

The Parable of the Sower

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[0 : 00] Father, we invite and give you permission to have your word, to have Christ come even more deeply into our hearts and our lives, that he will bear fruit in our lives and through our lives, all to your glory.

And Father, you know how hard it is for us to do this in our own strength. So we ask for the help of your Holy Spirit to strengthen and focus our will and our affections and our desires for Christ and his finished work upon the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring your word deeply home to us.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Why doesn't God make himself more obvious?

Like, if you think about it for a second, and I've had many people ask me this, like, if God, if the triune God really wants to be known, like, why doesn't it just make it far more obvious to people that he exists?

Like, it seems as if there's lots of good evidence that he does exist, and whatever evidence there is that he does exist seems very, very weak. And the other thing, which is just a problematic thing for Christians, for Christianity, is that some of Christianity just seems so, well, partly it just seems lame, and partly it just seems ridiculous.

[1 : 28] Like, you know, George, you're a born-again Christian, and you say things like, you need to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, accept him as your Savior and Lord. And guys like you say, you know, you accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you go to heaven.

And if I say no to that, I spend eternity in hell. And that just seems pretty random. Like, I just have this thing that I say to Jesus, and I go to heaven for the rest of my life, and if I don't say it, like, I go to hell.

Like, it's not connected to anything that I've done or not done. Like, it seems like a pretty flimsy, random type of standard. Some of you might have thought some of these things, and some of you have probably had conversations around some of these things.

And the Bible text that we're going to look at today walks towards these issues and helps us to understand, well, helps us to understand why it is that God seems to hide and what it means to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

So it would be a great help if you turn in your Bibles with me to Mark chapter 4, verses 1 to 20. Mark chapter 4, verses 1 to 20. And what's gone on just before this, if you're watching online for the first time, we preach through books of the Bible.

[2 : 41] Generally, that's the way we do things. If you've come for the last couple of weeks, you've seen sort of more, you know, Christmas and then the December 26th and January 2nd, sort of more of one-off text.

But generally, we preach through books of the Bible, and we're going through Mark. So what just happened before our break was the part just before this, you can look and check up on it later as it begins.

We looked at a part where Jesus' mother and brothers and sisters thought he was crazy, and they had to do an intervention. That's, I guess, what we would now call it. And then it went how Jesus' betters, the influencers, the intellectuals, the academics, the leaders of the culture, all basically came and told everybody that it looked at it as if Jesus was doing good things, but really he wasn't.

That really what was fueling everything he did was the devil and that ultimately it would turn out very, very bad. It looked good, but actually it was demonic. And then Jesus gives this very stark talk about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as being something that could never be forgiven.

And then the text ends, just before we get to this bit, where once again Jesus' mother and brothers and sisters are there and they sort of demand that Jesus come and see them.

[4 : 00] And Jesus gives this response that his real mother and brothers and sisters are those who do his will. So that's what's just gone on. And now here the story continues. And here's how it goes.

Again, Jesus began to teach beside the sea and a very large crowd gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

And Jesus was teaching them many things in parables. And in his teaching, he said to them, listen, behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path and the birds came and devoured it.

Other seed fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil. And immediately it sprang up since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched.

And since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among the thorns. And the thorns grew up and choked it. And it yielded no grain.

[5 : 05] And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding 30-fold and 60-fold and 100-fold. And he said, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Now, just before we go any further, this is not the way you should sow. Like, this doesn't make any sense.

And it probably is part of the reason that it becomes memorable because it doesn't make any sense. In fact, I remember years ago, I had a conversation with a fellow who had been a devout Muslim and he'd stopped being a Muslim.

And he told me that he stopped being a Muslim because he said, basically, everything in Islam goes back to Muhammad and what he wrote in the mid-600s. And life today is just so different than life in the mid-600s.

Why on earth would anybody go back to somebody like him to get advice about how to live in a place like Canada today? So he'd walked away from Islam, not into any other religion. He just walked away from it.

[6 : 11] And some people might hear this and think this is the dumbest way in the world to farm or to have a crop. So if Jesus can't even get something simple like this right, why on earth would you want to listen to him?

But the fact of the matter is that everybody at the time that was listening to it would have known that this isn't the way you do things. Like, this is foolish. And in fact, it's actually doubly foolish because on one hand, nobody in their right mind just says, I'm going to throw some seed on the path.

I'm going to see all those, see all the thorns and weeds. I'm going to throw some seed there. And you see where all the rocks are and there's hardly any, I'm going to throw some seed there and then I'll throw the rest there. Like, not only is that not how it works, but the other thing is that in that culture, and this we wouldn't know, like, unless you have some study helps, is that nobody got a return on their sowing of 30, 60, or 100.

Like, that was unheard of. A good return would have been 10 or 15. And so they'd say, this doesn't make any sense. Jesus doesn't know anything about farming. That would have been the response to many people.

And that probably explains a little bit about what happens afterwards. Because if you see in verse 10, not only the 12, but the other people who are hanging around, who are sort of part of Jesus' bigger inner circle, they all come and have some questions about what's going on.

[7 : 30] Look what happens in verse 10. And when Jesus was alone, those around him, so after this, all the crowds dispersed, and the people who really hang around with Jesus and sort of travel with him, and when he was alone, those around him with the 12 asked him about the parables.

I mean, they're probably saying something like, Jesus, what gives? We know that, you know, that's not how any sane person plants, and we know that that, you know that that's, nobody gets a hundredfold return from planting one seed.

Like, what's going on? And Jesus says to them, now, here's a very, very classic, if you're watching this for the first time, one of the things that you might not know about Jesus is that regularly what he does is he actually seems to make things worse.

Like, rather than just sort of making it really easy to understand, he sort of introduces new problems that you hadn't even thought of and seems to make it worse. And that's what goes on right here.

So, look what happens in verse 11. He said to them, to you, that's to the 12 and the others, has been given the secret of the kingdom of God. But for those outside, everything is in parables.

[8 : 41] And just before I read the next bit where it gets problematic, I'm going to return to this at the end of the sermon, but literally, it doesn't say secret. Literally, it says mystery. And that actually, the translators made the decision that it was easier for people today to understand the word secret, but I actually think they made a mistake.

I think the word mystery is actually the better word to use. But that's the literal word. If you go and look at a literal study help, it'll say literally the word is mystery. So he says, to you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables.

And here's the hard part. Verse 12, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

You go, whoa, whoa, did I just hear that right? Like did Jesus say, I'm intentionally saying things so people don't understand? And I'm intentionally saying things not only so people don't understand, but so they won't come to the triune God?

Like is that what he said? Like that's crazy talk. Like what's going on? In fact, you might want to say, this is why if you had your own Bibles, you're going, what, is that what he said?

[9 : 57] And you go back and you look and says, yeah, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven. Now, what's going on here?

Well, he's quoting from Isaiah 6. Now, one of the things which is going on here that you wouldn't know, that's why you have to come to church or read Study Helps or whatever, is, well, here, sorry, just a geek moment, a geek moment.

This is, for some of you guys who are sort of geeks and gals, you'll love this. But back in the time of Jesus, there was, of course, the official Bible, like the Bible, the Hebrew, which was written in Hebrew.

That would have been the language that all of the books were written in originally. They would all have been written in Hebrew fundamentally. But what had developed about the century or so before the time of Jesus is that two different paraphrases had been developed.

One paraphrase was, in other words, people realized, a lot of Jewish people realized that if you were a Jewish person living in Rome or in Athens or in what we now call Turkey, you might not know Hebrew.

[11 : 03] You only speak Greek. So what they did is they paraphrased the Old Testament, the Hebrew, into Greek. And for many people, that would have been their Bible. They would have heard a paraphrase of the Old Testament in Greek.

But there was another one not as well known, and that was in Aramaic, not Arabic. Arabic as a language would not develop for at least another century. But Aramaic, which is sort of similar to Hebrew.

And so, for instance, in the area where Jesus ministered at the time of this, most Jewish people would have spoken Aramaic, many of them would have spoken Greek.

And we know from looking at the historical evidence that Jesus knew Hebrew and he knew Aramaic and he knew Greek. And so what he does here in this answer to this thing, this odd text, is he actually uses the Aramaic paraphrase.

And that's why if you go back and you compare this to the text in Isaiah 6, it doesn't look identical, the same. It looks a bit different because Jesus is using the Aramaic paraphrase. Now, here's the geeky thing.

[12 : 12] I hope I didn't lose you. So now to get out of the geek in terms of what it means. In the Hebrew, if you go back and look in Isaiah 6, it's very clear that God stops people from understanding or makes some type of decision saying they don't understand.

But in the Aramaic paraphrase, the emphasis, it's ambiguous. And so listen again to what, so in a sense, what's happening here is this.

There's a lot of people and probably true of many of us at different times in our life and maybe before we became Christians who don't want Christianity to be true. Like, you know, if I actually came to believe that Christianity was true, well, what would happen?

If I actually came to believe that Christianity was true, look at the end of verse 12. I'd have to turn or repent and seek forgiveness. I'd have to say, well, if I actually believe that Christianity is true, the way I spend my time would have to change.

The way I spend my money would have to change. I might actually have some pressure to forgive somebody. I might have to change the way I view things on my screen.

[13 : 33] I might have to stop living with my girlfriend if I came to believe that Christianity was true. And I don't want to stop doing that. I don't want to turn and ask for forgiveness.

Like, I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that. I'm not going to do that. Now, people will rarely be very public about it, but in your heart, that's what's going on.

I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to do that. And so, in the Aramaic, if you look at it, say, you see, if they actually perceived, they'd have to turn to be forgiven.

If they actually understood, they'd have to turn to be forgiven. I don't want to turn and be forgiven, so I'm not going to perceive. I'm not going to understand. And that's what's sort of going on here in the text, that you're dealing with people who just, dang it all, I don't want to do that.

Or, if I do become a Christian, I want to do it on my terms. And so, God, I mean, I'm just, obviously, I'm exaggerating. I have here a list of demands and conditions.

[14 : 49] Okay, I get to keep my sexuality, I get to keep all of my money, and I get to keep all of my ambition, and I'll give you some of the emotional stuff, because I can understand how that would help me to, and I, you know, I can sort of understand I need to do some forgiveness, I'd love to have some emotional peace, so that's fine, I'd like that, but these things here, these are the conditions, and if you would just sign off on the bottom, then I'll give my life to Christ.

And that's sort of what Jesus is saying is going on here in the text. Now, just, it's a whole other topic of conversation, but just very briefly, like if you look through the gospel, if you look through Isaiah, and if you look through the Old Testament, there's this constant interplay between two ideas, of God sovereignly making decisions, and of human beings sovereignly or freely making decisions.

And it's a very, very big mystery about how you actually have free will in a world where your free will causes things. And the short form of the answer from Christians is that freedom has to have a guarantor.

It has to have conditions that allow it to happen. And so God, in his sovereign power, creates a human being like you to have freedom, and he guarantees it.

And on one hand, then, if he took away his sovereignty, you'd lose your freedom. So he never stops being sovereign, but he uses his sovereignty to give you real freedom. And I'll explain why in a moment.

[16 : 23] And so, well, actually, maybe I should go, so, yeah, so he gives you the, he gives you this freedom, but at the end of the day, since he doesn't give up his sovereignty, it's as if, so it's as if God, so from a human point of view, I say to God, my will be done.

And God woos you and woos you and woos you and woos you and woos you to try to get you to turn to him. And at the end, in a sense, on your deathbed and beyond, if all the way through your entire life you've said, my will be done, my will be done, my will be done, my will be done, that we never say thy will be done, but my will be done.

At the end, in a sense, what happens in the day of judgment is a meeting of minds. It's almost as if at the judgment seat, the person still says to God, these are my demands, my will be done, you give in to them and I'll go along with you.

At the end of the day, God says, well, you're not God, you don't get to make those types of things and so that's just not possible. You do realize that if you continue to turn your back on me, there's this eternal separation from me with all the consequences, all the pain and the sorrow, you realize that and you say, no, no, no, no, you're not listening to me, we say back to God.

These are my demands and at the end, the end of the judgment, I say to God, my will be done and God says to me, thy will be done, which ends up meaning hell, that there's a meeting of the mind right to the end, God allows our freedom.

[18 : 14] So, here's the problem that we have. Why is it that God hides, appears to hide? Well, part of the problem is that in our heart of hearts, we project onto God what we want for ourselves and think that God should be like us and what do we want?

We want our own way, we want applause, we want our own way, we want recognition and we want applause. I mean, that's part of the problem that's going on right now, you know, the dominant philosophy in our culture is that everybody has to get in touch with their own feelings and desires and be authentic to who they are and to be authentic it means that I have to be autonomous and I have to try to realize who I am but that doesn't stop with that is because then we also want applause.

Like, it's partly what's going on in the culture wars. It's not just that, you know, the homeschooling heterosexual mom just leave her alone and the gay or the lesbian or the trans person will just all make sure nobody's rights are trampled and we're just left alone but that's not what's going on in the culture is that for many positions there's the demand of applause.

Not just to leave them alone and to make sure nobody hurts them but actually a demand for applause. It's in the very heart of our cultural moment. It's actually come right out to the fore.

That's demanded. And so what we do is we project onto God well if I was God I'd want everybody to know and I'd want everybody to recognize it and I'd want applause and I'd make sure that happens.

[20 : 05] But God's not like us thanks be to God. You see, the fact of the matter is is that what God wants is love. And love requires freedom.

You see, the fact of the matter is is that God could in the tiniest, tiniest sliver reveal himself in such a way that every single one of us would cower. We would all fall down or flee if God made himself just even the tiniest sliver of revealed himself in a way that was completely and utterly undeniable.

It would cause us to fear. It would overwhelm our mind, overwhelm our reason, overwhelm our will, and it would cause terror. And he could do that effortlessly.

But God doesn't desire to overwhelm. He desires to woo. W-O-O. To woo. And so if God wants to preserve our freedom and your freedom and if he wants to woo, then how exactly does he reveal himself?

If God is humbler than you and me, because you see, part of the opposite of humility, which is pride, is a preoccupation with oneself and a desire for recognition.

[21 : 30] And humility isn't thinking bad things about yourself, but an actual engagement with the other person and a concern for them the way they really are. That's why humility is so deeply tied to love.

It's an actual caring for the person in front of you. And if God cares for you and loves you and actually wants what's best for you, well, how does he reveal himself without overwhelming you?

And so it is that Jesus speaks in things like parables and other types of things. It's why on one level you can look at the created order and on one hand you can start to get these clues that there is a God that does exist, that there is a designer, that there is a creator, that there's, that there are clues that there must be something sustaining my freedom.

There's all these clues around you that you can potentially begin to see that there is a God like the triune God that does exist. And even in Jesus' teaching then, it never overwhelms, it woos.

Even when he confronts his sins, he confronts to connect. And you know that especially by the end of it where you realize that no matter how hard a thing that Jesus says, it dies in a mystery.

[22 : 50] I mean, so it ends in a mystery. It ends with him dying for you. Like, how is it that love himself would die for those who are definitely not love, but are a mixture of love and hate?

How is it that light itself, himself, would die for ones who love light and darkness? How is it that God would actually die for a human being?

How is it that there would be one who would say to God, not my will, but thine be done? Which is what happens just before he goes to the cross. So this becomes clear as the New Testament develops.

So what's going on in this parable? So what's going on in this parable actually is very, very deeply human. In a sense, the invitation here is that if you stop to think to yourself, especially maybe when you're, you know, the people who are listening to Jesus are people who've seen him do things like heal a man who was paralyzed.

He's seen people heal from the distance. He's seen, they've seen demons being cast out by him. They've seen all of these things. So one of the ways they could respond to this parable is maybe the problem isn't that I think he's dumb, but maybe he's trying to communicate a point to me.

[24 : 28] Like rather than me just saying, oh, stupid Jesus, what does he know about farming? He's an idiot. You might say, one moment, this is a guy who heals paralyzed people and raises the dead and heals the blind and casts out demons.

Maybe if he says something, I should listen. Like maybe I should listen. Like maybe I should try to figure out what's going on. And actually, on one level, before we get into it, what Jesus says is actually quite psychologically profound.

And it's not only something psychologically profound, it's also something that we're all very familiar with. It makes up the constant themes of the novels and the movies and the plays that we consume and in fact our conversations with others.

Like you think about it, what's one of the common themes in our culture right now? One of the common themes in our culture right now is you have people who are like this. They're going around like this, all like this, and you know, maybe their wife or their husband or their kid says something and we go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Right? Isn't that a common theme in our culture? We're not really listening. We're completely and utterly consumed with our device. Well, doesn't that sound a little bit like the person who starts to listen or they think they're listening but really what's happening is the devil is just taking the word away from them so it never actually even makes any impact whatsoever.

[25 : 57] And I just recently recommended that you watch the movie Just Mercy. I watch all sorts of things. I don't often recommend that you watch it but it's a very interesting true story and in that is something which is a very common theme in lots and lots of movies and lots of things in our life.

They're all excited because evidence comes up. There are people who can give testimony and if they give testimony it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the person who's on death row could not have committed the murder.

He could not have committed the murder and they can give this testimony and the guy says okay we're going to get you to do a legal disposition or whatever it is and that will do it but within the next 24 hours and the people who make the offer they're all excited and everybody's excited but then a day later they realize if I do this there's going to be terrible consequences there might be terrible consequences to my life and they back away from doing it.

But doesn't that happen all the time? Like haven't many of you seen in your workplace or others where people come across an instant of abuse or injustice and people at all at first they're going to combat it but then they're silent?

Isn't that what happens in the military with claims of sexual abuse? Isn't that what happens with all sorts of people who could blow the whistle and they back off because they realize there could be very bad consequences?

[27:16] Isn't that the stuff of life? And what about another thing which is a very very common thing? What about the fact that it's a very very regular thing in life that maybe once again you realize that there's been something done which is very very wrong and at first you're going to do something about it but then you realize that if you do something about it it's going to affect not necessarily that anything bad is going to happen to you but shouldn't you maybe be concerned about the institution and shouldn't you be a little bit concerned about your career?

And if you think about that that's every Michael Connolly Harry Bosch novel that's one of the subplots of every one of those best-selling novels the police bureaucracy that thinks one moment we can't deal with this wrong because we need to protect the institution and I need to protect my career and isn't it an aspect of almost every romantic movie or drama with romance of a marriage falling apart because a person becomes overly consumed with money or with pornography or some other type of thing that starts to wreck it and isn't it part of the normal thing of life to understand that some people take the love or the justice or the goodness or the beauty seriously and are willing to pay the cost and in hindsight we see that they're heroes just before the COVID things all happened in 2019 at the end of October I was able to go because of my interest in apologetics I got invited along on a tour with Christian apologists and some others of the Holy Land and about halfway through the tour we went to the museum that remembers the Holocaust and that evening by coincidence people all went around to share a little bit about what the tour had been like for them so far and what they'd really got out of it and one of the most moving parts of the tour was that this woman and her husband who was on the tour they had disappeared

I mean we all separated but they shared she shared that some of her direct relatives her aunts and uncles I get worked up even thinking about it they were listed in the museum as part of the righteous Gentiles at great cost and risk to themselves they had hidden Jews and so they didn't go on the tour they just went to that part to see the names of her relatives and it was the whole room just silent it happened to be at a time as well where there were many Jewish people the whole room just goes silent because now in hindsight let me tell you if you were in Holland there's all sorts of reasons not to protect Jews but now we don't look up to the people who said if I protect Jews it's going to hurt my church if I protect Jews it's going to affect my advancement if I protect Jews I won't be able to make as much money or I can make more money if I betray them nobody remembers them with

Louise and I are watching a thing about Harriet Tubman there's all sorts of people who wouldn't help the slaves have all the reasons but those who are gripped with love and justice and goodness we now go back and look at them and we think of the great fruits the good fruits that happened so in light of that listen to this parable listen to what Jesus says in verse 13 and he said to them do you not understand this parable how then will you understand all the parables the sower sows the word I'll explain what that means in a moment and these are the ones along the path where the word is sown when they hear Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them and just sort of pause here for a second what the word is is the word is the personal the person and work of Christ understood in the context of the bible in the bible understood in the context of the person and work of Christ like you receive Christ and what he's done for you as understood in the bible and in a sense you're also receiving the bible understood in light of the person and work of Christ and that's the seed that you receive.

In a sense, what Jesus is just saying, if you understand that Jesus' parable helps to understand why it is that a lot of people don't do that which is just or that which is faithful or that which is beautiful or that which is right, then surely you understand that in the same way, if Jesus really is God, the Son of God, who dies as a sacrifice for sin, if he really is light swallowing the darkness, love swallowing the hate and the indifference, if he is righteousness swallowing the unrighteousness and doing all of that for us as an act of profound sacrifice to make you right with God, if that is right, then we can still have these same responses that turn that away, and the way that's going to be to bear fruit is to receive what he's done.

[32 : 29] Look at verse 16, and these are the ones sown on the rocky ground, the ones who when they hear the word immediately receive it with joy and they have no root in themselves but endure for a while.

Then when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. You see, it's a mystery.

You receive the mystery. If you were to go back to the time of Harriet Tubman and just sort of changing the context and you were to say to one of the white slaveholders, like, in a sense, you know, in a sense you're wearing a noose around your neck.

And they say, why are you wearing a noose? Well, don't you know that that black man that you lynched is the turning point of history and the means by which you became right God? Well, they'd mock it and say that's the dumbest, stupidest thing in the world.

[33 : 51] And you say, no, no, it's a mystery. You receive him and it begins to make a difference in your life and you start to bear fruit and the more you press into it, the more you know it's real and the more you might have a bit of a way to become more gentle rather than harsh and maybe to deal with some of the craziness and the messes and the addictions and the violence in your life.

And the white slave owners would say, there is absolutely no way on God's good earth that the turning point of all of history is that black guy that we lynched. And that's the mystery of the ancient world.

First of all, nobody survives crucifixion. Tens and tens and tens and tens of thousands were crucified. Nobody survived. And you're saying that this Jewish rebel who died a slave's death by Roman imperial power, and if you were the Jewish leaders, are you saying our scriptures say that cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree and you're saying that someone obviously cursed by God, dying under Roman power as a slave and a ne'er-do-well, that he, receiving him and what he did for you on the cross, that that's the turning point of history, that that is the end of your longings and your yearnings and you can be reconciled to God, that is completely and utterly ridiculous.

And you want to know how this really is a mystery? I mean, on one level, and it is a mystery, you know? I mean, on one level, mystery doesn't mean you don't know anything about it. You know the shape of it and all.

And at the end of the day, as we all know, philosophers have never plumbed the depths of what it means for Jesus to die upon the cross. Poets have never plumbed the depths. Musicians and mystics and philosophers and theologians and ordinary people, on one hand, you can understand, you can hear that this guy who dies on a cross has died to reconcile you with God and that if you receive it, it will make you right.

[35 : 59] And you can understand it on one level. There's a shape to the mystery, but the heart of the mystery is still a complete... It continues to fascinate when you're inside of it. And from the outside, it's a shocking thing.

And part of the thing, which is even more shocking, is that even though the historical records show that to accept the crucified Jew as your Savior and Lord is only going to put you on the outside of pagan and Jewish society, yet somehow or another this thing grew.

And 2,000 years later, there is not a single god or goddess of ancient Greece or Rome who is still worshipped, but we are here today remembering the crucified Jew.

And earlier today, our brothers and sisters in Nigeria and Uganda and Kenya and Rwanda and in Israel and Syria and hidden in Iran and hidden in China and hidden in North Korea and in South Korea have worshipped the crucified Jew.

What a mystery! Four things very briefly in closing.

- [37 : 30] Four very brief takeaways. I apologize I don't have them up on the screen. The first one is the importance of the message of the sower. God sows the seed to all and sundry and all conditions of men and women.

I don't know how many of you, if you haven't heard it, go back two Sundays ago and listen to Matt Usherwood's testimony. And if you've heard other things about his life, I can tell you right now that if you were the youth pastor there speaking to the group and you saw Matt come in and you talked to him, you'd think, why this guy's been arrested several times and he does lots of drugs and there is, in fact, you might have been worried that he was present and you almost might want to even hold back what you want to say, but they shared the gospel and Matt became a Christian.

He was the most unlikely guy in the room. And the sower, there are a lot of us here, if you hear this story, it's very unlikely you would ever become a Christian.

And so part of the takeaway from this is that don't say God's no for him. Pray for unlikely people. If you get an opportunity to bear witness to Jesus, take it.

Don't say to yourself, well, this person is a trans activist. They're just going to hate me. Don't say, this person is a very, very wealthy glee bite. They're just going to look down their nose at me.

- [38 : 54] Don't say, this person is very important in politics or in the media. Don't say, this person is too broken and messed up. Like, how do you know who the seed is? Who's going to, you don't know.

Share the gospel and pray for the unlikely people that you come across, that they will come to know Jesus because you don't know. And the second thing is, when you hear, you know, the text in verse 20 is that they hear the word, they receive the word.

And so it's not like, if you just happen to say the words, Jesus is my savior and Lord, then you go to heaven. And if you just happen to say the, you don't say the words, you go to hell forever.

No. And it's not a matter of, if you just have the opinion, you go one place. And if you don't have that opinion, you go another place. No. What it's like, it's like a seed being received into the soil.

You receive the person and work of Christ. You receive him as your savior and Lord. You receive him in. The image is like a seed going into the ground. And the water and the seed blossoms and bursts and grows.

- [40 : 06] it's more like accepting, saying yes to a marriage proposal. And that's what he does to you. And he's even humbled himself to use very old fashioned language.

He's got down on his knees and he looks up to you and he said, will you take me? Will you take me? Will you take me?

And he's hoping and longing that you will say yes. And this is the third thing. If you say to me, George, does Jesus know how messed up my life is?

And I can say to you, yes, he does. Does he know that every time I've tried to start on something it's ended up either I've dropped it or it's ended up in failure? Yes, he knows.

Does he know that every single time I've opened my life up to a person that all that's happened is that they've hurt me or rejected me? Does he know that?

[41 : 09] And all I can say to you is, yes, he knows. Does he know how consumed I am with drugs or alcohol or with sex or with money? Yes, he knows.

Yes, he knows. And he's still making the offer to you and he wants you to say yes. And the fruitfulness won't come from your effort. the fruitfulness comes in your own personal life and in the world when you say yes.

He does the fruitfulness, not you. And the final thing is that this parable of the seed is an invitation for us to examine our conscience.

To say to Jesus today, is it I, Lord? Have I become far too consumed with my image? Have I become... Am I worried to say something or do something because I'm afraid of the bad consequences?

Am I actually becoming too fixated on my career or my money? Jesus, are you talking to me this morning? And Jesus, if you are, help me to say no to those things and help me, please, Jesus, I want to be that fruitful soil where you do this miraculous work of fruitfulness.

[42 : 32] I want that to be me and I know I need your help to say no to those other things. I invite you to stand. Please stand. Let's just bow our heads in prayer.

Father, if there are any here or any who are watching, Father, who sort of, they feel the pressure, Father, to give their lives to Jesus, then Father, I ask that you just help them to turn around and to look at you and to accept the offer of your Son to be their Savior and their Lord and to allow Jesus to come into their lives.

Father, and help them with the words. Help them, Father, to just stop and to allow that to happen. And Father, for each of us who are here, you know the different ways that we are affected by these things, affected by our preoccupation with how others think of us, our worry about our reputation, our pursuit of wealth or power or career or some other thing, fitness or some other type of thing, of beauty, of looks.

Father, you know the different ways that we frustrate the Word, the person of Christ. And Father, we come to you and we thank you so much that you know us perfectly and you love us perfectly.

And just we once again recommit to you and we once again just come and stand and say we thank you. We can remember about Jesus and have communion and hear your Word and we recommit to you.

[44 : 06] Father, make us fruitful. Help us to accept Jesus deep in our lives no matter what the cost and help us to be fruitful. We turn to you. We desire to be that good soil as individuals and as a church that you will bring good fruit in our personal lives in our church and in the world all to your glory.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.