

The Growing Seed of the Kingdom

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- [0 : 00] Let us begin our service singing to God's praise from Psalm 36 and at verse 5.
- Psalm 36 and verse 5. Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens, thy truth doth reach the clouds. Thy justice is like mountains great, thy judgments deep as floods.
- Lord, thou preservest man and beast, how precious is thy grace! Therefore in shadow of thy wings men's sons their trust shall place.
- They with the fatness of thy house shall be well satisfied. From rivers of thy pleasures thou wilt drink to them provide. Because of life the fountain pure remains alone with thee.
- And in that purest light of thine we clearly light shall see. Thy lovingkindness unto them continue that they know.
- [1 : 04] And still on men upright in heart thy righteousness bestow. Let not the foot of cruel pride come and against me stand. And let me not removed be, Lord, by the wicked's hand.
- There fallen are they and ruined. That work iniquities cast down they are, and never shall be able to arise. Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds.
- Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds.
- Thy justice, thy mountains, thy mountains, thy judgments keep us flood.
- Lord, thy grace, thy grace, thy grace, how precious is thy grace.
- [2 : 29] Therefore in shadow of thy wings, men's sons, their trust shall please.
- They with the kindness of thy house, thou wilt be well satisfied.
- From rivers of thy flesh, how precious is thy grace. From rivers of thy flesh, how precious is thy will bring to them provide.
- Because of life the fountain pure remains alone, And of the purest light of life, we, we, we, we, we, we, we, we, we, we shall see.
- Thy loving kindness unto them continue that we know, And still on may the bright day, our light thy righteousness be so.
- [4 : 15] Let not let the fruit of cruel, cruel, cruel, cruel, cruel, cruel, cruel, and against me stand.
- And let me know, who will be of them be, Lord, by the wicked, and by the wicked.
- Therefore, nor they are ruined, not for iniquity, cast our way up and ever shall be able to arise.
- Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. O Lord our God, as we come before you, we are reminded afresh of your mercy, that you are a God of mercy, that you are willing to show mercy to undeserving creatures such as we are, who deserve not the least of your mercies.
- But we are made aware through your word and through our own experience that your mercies are new each morning and great is your faithfulness and that your people are reminded of it repeatedly.

[6 : 03] Each and every day of their life, they receive of your bounties far in excess of their deserving. But each one of them is aware in their own personal experience of the greatest mercy possible that you have shown to them in making them aware of their need of salvation.

And not just making them aware of that, but directing them personally to that place where that mercy is to be secured. We give thanks for the gospel that presents to us the saviour of lost souls, even Jesus Christ the righteous, and that he came into this world to seek and to save the lost, and that any and all who would come to him are assured of being received by him, that he came into this world to seek out those who were rejected by their peers.

In his own day, when he walked in the world, when he lived amongst us as people, he saw there those who believed themselves to be above a need for salvation.

They saw themselves as being righteous, and they defied the scripture that spoke to them of their true condition. Even those who were supposed to be aware of what the scripture taught, that there was none righteous, even not one, and yet they chose to disregard that, and believe themselves to be amongst those who God had favoured, and God had meted out a privileged position to, without resorting to the person that he had appointed, through which salvation was possible.

we marvel at your forbearance, your loving kindness to this world, a world that is lying in sin, and even as we are at this present, made aware of your displeasure, and indeed a judgment that is upon us, as a society, and as a people living in the world at this time.

[8 : 38] We cannot but conclude that the God of providence is against us, and that you have every right to show the artist's pleasure to us. Our hearts are hard, and we have defiantly turned our backs upon you.

We resort to the many things that we can lay our hands upon, thinking that it's through these things that we can have peace of mind, that we can enjoy many of the benefits of this world, and that these things will sustain us, even when tried and tested.

But we know that that is not the case, that there are many that are at their woods' end, even tonight. There are many who have discovered that the things that they took pleasure in, the things that they depended upon, the things that they looked upon to be guarantees for the present and for the future, are not as strong and as effective as they thought them to be.

We acknowledge that there are many who have succumbed to the current pandemic and the effect it has on our nation and the nations of the earth, where COVID has touched lives and dramatically changed them, some beyond the point of recovery.

We read the numbers that are presented to us through various channels that remind us of how many have succumbed physically to the virus, how many have even died from it, and the numbers are terrifying and we acknowledge that and that there are some who even where they are tonight are in the grip of that terror, are being counselled as we all are, to stay indoors and to avoid the company of others in case we become the agents of transmission or even be the recipients of the virus for ourselves.

[10 : 51] And we pray, Lord, that you would remember all who are in dangerous situations within our cities and within our towns and communities. We give thanks that in this community of ours that we have, up until the present, survived much of the effects of it.

And we pray that you would keep us even from this point on, that you would encourage us to put our petitions before you, that we would acknowledge that we do not deserve your favour, but that you are someone who is constantly reminding us of the need that we have, to surrender ourselves to your care, to acknowledge and confess our every sin, to flee from these sins to Christ, to embrace him as he is freely offered in the gospel, the advice you give to one and all.

May your voice be heard amongst the cacophony of noises that are raised at this time, pointing fingers of blame this way and that, no one points the finger at their own breast and acknowledges as we must.

Like David of old, when we hear of his encounter with the prophet who challenged him as to the genuineness of his own relationship to God and all the time he was unaware of how destructive sin was until he was presented with and he was told that he was the man and he believed in that moment that that was true and we give thanks that this is the way you deal with each of us.

You remind us of what we are by nature. You remind us as David of all discovered that his heart was indeed like the heart of all men, desperately wicked.

[12 : 54] Who could know it and when they discover that and when we discover it, a great fear is that you will turn your back upon us.

The prayer must come, cast me not from your side, nor take your Holy Spirit away. And we pray, Lord, that you would teach us the way of salvation, as we have it in Christ, that we would not depend upon the arm of flesh, but look by faith to him, and that he would be lifted up before us as the one upon whom we can rely.

So remember our homes, our families, our neighbourhoods, our communion, our community. Remember our families, our congregations. Remember your word as it is preached amongst us, by whatever means.

May we be given a hearing ear, a believing heart. May we look to the Lord always, and may a day of power be amongst us, that we might acknowledge that you are God indeed.

Whoever is hardening, may they discover that before they harden to destruction. We pray, Lord, that you would give us the heart of flesh upon which your own word is written.

[14 : 14] Remember all we entrust to your care, the grieving amongst us, the sorrowful, fearful, those who are weak and infirm, those who are frail and elderly, those housebound and hospitalised, those being cared for by others within the community and elsewhere.

Bless them, we pray. Continue with us now as we turn to your word, blessing it to us as we read it, and as our meditations fall upon it, may it be opened out to us, forgiving sin in Jesus.

Amen. I'm going to read from Gospel of Mark, chapter 4, reading from the beginning. Mark, chapter 4, And he began again to teach by the seaside.

And there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea, and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Harken, behold, there went out a sower to sow, and it came to pass as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up, some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth.

[15 : 44] But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

The other fell on good ground, and it yielded fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth some thirty and some sixty, and some an hundred.

it. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let them hear. Many was alone, they that were about him, with the twelve asked of him, the parable.

And he said unto them, And to you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. But unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? And how then will you know all parables? The sower soweth this word, and these are they by the wayside where the word is sown.

- [17 : 01] But when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise, which are sown on stony ground, who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure, but for a time afterward.

When affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitful riches, and the lusts of other things, entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

And these are they which are sown on good ground, such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, and some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick?

For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested, neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

- [18 : 27] And he said unto them, Take heed what you hear, with what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you, and unto you that hear, shall more be given.

For he that hath to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath. And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up.

He knoweth not how, for the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest has come. And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God?

Or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth.

- [19 : 39] And when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all the herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

And with many such parables spoke he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them.

And when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. And so on. May the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word, and to his name be the praise.

I'd like us now for a short while to turn to the passage that we read there, and read again at verse 26.

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how, for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that full corn in the ear.

- [20 : 55] But when the fruit is brought forth immediately, he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest has come. When we look at the Gospels, we discover what has been declared there, that Jesus often, spoke, spoke, by way of parable.

In fact, it goes so far as to say that he never spoke except to make his truth known by way of parables.

With many such parables, spoke he the word unto them as they were able to hear it, but without a parable, spoke he not unto them. Of course, that's not strictly true.

We know that he had many things to say, but many lessons of a spiritual sort he taught by way of parable. Sometimes he used the same imagery, the same typology, the same kind of images, conveying separate truths, different truths, truths that may have been similar but different.

For example, we begin this chapter with the story of the parable of the sower or the parable of the good soil. And then we have this other parable that again speaks of seed sown.

[22 : 37] And we wonder why he moves from one parable to the other and uses the same images.

But Jesus was probably, and I remember reading this a long time ago, someone saying that, when he walked about there was nobody as attentive as to his surroundings.

Sometimes he saw the birds flying above him, sometimes he saw animals around him, sometimes he saw the rich of this world and their behaviour and the poor of this world in their behaviour.

He saw families, he saw those who were living by themselves in poverty, he saw all kinds of people and he drew his illustrations from what he saw.

He was the creator of God after all and he had access to the truth of God that no other had. But we read here something that is quite clear regarding the kingdom of God in verse 26.

[23 : 55] He says, so is the kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed into the crowd. He is telling us something about the kingdom of God.

It's like this. The questions about the seed and the sower and even the harvester are not really important. The principle that is being taught is that the actual life necessary for the seed to yield fruit is hidden from view.

it is not in the province of the sower or the reaper to impart to it that life or even maintain the life.

The sower has done his duty. He has taken the seed, he has put it into the ground and now he must wait for the ground to yield the fruit.

word. And if we take for granted that the seed sown is the word of God and the sower is a witness to that God, a minister or missionary or a Christian dutifully seeking to witness to the saviour, they take the word and sow it and they do what is expected of them.

[25 : 24] They are expected to declare the unsearchable riches of God. They are expected to speak the truth concerning salvation as they themselves have discovered it and the word of God has made it known to them.

And we know that whatever else we do, that there is nothing that we can do to make that seed yield the fruit that we would desire for.

We may be prayerfully involved in preparing the soil. I think that's important for us to remember. That sometimes preparation of the soil for the seed to be sown is every bit as important.

moment. Sometimes Christ in his grace gives us that opportunity to prepare the soil. But more often than not it is his own doing.

And more often than not he is doing it even without realising that that is what happens. sometimes the soil is being prepared where the word of God is to be sown months and years in advance of that sowing to take place.

[26 : 52] That is something that is mysterious. for a member of the story told by John Flavel of Luke Short I think it was.

He heard the gospel as a young man and then he emigrated to America and it was in his old age we are told when he was coming to the end of his life that his thoughts went back to his youth and he remembered the word of God that he had heard in his youth and God in his mercy sanctified that hearing of his word to him and enabled him by grace to close in with God.

That is something that is a mystery. That is something that is difficult for us to understand. Why it is that God would work in one way in the life of one person in another way in the life of another person.

But we must when we are asking that question remind ourselves that it is God's prerogative. It is God's sovereign activity that we are dealing with fear and we have no right to question him as to what he does.

Jesus is saying here about the work of the Spirit. There are many things he is saying to us that we cannot, we are not eyewitness to.

[28 : 40] the picture that we hear is someone that we can see casting seed into the ground.

Somebody randomly taking a seed amongst many seeds and scattering it on the ground and he doesn't know what is going to prosper in this or that.

And when we come to the progress of religion as a principle at work in the heart it is hidden and it is mysterious and this is something that we must first of all lay to heart.

If you remember the words of the Lord himself when he was dealing with Nicodemus marvel not that I said unto thee you must be born again.

The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.

[29 : 54] No one can say that they are more worthy to experience the Spirit's work in their life than the person next to them. The first thing that we must remember is this is God's doing.

The actual sense of it is depicted by the wind. The source of the wind is not seen but we know its effects. Its effects are there to be seen.

We can hear it at times. We can see the motion of the grass or the waves or even something that is movable and we know that there is wind but we cannot physically see it.

We cannot understand its motion. We know the science of it to a degree those of us who are interested in it.

But sometimes it is completely mysterious. When we think of the accounts that we have of salvation given by individuals they may make no sense to us.

[31 : 08] When we listen to a testimony and we listen to a story told about how a certain person had his eyes opened as to what Christ is doing and we listen and we listen carefully and we hear what is said and it makes no sense to us.

We can't understand why that word was significant or that occasion was significant.

One of the popular writers of our day tells of how he came to faith as a ten year old boy and it was through his Sunday school teacher I think it was and he talked about how he had heard the same stories before from the same person and the person was explaining to him the cross of Jesus Christ and he had probably heard the same explanation I remember our own Sunday school teachers and they very faithfully presented the gospel to hearts that remained unmoved by anything that he heard from them at that time and this person's confession was I know he said that I had heard the same thing before but that night or that day I heard it like

I'd never heard it before and I understood that I needed to be saved and I couldn't save myself. The word of God connected, it, the word of God made sense, the word of God came with power in the hand of the spirit and when that happens we must accept that God does it, that God is able to do it.

We may be mystified as to why he did it in the way that he did it but when the moment occurs we must embrace it and be convinced by what we hear as those who need to be convinced by it.

- [33 : 26] One of the commentators writes as follows, men may sow the seed by preaching the kingdom. They can persuade men concerning the kingdom but they cannot build the kingdom.

That is something that God does. Men can receive the kingdom but they cannot establish it. Men can reject or refuse to receive it or enter in but they cannot destroy it.

They can look for it, pray for its coming and seek it but they cannot bring it. The kingdom is altogether God's deed. Lord works in and through men.

Now that may appear to us to be a complicated process but why should the process be so complicated to prevent us from understanding what the scripture so clearly tells to us.

Every one of us are told that we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. And we need to close in with that Christ for the saving of our soul and if we don't do it then we will perish, we will be lost.

- [34 : 41] When we read what Jesus is saying here he says this, when we observe the life, we can only do so when it comes into sight. The person who sows the seed cannot create the life that the seed has within it.

The fact that the sower sleeps is not to apportion blame to him but to emphasise the fact that this is God's doing, not the sower's.

life. What happens there is a principle of life in the seed. Humanly speaking, when we look at that we cannot, we understand that once a seed goes into the ground it needs the soil to create what brings the life along with the water which is necessary for that life to come to fruition.

There are plants, we are told, that lie dormant in the desert and they lie under the sand invisible from the naked eye and they will remain invisible and the desert will appear a desert until the moment that there is a flood of rain from the heavens which comes periodically and sometimes spasmodically and then the desert becomes an oasis of life.

Temporarily the life is created from the rain but the rain is not a real source of that. Well it is and it isn't because if there is no seed there will be no life.

- [36 : 45] Now what Jesus is saying here is the fact is simple. The field where the seed is sown is the ready place for the word to come to and there are many things that can be done to make sure that the seed falls on decent ground.

The farmer will prepare his fields for the sowing of the seed. He will remove stones. He will remove any hostile plants that are hostile to the seed that is to be sown.

And he will keep the ground as ready and as able it is to produce the fruit that he is looking for.

William Marnot, one of the commentators on the parables, he says it is true that he cannot make it grow by his care, that is the farmer, but he can make it not grow by his carelessness.

We cannot do the saving, but we can do the destroying. That's another side of this teaching that Jesus has. There is an onus placed upon men to sow the seed of the gospel.

- [38 : 20] There is an onus placed on the sinner to believe, but they do not in and of themselves have the wherewithal. They must look beyond themselves to God who enables them.

Consider then how this truth was accomplished in yourself if you are a believer. I know there are some who professed to know the precise moment when the seed that was sown sprang to life.

We see the parable refers to three stages and this is helpful from the point of view of seeing progress, life is there before any of the stages are reached.

In that sense, many people are convinced that they know that life began from the evidence seen whereas God could be at work and be known to ourselves. In his work on the Holy Spirit, Octavius Winslow is quite emphatic.

He says the first communication of divine light and life to the soul is always sudden and instantaneous as was the creation of natural light.

[39 : 34] He gives the illustrations of Lazarus or Saul or Tarsus. In this sense, we must agree with him whether there is life or there isn't.

However, he wisely points out that the advance of that work is gradual where life is seen by the progress that it is making.

Matthew Hendy puts that God carries on his work insensibly and without noise but insuperably and without fail.

There is a sense in which the rebellion that is natural to us and those who are rebellious can declare with confidence the point of departure when their life became radically changed.

Others find it harder. For example, if we think of people who live a life where they are careless and indifferent about spiritual things, when the changes are brought in them, they point to this becoming different.

[40 : 45] They are no longer careless and they are no longer indifferent. But if there are those who have been much more cautious in the way that they lived their life, much more careful, when the change comes into their life, it is not so easily recognised.

It's an illustration used by some of the older Christians of the children of Israel leaving Egypt and all ages all of the children of Israel left but some who left were carried in the bosom of parents.

They had no knowledge of where they were being led to. But the same evidence of progress is there. The inner power that is behind the progress may be hid but it is still evidenced by the growth of it.

And we look for growth to be the evidence that there is a life. Some people may worry about the actual nature of their Christianity.

There may be Christians there who are really genuine Christians but they are not able to discern a time in their life when they actually moved from darkness to light.

[42 : 13] When they experienced the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. They may have had an experience in their youth that they were unaware of and they have lived lives that to a degree demonstrated an interest in the things of God.

But there always has to be growth. There always has to be progress. There always has to be an increase in the graces that are implanted in the heart and mind of the believer.

Growth in grace and it is just as misleading to believe that you can believe or put in practice spiritual gifts without the God of grace initiating them.

We know that there are many I was reading it just recently that when we read in the scripture about the kind of behaviour we ought to have as believers that if we endeavour by our own endeavours with our own power with our own abilities to emulate or copy what the Christian is doing without grace in our heart then we are doing damage to ourselves you know the words that we have in the prophecy of Isaiah O everyone that thirst has come come ye to the waters and he that hath no money come ye buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money and without price reminding us that there is no possibility on our part to experience salvation by anything that we have done but the passage goes on to say for as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither but water the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eaters so shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth it shall not return unto me void but it shall accomplish that which

I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it how we need to pray to God for the opening of the blind eyes and only the God who makes the old pass away and causes the old things to become new all things to become new is the one who is able to do that and when we look at our own day and generation there are not many evidences of new life or new work of salvation bring come to fruition we must believe that God works because when he speaks he speaks the truth through his ministers through his servants through those who witness to him he has promised in that passage that his word will not fall to the ground without it accomplishing that which he has purposed for it we may wonder what that is

[45 : 40] God will harden whom he will harden and he will prosper his word wherever he chooses to prosper may it be true of us that we hear with ears that will receive this word with gladness and that we will produce that evidence of new life within us to glory to glory to glory of all things may bless to us this word let us pray hear us oh god bless your word despite of us bless your word amen amen come

Burn close to me to my if ever andmas to hi to tem come i