

Mark 4 1-20. **4** Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. **2** He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: **3** "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. **4** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. **5** Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. **6** But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. **8** Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

9 Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. **11** He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables **12** so that,

"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"^[a]

13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? **14** The farmer sows the word. **15** Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. **16** Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. **17** But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. **18** Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; **19** but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. **20** Others, like seed

sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

As it is our Harvest thanksgiving service this week this seemed an appropriate reading to cover. This time of year, its traditional for Christians to gather in churches around the country to thank God for the years harvest and provision towards us over the last year. And this goes way back into the Old Testament when the festival of sukkot was celebrated in late September early October time.

Jesus uses much of His teaching in relation to things such as seeds, planting, gathering in the harvest and producing fruit. Jesus takes the agricultural background that His listeners would be familiar with and uses this to convey truths of Gods kingdom through parables. In fact, at the start of the reading we find Jesus’ teaching from a boat on the Sea of Galilee and its interesting to note that Jesus also refers to fishing and great catches with nets in the gospels.

With that in mind lets look at this parable.

To begin with the Sower begins to scatter and some seed falls by the wayside and the birds come along and devour it Now in verse 15 Jesus gives the interpretation of those who fall into the first category. He Jesus says, these are the ones that fall by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear Satan takes the word away immediately that was sown in their hearts.

Who could these people be, perhaps someone we are sharing our faith with, they seem agreeable and maybe sympathetic but never follow through or make any commitment? Or perhaps a friend or family member who puts up their hands or goes forward in a meeting says the sinner’s prayer and they may even come to fellowship a few times but the just fall away and have no interest in following Christ. And of course, the more obvious whereby we are sent packing with a flea in our ear if we share the gospel with some, that can happen of course as well.

What's noticeable if we look at v 4 then v15 is that in v4 it says the birds of the air came and devoured the seed and in v 15 that Satan comes and takes the word from their hearts.

Birds in biblical typology have great significance. If you look at the dietary laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy most of the birds that are considered clean or kosher are land-based birds or water based, such as chickens, turkeys, ducks with one or two exceptions such as Pidgeon. There is a whole list of birds that are considered unclean. These would include eagles, vultures, ravens, owls, hawks, herons, pelicans etc. These are birds of prey or scavengers and I don't think its any coincidence that Jesus equates these types of birds to Satan who comes straight away to steal the seed. There are equations throughout both testaments to certain birds being synonymous with evil but equally there are clean animals that are symbolic in some ways of the Messiah such as a lamb or lion.

The second bracket are those who fall on Stoney ground in verses 5 and 6, a seed that has no root and gets scorched and withers away. Jesus interprets this in v 16 and 17. He says these are that have no depth and endure only a while because when tribulation and persecution comes because of the word they stumble.

I asked myself the question how can I, how can you not fall into this section, it is hard, let's not pretend otherwise. No one in their right mind is going to want a bellyful of persecution or tribulation, this is challenging to me. Right now, we know through Barnabas and other such Christian ministries, Christians are suffering terribly under many despotic regimes. The reality is Christians always have, currently are and always will until our Messiah returns. We can look back through the decades at people such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie Ten Boom, Richard Wumberand who was imprisoned by the Romania communists all of them persecuted for Christ and righteousness' sake. These are some of the many we know of, but there are countless millions from the past and presently who are only known to God.

I don't want to throw out an easy answer to this because there isn't one but I might have some idea of how we might be able to stand.

John 4 v14, Jesus says whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst, indeed the water I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Indeed, Jesus is the water of life but we must drink of Him every day because otherwise we will become dehydrated. When we have been looking at John's first epistle and indeed the gospel of John, Jesus constantly exhorts us to abide in Him.

As it says in 1 Cor 2 v16 we are to have the mind of Christ. Romans 12 v2 says, do not be conformed to this present world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve the will of God.

Yes, there will be persecution and tribulation for us, but our hopes of standing for Christ will be much more favourable if He is the epicentre of our lives and we are fully immersed in His word. It then changes our perspective of what's really important in our lives. And instead of being focused on this world and the likely troubles ahead or whole being needs to be ensconced in Christ.

But Jesus in Luke 12 v12 states, that at that time the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. And the backdrop to this verse is where Jesus is telling His disciples that they will be brought before magistrates, rulers the synagogue etc. But they will not have to worry what they will say because the Holy Spirit will give them the words at that time that will confound their opponents. And friends that remains just as true today. Jesus through the Holy Spirit will not only give us the wisdom but the comforter when we face such trials.

Can I read you this excerpt from the life of Corrie Ten Boom?

Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian from Holland who, along with her father and sister, courageously hid Jews in their home during the Second World War. Her

family was betrayed and handed over to the Germans, and they were sent to the notorious Ravens Bruck concentration camp. During her time there, Corrie lost both her father and sister. In spite of her loss, however, she did not lose her grip on God. When she finally was released from the camp due to a clerical error, she would reflect on the fact that God had given her the strength to endure and supplied His sufficient grace as she needed it.

In fact, Corrie had learned to trust God in the midst of death early on in life. When she was a young girl, she witnessed the death of a baby and was confronted with the fragile nature of life. Spooked by this experience, she burst into tears and sobbed to her father, "I need you. You can't die! You can't!" Seeking to comfort and counsel his frightened daughter, Corrie's father sat down beside her and gently said, "Corrie, when you and I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you the ticket?" She sniffled a little, and replied, "Why, just before we get on the train." "Exactly," her father responded, "and our wise Father in heaven knows when we are going to need things too. Don't run ahead of Him, Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to die, you will look into your heart and find the strength you need, just in time."

Corrie Ten Boom learned something that day that would hold true throughout her life. God doesn't give us grace for the future. Grace cannot be stored. It must be used for the moment we are in and nothing more. Grace is like the manna that God supplied the Israelites in the wilderness. It has an expiration date on it. Its shelf life is one day (Exodus 16:21). Grace is for right now (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In Hebrews 4:16, we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of our gracious God to receive mercy and find grace to help us in a time of need. A more literal rendering of that last phrase would be, "grace for a well-timed help." There is grace for what we need, when we need it. Now that is beautiful! Grace, not sooner, not later! Grace, no more, no less! Grace perfectly timed, and perfectly tailored.

Like Corrie Ten Boom, it is easy to let our minds run ahead of us, causing a stampede of fear. It is natural for us to wonder about tomorrow, but God has promised strength for each day (Deuteronomy 33:25). There is no grace for tomorrow until tomorrow. One of the secrets to successful living is living each day in the moment of God's sufficient and surprising grace.

We like Corrie can know, should these times come that the Lord will give us the power to stand and His grace to accomplish this.

The next group here is the seed that fell amongst the thorns that were choked, we read this in v7. Jesus then in v18-19 equates this to those who hear the word but the deceitfulness for riches and the desire for other things choke the word and it becomes unfruitful. It is very easy for any of us to be caught up or have our attention dragged away from our fellowship with the Lord. It could be any number of things, our ambition in our careers, the pursuit of wealth or material things, a relationship with a person whom we can put on a pedestal above our Father. Filling our time seeking pleasure and a hedonistic lifestyle. The list is never ending. It could be something very practical like worrying about our kids, the mortgage and surviving till we get paid again. Something very legitimate. And I like maybe some of you may have fallen into some of these snares at times.

In the Lord's prayer it says. May your name be hallowed, may your kingdom come, you will be done then give us this day our daily bread. In the prayer Jesus gives us its about seeking Him and His kingdom first and then that we need to sustain us. And those words line up with Matt 6 v33. Seek first the kingdom of God above all else and live righteously and He will give you every thing we need. When you have time read Luke 12 v 22-34. These verses again should just encourage us to place those worries at the throne of God, to assure us of His constant love and provision for us. Always seek His kingdom and He will put all that we need in place, He promises that it's a guarantee.

But I'm guessing today all of us want to fall into the last bit here, those sown on good ground and bear fruit, 30,60 a 100-fold. We want to bloom in the desert and boy is this world a desolate place. Perhaps during our walk with Jesus at times we may have fallen into any one of those four categories that we have looked at today. Maybe we have been shallow at times and not let the word penetrate our hearts. Maybe we have been fearful of persecution and ridicule and not been the light to others in the midst of that trial. It could be despite our best intentions we get consumed by things

that draw our attention from the plan of the Lord that He for our lives, even financial and family concerns.

The Lord knows what we need whatever comes our way, tribulations, financial concern, anxiety about our kids, parents and everything in between.

We are celebrating harvest this week and the Lord has blessed and provided for us in the physical realm, He can do that, meet all our needs.

But He wants a harvest in our spiritual lives, the more we let Him produce and cultivate that crop in our lives, the more we can feed others and bring Gods blessing to them.

A seed on its own wont feed anyone, it has to be nurtured, it may go through wind, rain frost before it reaches full growth. But then its harvested and can nourish many people.

Do we want to be major fruit producers, I believe so?

The world is starving spiritually, its feeding itself on a diet of junk food, there's starvation out there but if we let Yeshua seed take root in our hearts, then we have grain for the famine.

They might not want to eat it, people prefer fast or convenience food but in Christ we offer the only nutritional alternative.

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