. And other seeds fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they were yielding a crop and were producing 30, 60 and 100-fold.” And he was saying he who has ears to hear, let him hear and as soon as he was alone, his followers along with the 12 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 those who are outside get everything in parables in order that while seeing they may see and not perceive and while hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they return again and be forgiven.

“And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?” The sower sows the word and these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown. And when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. And in a similar way, these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy and they, having no firm root in themselves but are only temporary, then when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom the seed was sown among the thorns. These are the ones who have heard the word and the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good ground and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit 30, 60 and 100-fold.” May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of studying it together.

We are sometimes ask at Believer’s Chapel, about our mission program and we are quick to tell them we have a vast take ministry that stretches not only throughout this country but all over the world for that matter. But we also have men who go out from here to various places in the world. We have one who’s left recently, Saeed Hamid-Khani. He’s returned to his homeland and he’ll be there for some time. Serban Constantinescu will go back to his homeland in Romania and he will

be preaching the gospel there and others from our church will be going. So we want to remember them in our prayers this morning and throughout the weeks to come, but I think as we'll see from our study this morning, that we are all missionaries and we all have our work to do in this present age and this city and throughout the country that we live in. so we should also be praying for ourselves. Let's do that now. Let's bow in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to bless our time of study together. Let's pray.

Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the opportunity that You have given us again to come together and to study the scriptures. And we see this as Your hand of providence which has brought us together to this place at this time to study this passage and consider what your son has instructed in this parable. Bless it to our understanding. Help us to see your grace. Help us to see the great blessing that we have received from You due to that grace. And as we consider that at this moment, we give thanks and praise because we are what we are. We are Your people because we are what we are – Your people with an eternal inheritance, a people under your sovereign control, the providential guidance of Your hand and the wise guidance of Your spirit. We are that by Your grace because You sent Your son into the world to die for people who are undeserving, but people upon whom You've sent your love. We thank You for that and we thank You with humility because we recognize that we do not have these privileges and these great blessings because of anything within us, but it is traceable to Your grace. And we pray, Father, for that grace that it might be extended to us at this time. We pray for Your material care because we recognize that all that we have in a material way comes from You. It is in You that we live and move and have our being. Every moment is a moment from You and so we pray that You would bless those who have needs in a material way. That you would provide for them.

That You would provide for those who are unemployed that they might be able to provide for their families. Provide for those who are sick and in great need. We pray that You'd extend mercy to them and encouragement to their families. We pray for us spiritually. We have many needs, Lord. We are always in need to be sanctified by the spirit and we praise You and thank You that You never leave us and you're always performing at work, that You're always working upon us, that You are faithful to us. Help us by Your grace to be faithful to You in all that we do to undertake our responsibilities, to be lights in this world, to be sowers of the gospel in this world and to be very productive. We pray that for this assembly. We pray that you would put your hand upon many in this place and raise them up to serve You. We thank you for those that do and we pray Your blessings upon them. We thank You for the Sunday school teachers and the secretaries and those who care for the maintenance of this building and those who spend many hours of the week with friends seeking to give counsel and teaching and the various ways in which people serve you, many of whom go unnoticed but who carry on a great service. You see them. You know them, Father. We pray that you give them encouragement and blessing and pray that they would see the fruit of their labors and that we, as an assembly, would see fruit of our labors; that we might be an effective witness in this community.

We pray for those who are going beyond this city, this state, this land. We pray that You bless them. We pray for Saeed, that You give him protection and that You would give good effect to the work that he does there for others who are going abroad. Bless them. Bless the businessmen in this assembly as they travel throughout the week, that they would be a good testimony. Protect them from the temptations that are there. Bless our land, Father. We come this week to the day of decision and we pray that You give wisdom to the voters and by your providence we pray that You would raise up for us wise leaders, that this land would be governed by wisdom. We commit that to You and we trust You in this and we do so with confidence knowing that the outcome will be the outcome of Your will ultimately. We do thank You and we praise You that all of the affairs of life

ultimately rest with you, not with us. The destinies of nations are the destinies You have charted for them and we know they are all moving toward the great day of the Lord and the day of Your kingdom. Help us to rest confident in that and serve you faithfully. We pray these things in our savior's name. Amen.

Have you ever presented the gospel to someone only to get a blank stare in return or an angry response and a quick change of subject? Or perhaps you've spent a number of hours with a former roommate in college arguing over the reasonableness of the scriptures and the need of a savior and the solution for the human condition in the person and the work of Christ without any apparent success and later wondered to yourself why people can't see what is so plain to you. Why is it that the beauty of Christ and the wisdom of the cross is clear to you, but to many others – people of high intellect and good education – to them it's foolishness. Why is it that the gospel seems to fall on so many deaf ears? Perhaps those are questions you've asked yourself. Perhaps you've even become somewhat discouraged over what you've seen. Well if so, these questions that perhaps you've puzzled over, the Lord gives answer to in Mark 4:1-20. He does so by means of a parable in which he compares different types of soil with the hearts of different types of men. And by way of comparison explains the reception and the rejection of the gospel. Most of chapter four is composed of parables. It's one of the few sections in Mark's gospel devoted to our Lord's teaching and it contains four parables in which he illustrates certain aspects of the Kingdom of God.

That's what a parable is. It's an illustration in which comparison is made. The word comes from the Greek meaning putting or casting beside, placing one thing next to another in order to make a comparison between them. So a parable is an illustration in which teaching is done by way of analogy or by comparison. It's sometimes defined, parables are, as being earthly stories with heavenly meanings. The world is filled with such stories, filled with such illustrations of divine truth, and the perceptive mind is able to see those illustrations, see those stories, and make use of them. The Lord was a master in the use of these illustrations and these parables and he often taught in them. He has used them previously, up to this point, in his ministry, but chapter 4 is different. Previously, the Lord used parables to illustrate his doctrine. Now he teaches his doctrine in parables. He teaches exclusively in parables. To understand the reason for that, it's necessary to remember the context. The Lord has had an exchange with the scribes and the Pharisees, if you'll remember, in which they accused him of being in league with the devil. How could they explain the miracles that he'd performed, the casting out of demons, the healing of various individuals, and they'd come to the conclusion that the way to explain that is to explain that he's possessed of the devil and that the devil energizes his work. He casts out demons by Beelzebub, they said.

By saying that and persisting in saying that – because it was something that they were continually saying – they were committing the unpardonable sin. In spite of the clear and authoritative teaching that the Lord had given, in spite of the many miracles that he had performed and the many blessings that he had brought upon people, the leaders had rejected him. And rejection by the nation as a whole was imminent. The Lord knew the condition of the heart of those who were following him. He knew their motivations. He knew the condition. And so following this exchange between the scribes and the Pharisees, the same day, according to Matthew, the Lord left the house where this exchange had taken place, went down by the seashore and taught in parables. So chapter 4 is something of a dividing point in the gospel. Light had been given. It had been rejected. And when truth has been rejected, further truth can't be given. We see that principal set forth later on in this chapter, in verse 25. There the Lord says, "For whoever has to him shall more be given." That is, those who receive the truth and believe it, they will grow in that truth and ultimately they will receive far more in the world to come and whoever does not have, that is those

who have rejected the truth, who have not believed in what our Lord has said, he says even what he has shall be taken from him.

So this is the condition of the nation. Many have rejected the truth that they have received and so in the face of unbelief, the Lord avails his teaching in parables. So parables are not only a means of revealing truth, they’re also a way of concealing it. And what they were concealing was, according to verse 11, the mystery or, as Matthew and Luke put it, the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. That word mystery is very important because in the New Testament, a mystery refers not to things that are mysterious or not to special secrets that are given to a select few that are sort of in the club, a mystery refers to truth that has previously been hidden but it now revealed. Something that we wouldn’t find in the Old Testament, something that has not been revealed or had not been revealed to the prophets; it’s truth that has been revealed for the first time. And so in chapter 4, the Lord gives new truth regarding the Kingdom and in this case it’s not so much truth about the nature of the Kingdom that was revealed in the prophets and knew the kind of Kingdom that was coming. Not so much truth about the nature of the Kingdom as it is truth about the manner of its establishment and the time of its manifestation.

The first parable, “The Parable of the Sower,” or “The Parable of the Soils” as it is sometimes called, is very important to this. In fact, verse 13 describes it really as the key to all the others. If they don’t understand this parable, they won’t understand the other parables that he has told. It’s important not only because it explains why some receive the gospel and why others reject it, but also because it states that the work of sowing the seed of God’s word, the work of proclaiming the gospel, is the mission of God’s people in this age and that mission is preparation for the Kingdom of God to come. Our great work in this day and age as set forth in this parable is to preach the word in season and out of season. So in this parable, the Lord reveals that before the Kingdom is gloriously revealed on the Earth there will be a period of labor in which citizens of the Kingdom, sons of the Kingdom are called out of the world. Their citizenship is transferred from this world to Heaven. This is something new. The disciples were not expecting that. They were expecting the manifestation of that Kingdom very soon – within weeks, within months of this time. They didn’t realize that there would be a period of time between their day and the manifestation of the Kingdom and its glory.

But here the Lord reveals an age of some length in which men and women will labor like farmers sowing the seed of the gospel and gathering citizens of the Kingdom to come. To borrow from the apostle Paul in Colossians 1:13, “Delivering people from the domain of darkness and transferring them into the Kingdom of God’s beloved son.” So having defended himself against the accusations of being a devil, the Lord leaves the house and the Pharisees and he goes down by the seashore where we read a very great multitude gathered for him. They’re sitting in a boat out on the water. He was teaching them many things in parables. His first parable is about a farmer and the four types of soil in his field. It’s an important parable we we’ve noted. It’s the key to the others. And the importance of it is also stressed in the very beginning because he begins, in verse 3, with the word listen. “Behold, the sower went out to sow and it came about that as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road.” The birds came and ate it up. The scene must have been very familiar in an agricultural society like Israel. Their fields sometimes had roads going through them. So when the sower indiscriminately would throw out the seed, some of it would fall on unproductive soil, such as the hard ground of a path, and the hard ground that was beside that path. There the birds would eat the seed because it would not be able to put down roots into the hard ground.

If you’ve been up here after a wedding, you’ve seen some of the seed that’s been thrown rather than rice. That seed, of course, can’t penetrate into the blacktop out there and soon the birds come and they begin to feed on it. Well, that was the picture that we have here. The seed is cast

indiscriminately, must of it falls on hard ground that's beaten down on a pathway and it doesn't penetrate. It doesn't put forth roots. And so the birds quickly come and they take it away. Other seed falls on shallow ground, we read in verses 5 and 6, which covers a layer of rock beneath. That's very common in Israel, particularly in the area of Jerusalem and those areas. If you've been there, you've noticed the white rock that juts out from the ground all over that area. But it's true of any particular farm. There is ground that has rock beneath it and just a very thin layer of soil, and because the soil is thin it can't hold the rainwater, so the seed can't take root – at least it can't put forth deep roots – and when it sprouts up, the sun later comes out and the heat of that sun causes this plant to wither because it does not have sufficient root.

Other seed falls among the thorns which are more vigorous than the wheat and so they outgrow it and they choke out the good grain. But amid the bad soil and the obstacles in the soil, there is much good soil. It says in verse 8, the seed that fell on the good soil grew up and increased and were yielding a crop and were producing 30, 60 and 100-fold and he was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Well many of the disciples must have thought that they did not have ears to hear because when the Lord had finished teaching and the crowds were dismissed and they were alone with him, they were asking him why he was teaching in parables and what these parables meant. And the Lord answers them in verse 11. He says to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to those who are outside, get everything in parables." In other words, there is revealed in this parable a truth previously unknown and it was for them. It was for those who were following him, but not for others. For those who would not believe, who were persistent in their unbelief, he hid the truth in parables in a punitive act, in an act of punishment as he confirms, in verse 12, by quoting Isaiah 6.

If you're familiar with Isaiah 6, you'll remember that that is the passage in which Isaiah receives his commission from the Lord and it is a strange commission because there he is sent into Israel to harden hearts, to make fat the heart of the people. It is a mission of judgment because of unbelief. The nation had been in a protracted period of rebellion and so judgment had come and the judgment was that the truth would be withheld from them. So here we read that he speaks parables in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return again and be forgiven. That's a startling statement. When we think of our Lord, we think of his invitation to the weary and the heavy-laden. To come to him and to receive rest or receive forgiveness, and yet we read here that he states his purpose in the parables as being that of withholding perception from these individuals and in so doing, withholding forgiveness. And yet it's that strong. I think attempts to weaken the force of that fail. This is the force of that statement, those words or that Greek word 'in order that.' It expresses purpose.

We have to understand this purpose of concealment in light of the context. Those who are outside refers principally to the Pharisees who have rejected him. Like the men of Isaiah's day, these men had rejected much light as we've noticed, going so far as accusing our Lord of being possessed of Satan. They had turned from the truth and now judgment has come. They are being cut off from the truth, the truth that they've rejected. As Calvin observes, they must endure the blame of their own blindness and hardness. This was a consequence that they had brought upon themselves. They had resisted the truth and there comes a point when the truth is shut off, the light is cut off. And I think we have in that a warning for us – a warning for our day – because we're really no different, in essence, from the people that day. We're all descended from the same person. We're all descendants of Adam. We're made of the same stuff and we're subject to the same failures and we are people of this assembly, a people of this nation that have received great light and yet when people reject the truth judgment follows. And when people take the word of God lightly, in difference toward the word of God will follow. And where there is indifference, eventually there

will be rejection that will ultimately follow, and perhaps we see something of that in the spirit of our times in which we're living.

The warning that we have here is to take seriously the word of God and do not treat it lightly. When that happens there is that warning of judgment that must be considered. And we have that here and yet in this concealment of the truth we also see the grace of God because understanding brings sin when it is not accepted. The Lord knew that these people were not going to respond to what he had to say. They had hardened themselves against his teaching, and so as one commentator puts it about hiding the truth in parables, they were saved from the guilt of rejecting that truth because they weren't allowed to recognize it. So there is a sense of grace here as well as the warning that is given. But the disciples, in contrast to the others – to those outside – they were to receive understanding. That, too, is grace. The Lord says in verse 11, "To you has been given the mystery." It was to be given. It was to be graciously disclosed to those who were with him – those who were with him then, those who are with him now. Otherwise, all remains a secret; all remains a riddle. If the Lord does not give us understanding, then we will not understand his truth. We are continually dependent upon him, and for us to advance in the faith we must be receptive to what he teaches through the word and through that ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The word of God, the understanding of it, is always something that is given and so we see here the grace that is given to these men. To you it has been given. "To you has been given the mystery." And so he explains the parable. He unveils the mystery of it in verses 14 through 20, and he begins in verse 14 by stating that the sower sows the word. So the seed represents the word of God preached by our Lord, but secondarily preached by Christians throughout the ages – preached by these disciples, preached by those who have succeeded them. By extension, you are the sower whenever you go to work and give the gospel, whenever you visit family or friends and talk about Christ, you are sowing the seed that is spoken of here. And the types of soil represent four types of people or four hearers, or more specifically, their hearts. William Hendrickson, in his commentary of the gospel of Mark, classifies these as the unresponsive heart, the impulsive heart, the preoccupied heart, and the well-prepared heart. Each one illustrates the principal that the condition of a man's heart determines the way he or she will receive the word just as the condition of the soil determines how it will receive the seed.

The first kind, those beside the road, represented by the hard ground, are the people upon whom the gospel makes no impression. They hear it but they give no heed to it. Perhaps it's because they're hostile toward Christians or hostile toward the gospel like the scribes and the Pharisees were or because they don't want to be inconvenienced by the gospel. Felix was like that. He was the Roman governor in the city of Caesarea at the time when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. Paul, as you know, was taken to Caesarea and there he was placed in imprisonment. He spent time, Felix did, talking with Paul during that imprisonment and Luke writes in Acts 24 that after hearing Paul speak one time about righteousness, self control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and he said, "Go away for the present and when I find time I will summon you." He never really found the time to do that. He never really found the time to talk about the Gospel. He didn't want to. They had further talks, nothing of real substance. As it turns out, Felix was primarily interested in some financial gain from the apostle Paul, a bribe of some kind. Satan had snatched the word from his heart.

Whatever the reason in such people, they are insensitive. They are hard of heart and before the word makes a deep impression on them, Satan dulls them to it so they don't believe. Like those birds that snatched the seed from the ground, he snatches it from their heart. Now Satan's influence doesn't relieve them of any responsibility on their part. It was their indifference, their hostility, their attitude that gives Satan the opening to come in and snatch it away. But there is this hardness

of heart that characterizes a number of people, perhaps many people. It makes no impression upon them.

The second type illustrated in the shallow, rocky soil – it doesn’t do much better – they represent the impulsive heart. When they hear the word they immediately receive it with joy. They are enthusiastic. This is sometimes the case at evangelistic meetings. There is the excitement of a moment, there is the influence of the crowds, there is the desire for a better life, a problem-free life, and so they come forward. They sign a card or they are baptized, but emotions and faith aren’t the same thing. Emotions can run high for just so long. These people, they have no depth. They are shallow and the word takes no firm root, our Lord says. As he says in verse 17, its effect is only temporary. Then when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, because of their faith, they’re made to take a stand for it and that’s too difficult and he says immediately they fall away. The Lord witnessed this in his own ministry. Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John is a very dramatic picture of that. The crowds that we see at this point in his ministry, the large crowds, the excited crowds, they vanish after his difficult teaching in John 6 about bread out of heaven and eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

They were materialistic in their thinking and they could not see the spirituality of those words. They could not see what he was saying. The result was large crowds became disaffected. They became disappointed, disillusioned. They did not like what they heard and so many of those who called themselves disciples turned away from him. Some turned away because of hard doctrine. Others turned away because of hard circumstances, like Pliable in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. We refer to that frequently because it’s an excellent allegory on the Christian life and if you’ve never read it, I commend it to your reading. Bunyan pictures so many different situations that the Christian experiences and pictures beautifully the course of the Christian life. And if you remember, from that story, Pliable joins Christian at the very beginning of his pilgrimage to the Celestial City and along the way there’s excited conversation. Pliable is very much interested in what they’re going to find and what they’re going to have and he’s got all kinds of questions. It’s a very energetic and enthusiastic exchange between them until the two of them fell into a big mud hole – the Slough of Despond.

In the midst of the muck and the mire Pliable said, “Is this the happiness you have told me of all this while?” Pulling himself out very angrily, he abandoned the journey and he returned to the City of Destruction. That’s a picture of these kinds of men who are very shallow, men of rocky soil. You can see them in that allegory, but we see them throughout the scriptures. John writes of them in 1 John 2:19 that they went out from us, John writes. That they were not really of us; they had no firm root. That was evidenced, perhaps in that situation, by hard doctrine that they could not come to terms with and accept. And so to shake them out of a congregation, God will bring the heat of difficulties or hard teaching, and in so doing He will separate the true from the false.

The third kind of person, or heart, is the preoccupied heart, or we could say the worldly-minded hearer. These are those who, like the seed, which is choked off by the thorns, the various circumstances of life have that affect upon them, they are those who had potential for spiritual advance. They come to church. They’re involved. They have an interest in spiritual things. Perhaps they’re involved in Bible studies, prayer groups. But there are other forces at work in their heart as well and just as the ground is overrun by thorns, so their hearts are overrun with things of this world. The thorns of the cares and the worries of the world, such as a concern for advancement and business, the desire for riches or the pursuit of pleasures, looking for fulfillment in life in the things of this world and the things of this age – and those can be deadly thorns. The thorns grow up in their hearts and chose off their spiritual vitality. They become so preoccupied with the cares and the interests of this world that they have little time for reflection upon the word of God and spiritual

things. They become preoccupied with those other things and those other interests and pretty soon all of the spiritual interests that they had is choked out and they are carried off by various desires. It may be the desires for wrong things, desires of lust, but it need not be that. It could be an improper desire for that which in itself is indifferent – things that are fine, things that are good in and of themselves – a love of sports, a love of music, various things such as that.

The things have become a deadly diversion and as a result, smother spiritual desires. Thorns and other undesirable vegetation grow very easily, as I'm sure you well know if you've done much yardwork. The other day I cut down a wild grapevine that had been growing along the side of the house on a fence and it was intruding into cultivated vegetation – not that I had planted, but that had been planted by the neighbor. So it was not only all over our side of the fence but their side of the fence. Now I hadn't planted it. I hadn't cultivated it. It didn't need my help. Its seed found its way into our yard and it was vigorous, it was aggressive, and as a result of not dealing with it at an early stage, I had to spend a few hours of hard labor getting rid of it. Well, the thorns of worldliness and the thorns of dream-world delusions, as one writer puts it – I think that's a very good expression because so many of these kind of thoughts that intrude in our life and choke off spiritual vitality are of a dream-world nature, fantasies that we take hold of that perhaps have been placed in our thinking by the advertising that we see around us or whatever – but we have unrealistic aspirations and we begin to center on those things and those kinds of things can grow very easily in the heart of an individual if not taken care of early.

Ignore them and soon they take over. They will gradually encroach on the spiritual life and they'll choke it out. And that happens with many people who receive the gospel. They hear it, they seem to embrace it for a time, but other things intrude in their heart and their mind and their thinking and it's choked out and they have no firm root and they turn away. This might seem a little discouraging at this point – three types of men, all who reject the gospel. It's enough to breed a sense of defeatism in the ministry. But fortunately God's word never returns empty and there's a fourth kind of heart which is like the good ground that receives the seed. This is the responsive heart we read of in verse 20: "And those who are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good ground, and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit 30, 60 and 100-fold." They are ready for the gospel and when they hear it, they believe it and bear fruit. It's not that life is easier for them. That's not why they progress. That's not why they bear fruit. Really, in a sense, it's even harder. They face the same kinds of struggles. They have the same worries, concerns that the world gives us as we consider our situation financially or we consider our health or whatever it might be. The Christian faith has the same deceitfulness of riches and has to deal with that. They have to deal with affliction, sickness in one's own person or one's own family, financial setbacks, disappointments in business, persecution for the faith. The list goes on of difficulties that the Christian has to deal with.

You remember, Christian fell in the Slough of Despond along with Pliable, but when Christian pulled himself out he didn't go back. He went forward. He desired what lay ahead more than what was behind him. Why was that? Why did Paul press on through Asia after suffering stonings and beatings and rejection – many different afflictions that he experienced? Why did he press on? He pressed on because his heart was so inclined and he followed that direction. He acted according to the heart that he had and people with hearts, like the good earth, bear fruit. This is not only the characteristic mark of a Christian, but also the assurance that he or she is a Christian. A true Christian will bear fruit. Not all the same, but we will all bear fruit to varying degrees as the Lord said in Matthew 7, "You will know them by their fruits." And all of these examples emphasize the importance of a right response to the hearing of the word of God and to bearing fruit. And while the Lord is presenting a true or realistic picture of the ministry that the people of God are

to be engaged in and have been engaged in for centuries now – while it is a realistic picture of that and one that might seem a bit discouraging, there is sounded here also the note of victory. There is no grounds for a sense of defeat in the work of the gospel or the work of the church because one of the first three in the rejection, they are overshadowed by the greater fruitfulness of the good ground – the regenerated heart.

This parable is a realistic, but an encouraging picture of the present age of gospel- selling because in spite of our many failures that we will have, there will be enough success to make our toil abundantly worthwhile. I think we have a good illustration of that in our Lord's own ministry because he spoke to two young men at different times, one before the cross and one after the cross. The first man was a man of great promise. He was rich. He was young. He was a ruler of the Jews and he approached the Lord with the desire to inherit eternal life. What better prospect could their be than that? A man who has obviously thought about much and he comes to the Lord and he wants to know what he can do to inherit eternal life. So the Lord spoke to him and in speaking to he sowed seed upon his heart. But when the Lord did that, this young man turned away disappointed, because as Luke writes he was extremely rich. In him, the word was choked off by the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and what a loss that must have seemed, particularly, I'm sure, to those disciples. They saw this man with all of this great potential. They saw in him a man who could really be a benefit and a service to the Lord, but he hears the truth and he turns away.

Later, the Lord spoke to another man – a young rabbi zealous for the traditions of the Pharisees. His name was Saul. He seemed an unlikely candidate. He didn't approach the Lord, in fact he was persecuting the Lord, trying to destroy His church. That's when Christ approached him. When our Lord stopped him on the road to Damascus with the letters in hand of names of people to persecute and the Lord sowed seed into his heart and it did take root. The result was he produced fruit 100-fold. Whatever was lost in the young prince was more than gained in the young rabbi. We have every reason for confidence and encouragement in this age of labor. In spite of the setbacks, it promises many successes because ultimately it's God's field in which we are working and it's God's work. It's people who are responsible to sow the gospel. Men and women are responsible to receive the gospel. They are responsible to produce fruit in perseverance of God's sovereign grace that produces the good and lasting effect of the gospel. We're not called upon to make the ground good. We're not called upon to regenerate hearts, that's God's work. But we are called upon to show the seed and to preach the gospel.

And we can be assured that while it will meet with resistance, it always takes root where God wants it to and it prevails. So in this first parable, which is the key to the other parables that we'll study in this chapter, the Lord was informing the disciples of the nature of their mission as his disciples. They were to preach the word. They were to show the seed of the gospel in the age preceding the coming of the Kingdom. That mission hasn't been changed. The mission that was given to them is the mission that you and I carry on to this day and will be carried on after us until the Lord comes. It's not easy. Being a farmer, I'm sure, is not easy work. It's full of toil, full of labor and the farmer meets with much resistance with soil that is not good soil. But that's to be expected from the farmer and from the man and the woman who seek to do the Lord's service. But the gospel will always find its home in the heart which has been prepared for it, and it will not be choked out. It will bear great fruit.

So as we conclude, I ask you the question has your heart been prepared? Are you good ground? Well if you are, then you're to be bearing fruit. And part of that fruit-bearing is witnessing to the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's living in conformity with the word of God. So we are to strive to produce good fruit for God. But if you're not sure, if you don't know

what kind of ground you are, if you've got received the gospel, then the good news of Jesus Christ is for you the seed that is sown upon your heart at this moment, is the message that you are a sinner. You are in need of a savior and the condition of mankind, the human condition, finds its answer and its solution in the work of Jesus Christ. If you've not believed in him, then I urge you – believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Enter into salvation. Obtain the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. May God help you to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth that we see set before us in this parable. It reminds us of our responsibilities and gives us a clear picture of the difficulties that we will face, that there will be rejection. And it may puzzle us at times why men would become angry and resistant, or words of forgiveness, words of life, and let them do. And while that's puzzling, we also realize that these are supernatural matters that You clear up in Your way. So we think about that and realize that those who receive the truth receive it because of Your grace. We are reminded that we are the objects of that grace, that we are here. We believe these things not because our minds are so clever, but because You are so gracious as to open our hearts to that proof, to enable us to receive it. So Lord, we pray that you would continue to enable us; enable us to be good stewards of the truth, to be sowers of the seed, to be diligent in that service that we might serve you well, serve you faithfully. These things we pray in the name of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.