

Rejecting and Receiving God's Word

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[0 : 00] I want to preach from the word about the word.

Excuse me, this morning. I thought and prayed through the encouragement that I wanted to bring you this morning for a new year.

So we're in Mark chapter four. You will be familiar with this passage on the parable of the soils. And years ago, I preached through Mark touching on this as well.

And it's one of my favorite places to go in scripture to speak about the good and great reality of God's truth.

So the title of my message is rejecting and receiving God's word because that's what the text deals with specifically. So in Mark chapter four, Jesus explains the parable after verse one, moving down through verse 12.

[1 : 15] And then in verse 13, he begins to give them the interpretation or explanation of the parable. That's where I want to pick it up for today. So let's begin reading in Mark four, verse 13.

And Jesus said to them, do you not understand this parable? Well, how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word.

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.

In a similar way, these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places who, when they heard 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.

[2 : 20] And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns. These are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, the desires for other things, enter in and choke the word.

And it becomes unfruitful. And then he has this little one verse, all those verses now in this one verse in verse 20.

And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil. They hear the word and accept it and bear fruit 30, 60 and 100 fold.

In other words, supernatural results as a result of the word word implanted in their hearts. Now, in the way of speaking about this in an introductory fashion, because we're kind of jumping into the middle of what is a running kind of theme in Jesus ministry here is public ministry.

Let me take you to John chapter eight and remind you of a couple of verses that we read over the Christmas holidays. I believe this one was during our Christmas Eve service.

[3 : 29] It's in John eight and it's verse 12. And this is Jesus speaking of himself. John 8, 12. Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, I am one of his I am statements here.

I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life. Now, we have to ask ourselves, then, how do we how are we exposed to that light?

How is it that the light of Jesus, who he is, helps navigate us through this world? Now, the reason that we ask that question is because we know that while Jesus lives in us spiritually, he isn't physically before us like the disciples enjoyed to follow him around and actually watch him doing what he did, etc.

Now, we don't have that. But the Bible tells us blessed are those of us who, without having Jesus physically present, believe him in faith and follow him in faith.

We'll have a great reward in that way. So we ask the question, how do we follow him as the light? If you'll go over to John chapter 12. John chapter 12, beginning in verse 44.

[4 : 52] And Jesus cried out and said, now this was given in a very impassioned way. He who believes in me does not believe in me, but in him who sent me.

Very emphatic. He who sees me sees the one who sent me. I have come as light into the world so that everyone who believes in me will not remain in darkness.

So we see here a key element of following Jesus as the light. It's faith. It's belief. If anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him, for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has one who judges him. The word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

So now we have the word of God being a help and a light and salvation for those who believe the light.

[6 : 06] That is Christ. He is the light. And we have the word judging those who do not by faith believe the light. That is Jesus.

And he said, receive those sayings to themselves. So, gosh, we have gone way beyond now just making a profession or a confession that way.

Saying, yeah, I'm a Christian or I believe in God. Jesus is catapulting us far beyond just saying it with our mouths. This is now something he's speaking about that is life-altering.

This is a transforming spiritual reality of faith in Jesus Christ. And it is the difference between life and death. Life and death now and life and death for eternity.

That's what we're dealing with. If anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, verse 47, I do not judge him, for I didn't come to judge the world, but to save it. Now notice, he who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has one who judges him.

[7 : 12] And it's the word. It's the word I spoke. That's what's going to judge him at the last day. For I did not speak. This is so absolutely radical.

This is God. I did not speak on my own initiative. But the Father himself who sent me has given me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.

I know that his commandment is eternal life. For some. Therefore, the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me.

Now, where do we have the record of Jesus speaking to his people? In the scripture. Sure. So if I stand up here and say to you in these moments, thus saith Jeff.

Am I speaking to you according to the word of Christ? Not if it's thus saith Jeff. What Jeff has to do is the same thing you have to do.

[8 : 25] I have to humble myself and become a student. I have to become a disciple, a follower. I have to become someone who is teachable by the power of the Holy Spirit according to the word of God.

The word of Christ. All of this is the word of Christ. Not just the gospels. It is Jesus who brought us this truth. And so this truth is light and life.

It's a light to our path, a lamp to our path, a light to our... I always mix them up. A before I. That kind of thing. So the word of God is the one that keeps us, the truth that keeps us following in the light.

It brings us out of the darkness. Now all of that is to introduce and to say that what we're talking about in Mark chapter 4 about God's word and about the soil.

We'll get to what that is. Has everything to do with both life and death. It is a very serious sober reality that we need to take stock of.

[9 : 41] And so my encouragement to us this morning is this. Here's already the takeaway. The encouragement that I want to bring to you this morning is to reassess.

Take time and allow what we say this morning to help you re-evaluate and to take stock of your relationship with God's word. This is not us, Greg and I, pounding you.

We just will never intentionally do that. Legalistically. Are you in the word? That kind of thing. Now we may ask you from time to time, how was your time in the word this week?

And you may have to look and say, you know, it wasn't what it needed to be. Now what are you going to get from us? You're going to get a hug and you're going to get a holy noogie. Right? And you're going to get an attaboy, keep on going kind of thing.

And that's what the reading plan is all about. You don't have to subscribe to our reading plan. But subscribe to a reading plan. Be in the word. We want to encourage you this morning to think about your relationship to God's word and do this.

[10 : 49] Don't let the sermon this morning challenge you in the way that says, I'm such a bad person. I'm such a negligent person. I don't even know if I love the Lord that much.

Look, if the Holy Spirit convicts you and takes you in those directions, do this. Whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian at this point in your life.

Ask yourself, what is my relationship to God's word? And what can I do in the month of January to begin to take steps to help me be more disciplined and consistent in the way that I allow God's truth to change my heart so that I am more pleasing to Jesus in the things that I say and do?

How can I live my life for the pleasure of Jesus more consistently by being more committed to what I know his truth will do for me?

Guide me. Direct my heart. Change and transform and renew my mind to think the thoughts of Jesus. What can I do in January to start me off well on that road?

[12 : 03] The reading plan may be a good idea for some of you. The one that we're doing. You may have a different one that you've decided on. That's fine. We just want you in the scripture consistently.

All right? So that's what we're dealing with. So the scriptures that I've shared with you from Jesus in John are designed to help us begin to think about the relationship between Jesus as light and the word of God as a lamp and a light and how those two come together to help us live to the pleasure of God.

That's why. Now the question that's on the table for what we're going to do now, why does Jesus teach in parables? Now I have a whole other sermon that I preached before this one that dealt with the answer to that question.

The entire sermon was about helping us understand why is it that Jesus turned to parables? It's so important because he did that so much. The gospels are full of that.

And there is a specific way that you need to interpret parables a little bit differently than other aspects of narrative or the line-by-line precepts of like a first Peter that we did recently.

[13 : 15] Why parables? The message that Jesus is speaking in our text was a message of living and ministering God's truth as God's son.

And that is what the religious leaders and their followers are rejecting in our text. They will not accept that the son of God is standing before them speaking the words of God to them.

And so Jesus said it plainly. The one who sent me has given me commandment what to say. I'm not even speaking on my own initiative.

Wow. Wow. The deep and persistent and growing hatred of Jesus, as well as the absolute denial of his deity, made the religious leaders and their followers' sins unpardonable.

I said, Jeff, is there such a thing as an unpardonable sin? Yes. If you reject the only hope for salvation, you're living in an unpardonable way.

[14 : 24] If God holds out to you the offer of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and you flatly slap it away, friend, you slap away all hope for eternity. Period.

In fact, speaking about these religious leaders and how they treated Jesus up to this point, one commentator declared this.

Listen, the hard-hearted intentionality of the Pharisee's sin is the main factor that made it unpardonable.

Now, the hard-hearted hatred, the hard-hearted unbelief, the hard-hearted sin.

Now, we live around that all the time. And that defined my heart at one time. So, the question is, what can break down that kind of hardness?

[15 : 23] And there's only one thing. One thing. The Holy Spirit using the truth of God to drive into your very heart and soul.

It takes that kind of power from heaven to deal with how hard our hearts are. You see, one of the reasons that we have a hard time thinking about the sovereignty of God in salvation and receiving it to ourselves, that God is completely sovereign in every aspect of bringing us to himself and keeping us safe, we struggle with that.

We want to think there's some aspect of that that we contribute to or that we can bring to the table. And the Scripture makes it clear. Due to our hard, hard-heartedness, it takes a supernatural reality to break that open and deal with it and bring us to God.

We can't do that. It has to happen outside of us, to us, in us. That's the reality of how Scripture teaches this. One of the reasons that we're so adamant about that here at Grace is because that reality of what the Scripture teaches makes certain that God gets all the glory that's due his name for our salvation and keeps us forever coming back to him in complete gratitude, knowing that all that I enjoy in my salvation is truly because of Jesus' love for me.

I brought my sin to the table and he busted it up and gave me life. He should get the glory for that, not me. Not me.

[17 : 04] So that's why we do that. Now, following on the religious leaders' blatant, scathing denouncement of Jesus as a man, get this, operating in and under the power of Satan, that was their assessment when Jesus began to teach them in more plain language about who he was and why he came.

They said, you have a demon. Following on that, Jesus now turns to teaching in parables as an answer of condemnation and judgment on the unbelieving religious elite and their followers.

So teaching in parables, in one sense, is a way of judging and condemning the unbelieving. Parables hide the truth.

They hide the truth of God alongside a familiar aspect of life. Sinclair Ferguson helpfully explains that parables, notice this, parables reflect, reflect the principles of the kingdom of God and consequently serve as mirrors of our own lives.

They force us to ask the question, where do I stand in relation to the kingdom of God? They show us our own hearts in the light of God's word.

[18 : 31] How else are you going to know the truth about your heart, which is deceitful and wicked above all things? How else are you going to know, Christian, about the nature of your heart and the condition of your heart in any given circumstance, situation of life, unless you let the word do that interpreting for you?

Because the word will drive down into the joint marrow soul of who you are and search it out and reveal to you the truth. Now, in that condition, you're able to bring it before the Lord in confession, perhaps.

You're able to bring it before the Lord in praise because perhaps you'll see that out of your heart flowed this wonderful thanksgiving and praise. And you can say to the Lord, Lord, thank you for creating that in my heart.

The word is paramount in helping us do that. So, friends, parables aim at and expose two categories of people.

For those who have ears to hear, for those who are humble-minded and teachable before the Holy Spirit, who have God's gift to listen carefully and listen spiritually, who enjoy a holy desire to learn of the Lord, the truth nugget contained in the parable is opened to them.

[19 : 57] It's revealed to them by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's for Christians who are seeking to know and understand God and His ways. As they read the parables, hear the parables, the Holy Spirit begins to open their eyes to understand what that truth nugget in the parable is all about.

For those who are unbelieving, those who scorn God's word, those who live self-assured, hard-hearted, the truth of the Lord remains hidden and inaccessible to them, as does the blessings that come with believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

So being saved from the power and penalty of sin is something that unbelievers can't and don't enjoy. That's the tragedy. So here's how we can sum that up.

The parables were designed to produce a response. Parables do not leave people in no man's land.

They force you to reveal what's really going on in your heart. Your heart. It's the response that evidences whether someone is a believer or an unbeliever.

[21 : 15] This is how Jesus was using these. Now, the parable of the soils. This is not the parable of the sower. This is a parable about the soils are the issue, and we want to see why.

The parable of the soils exposes and explains the spiritual condition of the heart in its response to God's truth.

This is why the truth is so important. The truth exposes the true condition of the heart, the mind, the soul, the very being that we live by.

And so three conditions reveal a heart without saving faith in Jesus Christ. That's what we'll see in our text. There are three conditions that reveal a heart without saving faith.

And there's one condition in verse 20 that shows saving faith. That's the heart that receives God's truth and reaps the blessings of belief and obedience in the Lord.

[22 : 16] Now, hear now the parable of the soils and take heed. May God grant each of us spiritual ears to hear, understand, and repent.

We've read the text together, and I want to share with you what is the interpretive key as we move down through the major points that I want to bring out to you. What's the interpretive key to this passage?

Well, it's provided for us in what the Lord said about the parable itself. And it's in Mark 4, 14 through 15. The sower sows the word.

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.

He sows the word. And it's Satan who comes and takes away that word. And this is very interesting to me as I think hard about the interaction, the interplay that's going on here.

[23 : 22] It's sown in them. Man, that's chilling. Then how does it get out? Why has that happened? That's scary.

Because the heart, the heart is the seedbed. And so you want to think that man, there are so many obstacles that get in the way of the seed even getting to the heart.

So when it gets there, boy, you want to believe, oh, finally it hit the heart. But what happens if it hits the heart and bounces out? That's what this is describing. We have three evidences of that happening and we have only one.

It reminded me of what Jesus said about wide is the gate and the path to destruction. Narrow is the way to life. So again, I think this is, it's appropriate for us to be sobered by what we're seeing here.

This is the interpretive key. What does Jesus mean by the word being sown in them? The question is, and I've given it away, in where?

[24 : 36] But it's so critical for us to understand this and to believe this because we all have unbelieving family and friends, co-workers, people in our lives. And then we have people who make professions and say that they're a Christian and we don't see really the evidence of the fruit of a life that's loving God and desiring to please God.

They don't really have a relationship with the word. They don't really have a relationship with God's people. Going to church is just that. I just, I go to church.

Whereas, we try to teach and believe here that being a part of this living organism called the church is to be a family. And we simply gather on occasions regularly because of what God says to express ourselves to God as a family.

And we minister to each other as that family because we know it pleases God when we act like we love each other and we're related.

That's good. So the question again is, it's sown in them, but what does he mean by that? In where? So if you look at Luke, Luke chapter 8, verse 12.

[25 : 57] Mark just says in them, but look what Luke says in his account of this and then we'll go look at one place in Matthew as well. Luke 8, 12.

In this account, now the pair, in verse 11, now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God. So he also makes it clear. Those beside the road are those who have heard.

Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart. From their heart. So that they will not believe and be saved.

And then over in Matthew chapter 13. I'm just sharing with you how I come to this.

It's, you know, it's real standard and very straightforward. This is just using cross-references and the other accounts to help flesh out the details of this parable.

[27 : 00] Matthew 13, 19. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

Again, that is chilling to think about. This is the one on whom seed was sown. Beside the road. So the heart, the word of God's truth, the gospel of God's forgiveness for sins offered through faith in the Lord Jesus is taken away from their hearts.

So that, quote unquote, they may not believe and be saved. Again, if God holds out the offer of salvation to you in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is holding out to you the only way that you can have forgiveness for sins.

If you slap it away, you slap away your only hope for eternity with God in heaven and you guarantee yourself an eternity in hell.

That's the truth. It's not my truth. It's God's truth. In Luke chapter 8, verse 11, you don't have to turn there.

[28 : 12] It says, the seed, I read it just a second ago, the seed is the word of God. And so here's what we want to do with all of that just to make sure we're tracking on what all this means.

The seed is the word of God. The soil, which is the point here, it's the issue we need to look at. The soil is the heart of each person where the seed falls.

The condition or preparation of the heart, the soil, is what makes the difference in the response of each person. So you might ask, what is the condition of my heart?

What is, has there been any preparation? Has the soil of my heart been turned and tended so that it can receive the seed and the seed can have a good place to bed and root and flourish?

And then finally, the sower. The sower is anyone who shares the truth of God's gospel that Jesus saves us from our sins through faith in his sacrifice on the cross.

[29 : 21] A sacrifice made on our behalf. So I can say it this way, folks. The sower in the story is not critical to the main point of the parable.

The sower could be anyone. So here are the three conditions of the heart related to rejecting God's word of truth in Christ.

Now, another reason that I chose this and want to deal with this here at the first of the year with you is to encourage our hearts in a biblical explanation of why it is that there are people in our lives that have heard the gospel, they hear the same truth that we've heard, either we've made that appeal, others have made that appeal, we know they've sat under that and yet they still will not abide by that truth.

And how do we deal with that? How do we, look, if you love them like I love the people I know in my life like this, it's heart-wrenching. It is absolutely heartbreaking.

Sometimes the grief sits on us so heavily, it's hard to breathe, to think, to contemplate for two seconds. What awaits them if their hearts are not turned to Christ?

[30 : 41] So again, we're back in that now and not yet reality. Now the pain of that is hard to bear. The reality of our hope in Christ helps us to keep going over here, you know, without being all deflated.

We just, we live in the hope and we keep, graciously, we point people to the hope in the way we speak, in the tone of our voice, the countenance of our life, our face.

That's what we're trying to do. Alright, so, the first thing that we'll deal with in one of these conditions is the indifferent heart. The indifferent heart. And I'll read from what Jesus says when he gives the parable and then we'll read the explanation.

So in chapter 4, verses 3 and 4, Jesus says, listen to this, behold, the sower went out to sow. Again, that could be anyone.

As he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road and the birds came and ate it up. The birds came and ate it up. Now go over to verses 13 and 14.

[31 : 50] Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. 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.

Now what are we dealing with? The indifferent heart emphasizes an apathy. So this is an apathetic, unconcerned, uninterested, unresponsive heart.

And it's hard. Indifferent people are unaffected and unchanged by the truth of God.

They're unaffected and unchanged by the ways of God and the life of God in God's people. His truth doesn't matter. The truth of God is completely unimportant and irrelevant to them.

Now in one sense, because I've been walking with the Lord for a while, saying those things arrests me. It's almost hard to get the words out and you want to go, unbelievable.

[33 : 06] But, you know, it hasn't been that long in eternity time for me to look back and see Jeff in those statements where all that was unimportant to me.

Can you do that too? Can you remember that? Suzanne, I use you, honey, because you're, I know, she went like this. I'm under oath not to, you know, I can only go, I only have so much rope and it's about that long.

But she was saved at a young age. So, you know, looking back on her life, I mean, real young, like six or seven, looking back on her life, it was mainly disobedience to her parents and things like that.

With me, I was an older adult in college and all that kind of thing, so very different for me to think on my life. But what we're dealing with here in this night, this might help as an illustration.

Mitch, I thought of you, brother. Mitch is a professional landscaper. He does construction and all kinds of stuff. In fact, he came out to my house last week and set me straight. Thank you, brother.

[34 : 12] Thank you, brother. He solved a month-old dilemma in my heart and gave me relief. I now know what I need to do. This is an illustration of compacted soil.

Now, you don't have to be a professional landscaper to know what this is. If you've ever worked in a yard or in a situation where you had to take a pickaxe to dirt, oh my goodness, and the thing bounces off, and so you go in the house and tell your wife, I got this, I got this, and so you get the hose, and you take the hose out and you put the hose on it, and you just let the hose run, and the ground says, and the water goes off of it like it's concrete and doesn't soak in.

So you get the pickaxe out and you hit it again, and that's what it takes. That's compacted soil. That's the indifferent hard heart. Nothing can penetrate.

It doesn't even have a chance. It doesn't even go a little way in. It just hits that hard surface and bounces off. Their hearts are not broken up by the pickaxe of conviction.

It's not. So the seeds of God's truth never even begin to germinate, much less take root in their hearts. They're indifferent. They've heard it all before. They have no use for it.

[35 : 37] And who does it say is behind this reality? Satan. The great liar, the deceiver. He comes to steal away the truth that they heard, and they take no notice of the fact that they've not been changed in the least by hearing God's word.

They're apathetic. They're apathetic. It's all irrelevant. The Bible says that these are self-righteous unbelievers in whose case, quote, in whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4. 4. So human beings, in a word, have no remedy. They have no answer in themselves for this reality. Now that's the truth that the gospel preaches.

I don't know if I've ever heard anybody say it this way, but sometimes I think of it this way. What I just said to you about human beings having absolutely no hope in themselves and no remedy in themselves for this condition of hard-heartedness against God's truth.

That's kind of like the dark side of the gospel. Did you know that? It's like the dark side of the gospel because it's like you have to have some kind of appreciation for how deep your dilemma is for the great good news of the gospel, the light side of the gospel to explode on you.

[37 : 17] And that's the pickaxe of the Holy Spirit bringing conviction to your soul, to your heart. Bow! And it busts up all that hardness. So it begins to penetrate and seep in and get in and your eyes begin to open and you are put on your knees before a holy God because God is now revealing to you the depth of sin in your heart and your need for forgiveness.

Not for my forgiveness or their forgiveness for his, for God's forgiveness, for sinning against him. And you know God keeps you there in your walk.

He keeps you there in dealing with your own sin over and over again as you walk with Jesus through this life. He keeps you from constantly pointing your finger at everybody else.

And he keeps that thing coming back to you so that you're constantly dealing with you before the Lord. Now that's the heart of a convicted repentant person. I'm dealing with me and you deal with you and we'll get together and deal with each other.

Together. And I'll give you what I would like to have you give me. Grace. Grace. All right?

[38 : 35] That's the hard heart or the indifferent heart. The next one is this one. The hardened heart. The hardened heart. Jesus goes on to say in verse five, other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil and immediately it sprang up.

Now that's different because it had no depth of soil and after the sun had risen it was scorched and because it had no root it withered away. And then over in verses 16 and 17 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 have no firm root in themselves but are only temporary then when affliction or persecution arises now underline this in your Bible if you do that because of the word that is so critical affliction and persecution come because of the word immediately immediately one of Mark's favorite words they fall away hardened hearts are likened to rocky ground where roots cannot go deep and bring needed life giving nutrients to the plant but unlike the indifferent heart the seeds in this case they show signs of taking root notice that there is the outward appearance of what the word says receiving the word with joy that's temporary in reality they have no root in themselves this is all shallow the truth doesn't take root it doesn't penetrate and in this case there is a hidden hardness just below the surface that's the difference between the first one the indifferent apathetic heart and this one the seed it's like it gets just below the surface and it begins to root there there begins to see and to show these evidences there's going to be a plant and then the sun comes out and scorches it down and it can't continue and it's because because of the word because of the word when God's truth suits their cause supports their position or aids their agenda then they accept it but when God's truth counters convicts or cautions it's ignored or explained away

God's word becomes a matter of convenience and inconvenience of picking and choosing what is heard and heeded when it's picked up and I give heed to it and when I don't have time for it now this is not good obviously this is not good I want you to understand please and notice that the scripture tells us that people who are living like this now these are not true believers folks people who are living like this what happens is they begin to take the word in and they begin to live according to the word they begin to live according to what they're hearing right at first but then because they're trying to live that life according to the word outside the power of the Holy Spirit working in them that word is going to bring what into their life when they try to live for Jesus what's going to happen persecution because of the word now so these are not the trials and tribulations of everyday life and circumstances of just living in a fallen world we have that we're going to see that in a minute this is

I am trying to live according to the truth and because I'm trying to do that the world is slamming me the words bringing that into my life what do these people do when that happens they cut and run why because they have no root there's no substance to it see the reason that you and I if we do cut and run and we truly love the Lord we can't get very far before we feel the sting of what conviction conviction and we turn to the Lord and ask for forgiveness you see Peter there you see Peter weeping and God coming back to him and the Lord Jesus telling him I love you do you love me do you love my people and as Peter said I do and Jesus commissioned him to go serve the people that was all helping Peter give testimony to himself I do love the Lord I am in the Lord because that was a massive failure in his life that's what

God does with us folks that's why I say God continues to keep that finger pointed here so that we will look up to Jesus not pity party not wallow look up to the Lord cast your eyes where your hope is in Christ it's not in you I when I sometimes when I counsel people or sometimes I even have to look in the mirror and counsel myself and say Jeff get your eyes off yourself I say that look as long as you're looking at the wrong and the failure and the dark and the bleak and keeping your eyes on the temporal things you will not lift your eyes to heaven and if you don't lift your eyes to heaven you will not see from whence comes your help you'll just stay right here and there's no hope there as you put God as it were lift your heart to Christ and be reminded of the grace in the

[44 : 41] Lord well these people don't do that that isn't important to these folks they're not responding to Jesus as Lord and Savior and eventually the response proves to be nothing more than just an emotional reaction not a spiritual breaking of the heart a crushing of the pride what contributes to this temptation and time exposes this reality you just give it time temptation and time will bear out folks who are shallow in what they've professed but they've never owned it's never owned them and then we have this third reaction and it's the disloyal heart the disloyal heart other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns came up and choked it and it yielded no crop and then the interpretation for that over in 18 and 19 and others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns these are the ones who have heard the word but the worries of the world the deceitfulness of riches money and the desires for other things those are idols of the heart enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful now is it a bit unnerving to you to read those words and realize this can happen that there is something that can choke the word as powerful as it is it's certainly arresting to me this is another example of the seed of

God's word germinating like in the previous example but not taking root it's not going deep into the heart before the seed can grow into maturity before it can produce proper fruit it's all choked out by what is called the thorns of this world now we all live among the thorns we all understand that God's word is not cultivated in the heart where it can grow it's not flourishing can't produce a crop of good fruit it's not watered hear this now it's not watered by love for Christ it's not watered by love for God's truth love for God's people so God's truth is choked out by preoccupation with the cares and values and priorities and perspectives and concerns the pursuits of this world so here is where possibly trials and tribulations along with these other things that we've mentioned can get in the way of people surrendering themselves fully to the truth of

God and doing the harder thing the harder thing of sometimes just trusting of believing so this person is consumed with his own appetites his own agendas there's no need to go overboard with God with church with the Bible come on keep it real they're always looking for the path of least spiritual investment I want the path of least spiritual resistance resistance and I'm going to let you know something that you can look at the Bible and verify with me there's no such thing the path of least resistance there isn't one in spiritual living I can prove it to you what did Jesus say if you want to follow me you have to do what deny yourself take up your cross and follow me does that sound like the path of least resistance to you it doesn't to me either so it doesn't exist so we shouldn't look for it these folks try to blend their faith with their heart of worldliness they try to find common ground with the world and mix that in with their faith and they make all kinds of justifications and rationalizations for doing that and when you confront people like this because they don't have a heart for the truth and because they're not teachable it either disintegrates very quickly into an argument or they blow you off

I've had a number of different reactions like this from people in this condition some of them it's all a joke as soon as I try to deal with this on a serious or sober minded or truthful level they blow it off with levity it's just a joke they're just a clown come on man and then there's other people on the other end of the spectrum that as soon as this starts they feel that and the anger comes and they want to fight they want to argue they want to defend and rationalize right away right away there's just no getting in because their heart's not teachable it's not yielded to the spirit I know that you can hear that in these other people too and have these reactions but I see it a lot with this one especially they're blending their faith with the things of the world so they twist God's word to justify their worldly appetites and lifestyle and they want other people to share in this perverse sinful logic as well have you ever experienced that it's almost like they live in this sin bubble because they do and they want you to relate to them by they reach outside of that bubble and grab you and want to drag you into the bubble with them so that you're in the bubble you get in here to deal with me and you want to stay outside that bubble and grab them and bring you know help them out of that that it's it's

I don't want to use the matrix as an example the movie but I can't help it I think of it every single time but that you know I was always told don't use illustrations that won't go international if you and I to express these things illustratively but it's not sin logic is not logic is it it's a misnomer it's an oxymoron alright James calls this person double minded unstable in all his ways his answer to this worldliness is this what is James answer to this worldliness therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness in humility notice receive the word implanted there's your marching orders Christian receive the word implanted don't be double minded don't be unstable about God's word don't do it it's dangerous dangerous ground because that word implanted is able to save your very souls but prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves you see that all three of these others these people are deluded they're living in delusion they're delusional now don't tell them that that is not a witnessing technique remember I told you the story for some of you

[52 : 34] I did that one time that I led with that and I got punched and sent back across the table I deserved it but I was like Lord I didn't have to learn it that way somebody could have just told me don't lead with that and I would have listened I would have listened let's look at this last one because this is the good news receiving the word of God the other was the main idea was rejecting this one is receiving and we want to do a couple of things with this it's in verse 8 other seeds fell into the good soil see the soil is the issue it's the condition of the heart all of us share in the natural issue of the heart being in rebellion toward God we all start that way we all have that so nobody has a better heart than anybody else don't be deceived and think this one got saved sooner because they had a better heart no we all have a rebellious heart in the sight of the

Lord but it's that condition of the heart as God draws us and works the soil of our heart to ready it for the seed and that's where we are now other seeds fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased they yielded a crop of and produced 30 60 and 100 fold so this is a shocking uncommon unheard of kind of yield remember Jesus is talking to agricultural people for them to hear something like that would have arrested them and shocked them what oh we would love that kind of an increase in our farms and in the life that we do and then over in verse 20 for the interpretation the explanation and those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil again that is not goodness within ourselves that we produce that is the work of the Holy Spirit and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit 30 60 and 100 fold so supernatural results because of a supernatural work

I can't take credit for any of this in my heart any more than you can let's give the glory to God and be careful now the first thing that we'll want to say about this one is this it's the principle of process what are we talking about the principle of process is this the seeds that fell into the good soil grew up and increased now these terms picture the seedling pushing its way up through the soil to reach the light connection right isn't that good the light that scriptures are wonderful aren't they it all comes together what are we reaching toward the light where do we flourish in the light absolutely it's about him it's always about him it's pushing toward the light pushing toward the clean air of grace as it were so that it can continue to grow in a word what are we talking about in biblical terms perseverance this is the perseverance of the saints those who know the

Lord will persevere to God's purposes in end they will because the Holy Spirit will guarantee it I'm glad for that because I'd give up I'd just give up so this is enduring in the truth the idea of the principle of process is this time earthly time temporal time works with a receptive heart so it's a process for the receptive obedient heart to be molded by God's truth aren't you glad you're in a process and God designed it that way so it's okay if you haven't arrived that's okay what's not okay is for you to pity party and mull grub or whatever the terms are that keep you wallowing in you you got to reach to the light that's what we're being encouraged with and the word of God is the critical element in being able to do that no word no reach because the word tells you where to reach how to reach when to reach so again time works with an obedient heart as time goes by more spiritual growth takes place in the receptive humble teachable heart so

I can say it this way it is actually unnatural for a receptive heart not to grow over time God has so designed the process that he will he will grow you in a spiritual maturity as you yield yourself to his truth and as you obey him you will grow in the Lord so now folks again I keep adding this stuff this is not knowledge for knowledge sake do you see that this is not somebody bragging on how many Bible studies they go to through the week this is not somebody bragging about how many seminary degrees or certificates they have or religious degrees they have or how many times they read God's word through in a year this is not knowledge for knowledge sake this is knowledge for spiritual fruit bearing this is knowledge for living a life that pleases your Lord and Savior it's keeping you on the path of reaching to the light that's what

[58 : 19] God's word does so you can see now you're beginning to see the absence of God's word explains why you don't grow spiritually more than you do even if you spend a lot of time in God's word if you can't get past why you're reading God's word which is so that I can know how to honor and please the Lord in the way I speak and live and all that I do so that God will transform my heart and I'll live out of that heart of gratitude to my Savior I need the word to do that work in my heart impoverished you'll get it here but you're living on an hour a week what happens all the other time I know what happens because I live out there too again God will grow you as you obey and yield and humbly receive the word that's the promise that

James gives us and then finally the principle of production I've been alluding to it here healthy plants yield good fruit period we produce again please hear these nuggets we produce from what we are right I'm not going to go there all right we produce from what we are we reproduce according to like kind so you reproduce yourself according to who and what you are in your speech and behavior are you like your father the heavenly one the more that you are conformed to the image of Christ the more your speech and behavior take on the characteristics of Christ love joy peace patience kindness gentleness self control the fruit of the spirit the fruit of your

Lord likeness to him the word of God always produces good fruit in other words if you're not producing good fruit in any given circumstance or situation don't blame it on the word it's not the word's fault it's not the truth's fault don't blame it on God because that's what you'd be doing there's something going amiss in that in this process that we're talking about bad fruit is the product of sin and not of God's truth at work in the heart so one of the most revealing passages on the issue of a receptive heart producing good fruit is in Luke 6 I'll take you there real quickly before we move toward a close Luke 6 you know I'm making up for lost time last week Luke 6 and we'll look

Matthew Mark I gotta get to Luke verse 43 I think is where I want to start yep verse 43 for there is no good tree which produces bad fruit nor on the other hand a bad tree which produces good fruit for each tree is known by its fruit men do not gather figs from thorns nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush we might have said it this way you can't get oranges from an apple tree each tree will bear out what it is by its fruit that will be the distinguishing characteristic to help you know what kind of tree it is verse 45 the good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart there you go that's how we live folks we speak and live out of what's in our hearts now the issue of fruit bearing the thirty the sixty the hundred fold that is according to

God's blessing the blessings of reaping the harvest of obedience truthful faithful living because God says I'll do that now warning warning when we talk about God blessing the obedient humble receptive heart we have to understand how the Bible explains blessing and we do that as we learn together we went through first Peter together and we saw all about God bringing suffering into our lives it would be very easy for you at that point to say what am I doing wrong I have suffering in my life when God says he'll bless the obedient heart I thought I was being obedient well you may be suffering because of the word Tara said it for being faithful because you live in a broke down world that's at this incredible increase is that of financial blessing for the farmer when you think about this on a temporal level as it is applied to how we live here in the real world these people would have heard this and saw financial blessing a bumper crop for market beyond anything they probably had ever truly experienced a hundred fold increase on my crop oh my goodness that set me up for life in spiritual terms it's the good works we do as the

[64 : 13] Holy Spirit teaches and empowers us in a holy God pleasing life so this parable tells how a prideful worldly heart rejects God's truth and pride pride pride is the chief expression of an unbelieving heart you and I know that people reject the truth by their own prideful choice they are self deceived and hard hearted and so Jesus is highlighting our helplessness hard heartedness and our need for mercy and grace he is driving us in our neediness to himself he is calling and beckoning us what I'm trying to say to us today is that as Christians we are so needy and dependent on the truth of

God to help motivate and move our hearts in God pleasing ways every hour of every day which is why Greg and I ask you to read it and why we ask you to meditate on it and why we ask you to memorize it so that you can live out of the truth as you go through life now just a couple of other things I want you to see here look this parable here's the takeaway this parable teaches us that spiritual growth is the product of spiritual truth that's it your growth in the knowledge and ways of God only comes through spiritual truth at work in your heart so you can you can take all of the the whoo out of this and just say man my heart and mind are renewed to think the thoughts of God thank the Lord as I come into contact with the scripture and as I meditate on the truth and I allow that truth to get into my heart to take away the instability and cause me to root myself root myself so that

I can reach for the light and know the Lord Jesus that's the work of God's gift of salvation in his son that's God's work working in the power of the Holy Spirit to make us more like the Lord Jesus in what we love and in how we live so friends our patient endurance in loving and living for God through trials through suffering temptation even through our failures due to our sin our perseverance week to week in worshiping God from our hearts and with our lives that's the proof of God's word being rooted in the soil of your heart which he prepared to receive his word for an entire lifetime here's how Peter said it and will be done grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity again friends grow in him not just in knowledge grow in him let that knowledge take you to him and resolve in your heart

I will live for him I'm not big on new year's resolutions I think it's fine to do it but I've learned to try to live my life where as I'm going through February March April May June and I come under conviction and I know that there's something in my life that needs to be dealt with I try to resolve in that moment to deal with it and get going not wait until next January to say oh well you know that'll be a good one for next year right I ain't beyond that you know but I try not to do that kind of nonsense so this is a good time of year for us to resolve together can we do this as a church family and just say this is what we're going to do this year we're going to try to encourage each other in the word this year we're going to look for ways to come in here through the Lord stage each week and we're going to try to find ways to deal with each other and relate to each other where we're encouraging each other to be faithful to the scriptures and we're not going to be legalistic about it we're going to be encouraging and edifying say

Jeff shouldn't we be doing that all the time yes but we're going to highlight it and we're going to ask God to bless us and make us very mindful in those ways through this year okay let's pray together our dear and most gracious merciful heavenly father we are so thankful now for your word I think each of us each of us could say now at the conclusion of this message that we do have confession to make to you regarding our heart toward your word there may be some of us in here that just need to ask you to forgive us that we've taken a rather prideful stance toward your word by taking it in in ways that we could kind of weaponize it and show off our knowledge put people in their place we might have even tried to convince ourselves that

[69 : 48] I'm just trying to tell the truth and so I pray for my brothers and sisters who might be wrestling with some of that right now help help them to measure that by did they speak the truth in love did they have a love for Christ that motivated them and kept them straight in all that they said and did were they willing to walk away from those conversations at peace in their heart because they shared the love of Jesus and they didn't try to convince that person or knock that person down or put them in their place there may be others in our congregation Lord who are wrestling with a conviction about your word because they know that they don't spend the kind of time or have the kind of priority toward your word that they need to have to grow in Christ likeness to have you change their heart and conform them into the image of Jesus over this time this process that we've talked about I the opportunity to come to you and lay that before you to look to you to help them and to guide them that's what we need and that's what we want to do with each other so father as we commit our hearts as a church family this year to seek for to look for ways to keep each other encouraged in the truth of

God by speaking that truth in love help us as we do that with each other knowing that we're all at different places and levels not only in that commitment but then the ability to receive it we thank you father that you know all this and you know us better than we do so we look to you we look to your word we thank you for your truth and here at grace Lord our heart is to humbly ask you to help us to keep preaching your word praying your word singing your word living your word thinking your word even as we look to the living word who is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in his name we pray amen