

## **A Diagnosis of the Soils, Part 2**

Scripture: Mark 4:1–20

Code: 41-19

We come now to the Word of God, and what a privilege it is. And we're looking at the fourth chapter of Mark again, and the parable of the soils that takes up the first 20 verses of this fourth chapter. So, open your Bible to Mark chapter 4. This is message number three and will be the last message as we look at the parable of the soils.

There is so much actually in the truth of this parable that I suppose one could do 10, 12, or even 20 messages just explaining the nuances of this parable. So, by no means are we exhausting it in three messages. It is a familiar story to all students of the New Testament. One of the most familiar of all of Jesus' parables. Let's familiarize ourselves again with it by starting at verse 1.

"He began to teach again by the sea." That's the Sea of Galilee. "And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.

"And He was teaching them many things in parables" – that's analogies, stories, illustrations – "and was saying to them, in His teaching, 'Listen to this!'" – and here comes the this parable – "'Behold, the sower went out to sow. As he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depths of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched. And because it had no root, it withered away.

"Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. Other seeds fell into the good soil. And as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and hundredfold.'

"And He was saying, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

This is a simple story that was very familiar in terms of its details to the crowd. Galilee was an agrarian society. Everybody understood this. They understood there was good soil and bad soil. There was good soil that was relatively better than other good soil. And here were various reasons why some soil was bad. They got it; it was a simple story. Everybody would understand the story.

But what about its spiritual meaning? Well, that was reserved, according to verse 9, for those who had ears to hear. And not everybody did. Everybody understood the story itself, but not everybody understood the meaning of the story. As in all the parables that Jesus told, they intend to convey very, very significant spiritual truth. This one has sweeping breadth, sweeping implications. It has great importance.

Though it is a simple story, its spiritual meaning is totally lost on the huge crowd. They don't

understand what the story means spiritually. Its meaning is totally obscure to them; they are oblivious to it. And that is by intention. They are unbelievers who follow Jesus strictly for the miracles. They are thrill seekers. They're happy to come along for what is clearly the greatest show on earth.

Jesus healing all kinds of diseases, raising dead people, casting out demons, presenting wondrous teaching. They are the thrill seekers, but they have no interest in the teaching of Jesus. They have no interest in the theology of Jesus. They're there for the miracles.

For them, Jesus speaking in parables becomes a judgment. Becomes a judgment. This is a turning point in His ministry in Galilee. From now on, He never says anything to the crowd except in parables, and He never explains the parables so that they hear but don't understand. They see the imagery but don't comprehend the meaning.

This is a judgment, and that's what it tells us in verses 10 through 12, "As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the Twelve, began asking Him about the parables." What do they mean? What are You trying to convey? What is the spiritual meaning? "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 so that'" – and He quotes an Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah 6:9 and 10 – "While seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand. Otherwise, they might return and be forgiven.'" Otherwise, they might return and be forgiven. The indication is it's too late for forgiveness. It's too late for comprehension. They have made up their minds.

If you go over to verse 33, later in the same chapter, it says, "With many such parables He was speaking the Word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He didn't speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples."

And so, I say this is a judgment. This is a judgment. This parable, by the way, and these same statements about who can understand and who won't understand, this problem and those same statements appear in Matthew chapter 13. The parable is repeated there and also appears in Luke chapter 8. So, three of the Gospels record the parable and record it as a judgment and make the distinction between the people who cannot hear because they have a fixed rejection of Christ, and those who will hear because they are believers in Him.

In Matthew 13:10, it's good to hear his account of it, "And the disciples come to Jesus, and they say, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?'"

"Jesus answered them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. Therefore I speak to them'" – verse 13 "in parables; because while seeing they do not see; while hearing they do not hear; nor do they understand."

Then He says, "This is to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah." Then verse 16, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear." And then over in verses 34 and 35, "All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He didn't speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet, 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.'" Words borrowed from Psalm 78, verse 2. Luke 8 says essentially the same thing.

So, in understanding the ministry of Jesus in telling parables to the crowd, you have to understand this is a divine judgment. This is a moment which freezes the rejection of Jesus. These people, who have rejected Christ, under the leadership of the apostate Pharisees, and scribes, and rabbis, and the rest, these people now are past the point where they can return and be forgiven. This is a tragic moment in the history of Israel.

So, in Galilee, where He is ministering, He never again speaks in any teaching without parables, and for the crowd, He never gives them an explanation. This is a divine judgment on their fixed unbelief.

On the other hand, however, our Lord gives a full explanation to His followers, the disciples, the apostles, the believers. They are preeminently privileged to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. They know the divine spiritual truth that the Lord has revealed to them in these wonderful stories. This is critical for them, because how are they going to be used to build the kingdom? How are they going to be used to proclaim the Gospel? How are they going to be used when the Church is established to build the Church and strengthen the Church and carry the message of the Church – the Gospel – to the ends of the earth if they don't understand these things? They must understand them.

One of the most beautiful portions of Scripture is John 15, where Jesus says, “You're my friends, and I call you my friends because I have revealed all things that My Father has disclosed to Me to you.” If you're a friend of the Lord Jesus Christ, what marks that friendship is full disclosure, complete revelation.

So, on the one hand, our Lord speaking in parables is a judgment to the nonbelievers who are fixed in their rejection. On the other hand, it is an invitation to revelation to His friends to whom the great mysteries of the kingdom will be disclosed in full so that they can have the privilege of knowing this truth and carry out the responsibility of proclaiming it.

Now, this particular problem is a foundation parable. It's just one of those parables that is absolutely critical to all believers' understanding of spiritual responsibility. The greatest spiritual responsibility we have is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Right?

That's why we're here in this world: to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, to proclaim the Gospel to every creature, to go to all the nations, to teach men about Christ, to come to Him in faith and repentance. We understand that. Every other mandate in Scripture works toward making us better able to fulfill the Great Commission; that's our ultimate goal.

Well, with that in mind, this parable of the soils is the most detailed instruction our Lord ever gave us on evangelism. We know the Great Commission. We're familiar with the Great Commission in Matthew. We're familiar with the one in Luke. We're familiar with the commission in Acts chapter 1, the Lord sending us to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Gospel.

But this goes beyond that and describes what we should expect. This tells us how to get ready for the responses that we're going to have as we carry out this commission. It is an absolutely critical parable to be understood. Sadly, it is not really understood by the Church, I'm afraid. If it is understood, it is ignored. If it isn't ignored, it is misinterpreted. And even, in some cases, where it is rightly interpreted, it is unapplied.

It is so definitive; as I said earlier, I would not be remiss to preach 20 sermons on this parable. But I wouldn't do it for fear I would wear you out with this one story. But it is so critical; it is so foundational it must not be ignored; it must not be misinterpreted. And I have heard many frightening misinterpretations of this. It must not be left unapplied. It has implications on how we do evangelism.

Failure to understand this, failure to interpret it correctly, failure to imply the truths in this parable has blighted the Church in a very serious way. I has allowed the Church to engage in all kinds of foolish and illegitimate strategies for evangelism that are very effective in producing false converts. Maybe never, in the history of the Church, has it been any more efficient than it is now in producing false converts. The Church is really good at making hypocrites and even apostates. False conversions abound in the Church. The Church is very adept at sowing its own tares in the midst of the field.

And if you go back to this story and get it right, and make application of its truth, the Church would become insulated against that kind of folly. The last thing you want to do, the last thing you ever want to do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is produce a false conversion by using some illegitimate means of manipulating people. So, I cannot stress how important the instruction of this parable is because it regulates our understanding of evangelism.

Back to the explanation. The explanation comes, then, starting in verse 13. "Jesus says, 'Do you understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?'"

The point is no, we don't understand. How can we understand? There's only one way. You have to explain them to us. So, He does in verse 14, "The sower sows the Word." Now, pretty obvious that He doesn't say anything about the sower. There is no adjective in front of "sower." He doesn't say the good sower, the clever sower, the adept sower, the savvy sower, the culturally acute sower. He doesn't say any of that. The sower. No description. This is every believer, folks. This is us. This is you. Every believer. Every believer. We proclaim the Gospel.

Nothing more needs to be said about the sower. It's not about the sower. It's not about the technique of the sower or the skill of the sower. Then it says, "sows the Word." Well, the Word is the seed. There's only one seed; that's the Gospel. Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ" - Romans 1 - "it is the power of God unto salvation to whoever believes, Jew or Greek." The power is in the Gospel. The Gospel is the seed. "Faith comes by hearing the Word concerning Christ" - Romans 10.

First Corinthians 15, "This is the Gospel, that Jesus died and rose again." We understand the Gospel. The Gospel is simply summarized as preaching Christ. The Great Commission, at the end of Luke, our Lord says, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you and all the things which are written about Me in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." So, He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

The Gospel starts in the law. The prophets and the holy writings, the Hagiographa of the Old Testament. You start with the story of Christ, all the way back with the law and with the prophets and the Psalms.

And then he said, "Thus it is written that Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third

day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to these things, now go do it. Preach Christ; preach Christ. Preach the whole history of Christ.” As this connection to the law and the prophets and the Psalms is the beginning of it all, and the fulfillment of it comes in the New Testament, preach Christ. That's the seed; it's the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who fulfills all Old Testament prophesy.

So, there's really no discussion here about the sower. Every believer is a sower. And there's no discussion about the seed. There's only one possible seed, and that's the story of Christ. That's the story of Christ. It is Christ. The Gospel is Christ. We preach Christ.

Paul says, “I'm determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified.” And they said about Paul his speech was contemptible. He lacked personal charm. He had nothing going for him. He was boring. He didn't get into any of the philosophical labyrinths that teased the minds of people. He had this consistent, simplistic message about a crucified Jew. That's all he preached. He didn't try to embellish it. It was the pure Gospel. As we all know, God used Him mightily. So, all of us are sowers, and we have the seed which is the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ.

Just a footnote, I was reading some of Spurgeon this week, and Spurgeon, he was very insightful even in his day. And he hated the invitation system that was popular in his day, where preachers would say, “Come forward to this altar,” or, “Come into this inquiry room and talk to this counselor, or talk to this person.” And he said, “Drive everyone to Christ. Drive everyone to Christ. Drive everyone to Christ. The only hope of salvation is found in Christ. Don't offer a counselor. Don't offer the byproducts of Christ. Offer Christ and Christ only. That's the Gospel: preach Christ.”

And so, the sower is every believer; the seed is the Gospel of Christ. So, the issue left for us is the soils. Right? This is the key. Soils represent the human heart. Matthew 13:19, the parallel passage refers to the seed going into the soil as the Gospel being sown in the heart. In the heart.

So, here we have hearts that we're going to face as we go to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. It's very, very important. First of all, in verse 15 is the roadside heart. “These are the ones who are beside the road where the seed is sown. When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the Word which has been sown in them.” This is the seed that falls on hard, beaten path. It's like concrete. No response at all.

They are described in 2 Corinthians 4, as we read earlier, as those whose minds are blinded by Satan. And Satan comes along and snatches the truth away before it can ever penetrate. This is not some oblique group of people. This is Israel. They are the hardhearted and stiff-necked just like their ancestors. Do you remember when Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth and preached one sermon, according to Luke 4, they tried to throw Him off a cliff and stone Him to death because He attacked their hardheartedness. He reminded them of the story in the past that God wanted to benefit a widow in Israel, but He couldn't find a righteous widow. So, He had to go and take care of a Gentile widow. And he wanted to heal a leper, but there were none worthy of being healed in Israel. So, he went and healed a border terrorist who pillaged and raped the Jews by the name of Naaman. They were so infuriated by being reminded of how stiff-necked and hardhearted they were that they wanted to kill Jesus. But that was the way they were. Hard, impenitent hearts.

So, He's describing the vast population of Israel: the Jews and their religious leaders who had rejected Him, for whom it was now too late. And He was speaking to them in stories without an explanation because He was hiding the truth from them. He was no longer going to cast pearls before swine.

Then you remember the rocky here, in verses 16 and 17. In a similar way, they're ones who on whom the seed was sown in the rocky places, who when they hear the Word immediately receive it with joy. They have no firm root in themselves but are only temporary. Then when affliction or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately they fall away. Get ready to expect temporary converts. Now, these are shallow responders, false converts who respond emotionally, without counting the cost, selfishly seeking personal satisfaction. This rises, frankly, out of self-love. Here are people who say, "Oh, yeah, I certainly want that. I want Jesus if He can take care of my life and forgive my sin and take me to heaven." But it's all very self-centered.

Jonathan Edwards was well aware of this when he wrote a treatise concerning religious affections in 1746. He said that fallen human nature is fertile ground for fleshly religiosity; impiously spiritual, but ultimately rooted in self-love. Folks, that dominates Evangelicalism today: a self-centered, self-love, fleshly religiosity. And impious spirituality that wants Jesus only because Jesus will deliver what this person emotionally needs. "High emotion experiences" – Edwards said – "effusive, gushy religious talk, even praising God and experiencing love for God in feelings can be self-centered and self-motivated."

And this is aided and abetted by the charismatic movement and all its tentacles that go everywhere, driving people emotionally to do things that have nothing to do with a real conversion.

In contrast to this, Jonathan Edwards talked of experiences of genuine salvation from the Holy Spirit as always being God-centered in character based on worship, having an appreciation for God's grandeur, divorced completely from any self-interest. Edwards pointed out that genuine conversion creates humility in the convert rather than pride. A spirit of meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, and mercy, and leaves the true believer hungering and thirsting for righteousness, instead of being satisfied with some kind of self-congratulation. This happens constantly where there is an emotion appeal or an appeal to people's will divorced from clear instruction regarding God's holy hatred of sin.

And who does the Lord seek? He seeks those who are of a broken and a contrite spirit, "who tremble at My Word" – who literally shudder under the authority of God. False conversions happen all the time. And the issue is not that people don't believe in Jesus Christ. That's not the part that creates false conversions. There are lots of falsely converted people who will tell you they believe Jesus lived; they believe Jesus died; they believe Jesus rose again. That is relatively easier to accept. What makes a false conversion is a failure at genuine repentance. At genuine process.

The quote-unquote Christian Church is full of all kinds of people who believe in Jesus Christ. "The devils believe" – James 2:19. Devil faith. But it's about the holy hatred of sin. It's about brokenness. It's about self-denial. It's about repentance. Spurgeon said, "There are people who come forward under an emotional appeal and then immediately go backward into their sin." He said, "They go into the inquiry room and get converted in five minutes and have nothing to do with godliness the rest of their lives."

So, He was dealing with the same kind of false conversions in his day. It's always this temptation in the Church to cheapen evangelism. And all it does is create superficiality. Look, false converts are going to happen anyway; aiding and abetting them is not acceptable. There's going to be rocky soil even under the correct presentation of the Gospel. Accommodating the Gospel to that is a gross sin. Mere emotion has nothing to do with evangelism. Look, they had seen that, too. They had seen the hardhearted populace. They also knew there had been disciples, as recorded in John 6:61 to 71, who followed for a while and then turned around and left. And Jesus gave a reverse invitation, "Will you also go? Why don't you all leave?" There's a new approach to an invitation. "Why don't you all just reject Me? All of you leave." And the ones that remained stood up and said, "We're not going to go anywhere; You're the one with eternal life. We know who You are: the Holy One of God."

So, they had seen the kind of people who when there's any kind of pressure or anything they don't believe, or anything they don't want to submit to, or any kind of persecution arising on the horizon, they disappear. And they're still with us. We don't aid and abet that by superficial emotional approaches in evangelism.

If someone's confession of Christ doesn't come from a deep, inner contrition, a broken and a contrite heart, a desire to be delivered from sin and come under the holy lordship of Jesus Christ and a life of self-denial, and sacrifice, and service, and even suffering, then you have no root. You have no root.

All right, that's the review. It gets us to the third kind of soil: thorny hearers. Verses 18 and 19, "And others are the ones on whom was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the Word, but 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." Thorns is the Greek word *akanthas*. That's actually the name of a thorny weed, very common in the Middle East, found frequently in cultivated soil. It's the same word used in Matthew 27:29 to refer to the crown of thorns placed on our Lord's head. It was made out of those same thorny weeds.

So, this is what occupies this heart. This is not a response of shallow emotion. This is not the response of self will, driven by self-love and self interest. This is a double-minded person whose repentance is not complete. This is the person who wants salvation, wants Christ, wants the kingdom, but wants the world and wants riches, and wants things. Pretty obvious this is the double-minded. He wants to serve God and money, and Jesus said, "You can't serve God and money." This is the rich young ruler – remember him in Matthew 19? He comes to Jesus, "What do I have to do to enter the kingdom?"

And He says, "Give up all your money because that's obviously the idol that rules your heart."

And he was not willing to do that. And he was also not willing to admit his own sinfulness. He wanted to hang onto the illusion of His own pride and His own riches. Literally, when it says, at the beginning of verse 19, "worries of the world," it is literally the distractions of the age - the distractions of the age, whatever they are, whatever occupies the age. This is the preoccupied heart. This is the heart that unfortunately loves the world and all the things that are in the world, according to 1 John 2, and therefore the love of God is not in Him. This is the heart that is the enemy of God, James 4:4, because it loves the world. This is the kind of heart that says, as Jesus points out in Luke chapter 9, "Yeah, I'm going to follow you Lord; I'm going to follow you. But I can't follow you now. You know? I

got to go home and wait till I get my inheritance from my father so I have some money.” “Well, I can't follow you. You know, I got to go home and say goodbye to everybody so I can raise some money to take with me.”

And Jesus says, “No, no, no. If you look back, you're not fit for the kingdom.”

These are those who are under the terrible temptation of the love of money becoming the root of all kinds of evil, 1 Timothy chapter 6. These are people consumed with the stuff of the world. Now, let me tell you something that you need to know that's very, very important. The Gospel calls for a break from the worries of the world or the distractions of the age, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things. This chokes out the true seed.

Is it not amazing to you that the prosperity gospel promises all these thing and Christ? Isn't that what it does? Doesn't the prosperity gospel say, “You can have all the world has to offer; you can have riches, and you can have all the other things you want and Jesus”? That is a lie right out of hell.

Let me tell you something about the Gospel. The Gospel does not promise to you what your unconverted, corrupted, fallen, wretched, sinful heart already wants. That's not what the Gospel offers you. The Gospel doesn't say it'll give you the world, it'll give you riches, it'll give you every other thing you desire, it'll give you a new house and a new car, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. That's a lie. That's saying that's fine to have weeds in the soil. Great. Christ and weeds can coexist. Thorns. This is a horrendous perversion.

When you come to Christ, you have to let go of the world and the love of riches and all the other things this world has to offer. You deny yourself. You deny all that you are, all you possess. “You hate your life, your family – your father, your sister, your mother perhaps - and you come and follow Me. Take up your cross. It may mean your death. Well, they were going to become familiar later on with somebody who never could make that break, follow Jesus. He said he believed in Jesus, preached, but he loved money, and he loved the world, and he loved all the things the world offered. And his name is Judas.

And then in 2 Timothy 4:10 there was Demas, the associate of the apostle Paul who abandoned Paul because of his love for this present age. And there are people like this. They want Christ, but they don't want to let go of anything. It isn't that you won't have anything. The Lord will give you whatever He chooses to give you in blessing you. The Lord will give you food to eat and a place to stay. You don't see God's people begging bread. He'll be your provision.

But the distinguishing mark of a true believer is not the love for those things and the desire for those things, but a consuming love for God that's born out in the testimony of Scripture in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be” – what? – “shall be added.” It's a matter of what your heart desires.

So, what is the chief evidence of conversion? Well, so far we've seen emotion. We've seen quick response. We've seen interest. Speed of response doesn't prove anything. Principal can respond because they're wills and emotions have been moved superficially. Joy isn't the evidence. There are many people who have an emotional experience, a temporary emotional satisfaction because they have some feeling induced. It's not a desire to be blessed. Oh, there are a lot of people who want to



be blessed. They want everything God can possibly give them. That's the devil's message that prosperity Gospel.

What is the distinguishing mark of true conversion? Well, it's not any of these things. Jonathan Edwards said it is this, "Humble, brokenhearted love for God." Humble, brokenhearted love for God.

Salvation is a regeneration. It is a real transformation turning a person from loving self to loving God, from pride to humility, from the reigning power of sin to the reigning power of righteousness.

Jonathan Edwards said, "The desires of the saints are humble desires, humble hope, humble brokenhearted joy that leaves the Christian more poor in spirit, more like a little child, more disposed to a universal lowliness of behavior." He said, "True grace reaches to the very bottom of the heart. Counterfeit grace never disposes sin of its claim on the soul, nor destroys its reigning power there."

That's the bottom line. "A holy life is the chief sign of grace." That's what Edwards said, "A holy life is the chief sign of grace, and the chief representation of a holy life is holy love." The chief sign is a holy life, and the chief manifestation of the sign is a holy love.

Edwards goes on, in *A Treatise on Religious Affections*, to say, "They that are converted are new men, new creatures; new not old within and without. They are sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body. Old things are passed away; all things are become new. They have new hearts, new eyes, new ears, new tongues, new hands, new feet. They walk in newness of life and continue to do so to the end of life."

And Edwards went on to say, "There are plenty of people who have false affections for self-interest, but the saved have true and deep affections. They are marked by a holy life, manifested in a holy love. They love God; they love Christ. They thus are pursuing the fulfillment of the greatest commandment, to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength."

Holy love, out of a holy life, directed at the Holy One, is the chief affection of the redeemed. How sad it is that contemporary evangelism lowers the standard so terribly. So terribly. You know, it all comes down to the sinner's pride.

Just to help you with that a little bit, the garden - Satan come to Eve, and what is the temptation? "God said, 'Don't eat.' I'm telling you you can eat, and if you eat, you will be as God. That's it. You'll be as God. And what will happen when you are like God? You will know good or evil. Not just in terms of information, but you'll be able to choose. You'll become the sovereign of your own life. You can get out from under this leadership that you're submitting yourself to in the garden to God. You can take over. You'll be as God, and you can determine for yourself good and evil. You can choose to do good. You can choose to do evil. You will be the master of your own life. You will do whatever you want."

That was Satan's temptation, and it was true to his nature. Because why did Satan get kicked out of heaven? Why did he fall? Because he wanted to be equal to God. He would no longer submit himself to the sovereign rule of God. He wanted sovereign rule himself.

And so, that is what launches the great fall and sin into the universe. All sinners, then, are the sons

of Satan. They manifest the same need to be sovereign over their lives. They will not submit themselves to God. They will choose their own good and their own evil. Now, that has a problem, folks, because once those two made that decision in the garden, they were thrown out of the garden, and a flaming sword was placed at the garden to keep them from ever going back, because nobody who lives like that can have any relationship to God. You can't get back into the fellowship of God if that's how you live. No possibility of reconciliation, because according to the words of James, God resists the proud.

Man's only hope is to humble himself because God gives grace to the humble. And so, God is looking for the humble, and broken, and contrite heart, who trembles at His great authority. Salvation only comes to the humbled, the sinner renouncing his own independence, his own will, his own wisdom, and totally submitting to the lordship of Christ.

And for sinners, such submission and such abandonment of self-will is far too much to ask. That's why there are people, Jesus said, who want to get into the kingdom, and they go at it, but they can't do it because they can't make the sacrifice of their own sovereignty. The only sinner who comes back to God and is reconciled is the one who stoops, who hates himself, confesses Jesus as Lord. Failure to do that dooms and damns the sinner to hell. Partial commitment is useless.

There are people who do respond that way – the right way. They're indicated in the final kind of soil. Verse 20, "And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the Word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." They're willing to humble themselves. They're willing to be broken and contrite in heart. They desire heaven. Yes, they desire salvation. Yes, they desire forgiveness. But underlying all of it is they desire to be delivered from the dominating power of sin. They want a life of righteousness and holiness. That's the good soil.

That's not natural. Good soil is not natural. Hard soil is natural. Just leave the ground and that's what it'll be. Rocky soil? That's natural, leaving it the way it is. Weedy soil? That's natural; that's the way it is. Something has to happen to this soil. To make it good soil, the stone has to be broken up, the hard ground has to be broken up, the weeds have to be taken out. Who can do that? Only God can do that. He alone can do that.

Deuteronomy 30, verse 6, "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, that you may live." Proverbs 20 and verse 9 says, "Who can say 'I have made my heart clean, pure from sin'?" Nobody can do that on his own. So, what does this good soil sinner do? He cries out to God, like David in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a" – what? – "clean heart, O God."

This is the sinner who comes to God in the invitation of Hebrews 10:22, "draws near with a pure heart, a cleansed conscience." This is the one of whom Jeremiah writes, "I'll make an everlasting covenant with them. I will not turn away from them from doing good. I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will never depart from Me."

So, James says, "Purify your hearts, you sinners." How do you do that? You can't do that on your own. You go to God, and you ask God to purify your heart.

You know, when you're – when you're talking about a true conversion, you're not talking about

somebody who wants and emotional fix in their life, or who wants a new direction, or who wants what their corrupted flesh wants. You're talking about someone who wants to be rescued from the power and the penalty of – what? – sin. Sin.

You say, “Well, wow, that's not going to happen naturally.”

No, I just read that from 2 Corinthians 4. Only God can do that. That's why we say you plead with Him. If our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

We don't preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord. And then we know that God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the one who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. If there's ever going to be any hope for these people, God has to turn on the lights. So, we cry out to God on behalf of the sinner, on behalf of the sinner's heart condition. The sinner who comes and says, “I want a clean heart; I want a pure heart; I want to repent of sin. I want to be delivered from sin. We'll have the benefit of the great new covenant promise, “I will give you a new heart. I'll take the heart out of your flesh and give you a heart – stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

This is the best part of the story, the last line. The results are really phenomenal. Verse 20, “And they that hear the Word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” Remember I told you last week, this is the shock factor, because the average crop in Israel, from what I can find in my research – and I kind of rejuvenated it a little this week – is about 7.5. That would be a big-time crop. Nobody ever heard of thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

So, the point here is simply this, that while the results immediately on the surface look pretty bad, pretty bleak as we launch into this evangelism, the disciples are saying to the Lord, “Why are so few believing?” They see the mass of people who've rejected. They see the superficial disciples who come and leave. They see those who never break with the world and eventually turn out to be false converts - their interest in Christ is superficial; they love the world too much. They see the types like the rich young ruler. And they must wonder, “Is it ever going to get beyond that? Is it always going to be the little flock? The few?”

Well, here's the great lesson of this parable: the results are going to be supernatural. The results are going to be supernatural. All the hard ground, all the rocky ground, all the weedy rejecters of the Gospel will not thwart – will not thwart the divine purpose. In the face of very discouraging early results, very discouraging early response in Israel, they need to know that the Lord was going to do absolutely staggering, inexplicable, exponential things.

There is, in spite of rejection, an irrepressible empowerment in these lives. They can't see it. The disciples are timid, hardheaded, ignorant, selfish. They're a work in progress. They can't see it, but the results are going to be exponential.

Now, this is not trying to convey that if you're a thirtier, you should be a sixtier; and if you're a sixtier, you should be hundred. That's not the point. You can't determine that. Okay? This is not about that. This is simply saying that God is going to do things through the lives of His people to build His

kingdom. Some are going to be less than others by His design. Okay? By His design.

It reminds me of the parable in Matthew 20 where some people worked 12 hours, some people worked – do you remember? – 9, some worked 6, some worked 3, and some worked 1, and they all got the same reward. When we all get to heaven, we're all going to get the same eternal reward. And it's not about the numbers of people we influence with the Gospel; it's about our faithfulness to the calling God gave us. And the callings vary: 30, 60, 100. That's God's to determine.

But backing up a little bit, there's no such thing as a – and it's important to say this – there's no such thing as a fruitless Christian. Look at John 15 for just a moment. We have a few minutes to kind of wrap up with some of these verses. John 15, "I'm the vine. My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in Me that doesn't bear fruit He takes away."

So, if you have a super – this is a superficial connection to Jesus – if you have a superficial connection to Jesus, you're going to get taken away. And what happens to the ones that get taken away? Verse 6, "They get burned." That's hell. They're some of that weedy soil, some of that rocky ground. But if you're a branch that is in Me and remains in Me, verse 2 says, "He takes every branch that bears fruit and prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." It doesn't say He would like to do that. It says He does it. Your life becomes exponentially impactful.

Verse 5 says, "He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing." Verse 8, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so proves to be My disciples." The point is, if you're a true disciple, you bear – what? – fruit. It's inevitable.

Ephesians 2:10 says this was foreordained by God in your salvation, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God beforehand prepared so that we would walk in them." It's a foregone conclusion. We're going to bear fruit. Our lives as true believers are going to have an impact.

You say, "Well, even if we're sinful?"

We're all sinful. We all fail. Oh, I'm sure we can diminish our fruitfulness, of course. But there's going to be fruit born by the irrepressible power of the Gospel and the dwelling of the spirit of God that is in us. This is a promise. And it's not trying to say, "Well, if you're 30, be 60; if you're 60, be 100." The Lord knows what He will do to build His kingdom. He knows the soil that is going to produce 30, and 60, and 100.

But mark this; they're all supernaturally powerful, because they're all beyond the capability of soil in the analogy. That's why the only explanation for us is the power of God. Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1. First Corinthians chapter 1, verse 26, "Consider your calling; there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" – that's us, folks; we're just the common folks; we're just the foolish, the weak, the base – verse 28 – the despised, the nobodies.

You say, "Well, how can we have any effect?"

Verse 30, "By His doing you're in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." Here we are in the world, this collection of

nobodies who, of all people in the world, alone have “the wisdom of God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But it's all the work of God. It's by His doing so that it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” We can take no credit for it. We can take no credit for it.

Second Corinthians 2 says, “Who is adequate for these things?” Now go back to Mark, and I'm going to close with just a reference to coming parables in this same chapter that explained the exponential, divine empowerment and the impact of our lives.

Look at verse 26, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; goes to bed at night, gets up by day. The seed sprouts and grows. How? He himself doesn't know.” I love that. That's how evangelism works. Some sow, some water – and what? – God gives the increase. We don't make it happen. We go to bed and it happens.

Or, in verse 30, “How can we picture the kingdom of God? What kind of a parable should we use to present it? It's like a mustard seed, when sown in the soil is smaller than all the seeds upon the soil. When it's grown, it grows up – when it's sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.”

The Lord is saying, “It's going to start so small, but it's going to explode, and it's going to do so through you.” Well, it happened fast, didn't it? The Day of Pentecost 3,000. Another week later or so 5,000. You got over 20,000 in a few weeks, and pretty soon it turned the world upside down, and here we are 2 centuries later, and millions and millions and millions and millions of people have come into the kingdom of God and are now either in the Church militant on earth or the Church triumphant in heaven, and the power of the Gospel keeps moving through those who are the sowers. That's us.

God is still using us to turn the world upside down. This is our great privileged calling. We do what we can do, and go to sleep, and it happens. And that's just a parable way of saying the power doesn't come from you; it comes through you. It's in the Gospel itself and the work of the Spirit.

Father, we thank You that you've called us to this unique and amazing calling. This – as we said earlier, this condescension that follows right behind the very condescension expressed in the incarnation in Christ that You have come down to earth in Christ is the most wondrous. But second to that is You have come down to take up residence in us. He was holy; we are not. And through us, to bring about a spiritual harvest, that can only be explained as supernatural. Supernatural.

There's no human explanation for our influence. We talk to a person here, a person there, and while we go away and do something else, as it were – going to sleep – the seed planted bursts to life, and it grows by Your power. And the next thing we know, that person talks to someone else and someone else and someone else, and pretty soon the harvest is getting larger and larger. We won't even know all the lives that we have been able to impact until we meet them in heaven in the glory of the future.

Who humanly is adequate for such an influence? The world has its idea of who the influencers are. They are clueless. The only people who really have an influence that lasts eternally are Christians. And here we go through this world bearing thirty, sixty, a hundredfold as instruments that You can use. The power is not ours, but it comes through us. What great privilege this is for us.

May we eagerly proclaim the Gospel, live the Gospel to the end that You would be glorified and that our faithfulness would cause many to give glory to You. That as Paul put it, it would redound to Your glory as we see many come to Christ. We pray in His name, amen.

END

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