

# Sowing the Word

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[ 0 : 00 ] Seeking the Lord's blessing, let us now turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together in the gospel according to Mark chapter 4, verse 3.

Listen, a sower went out to Saul. Listen, a sower went out to Saul.

Here we read that by the shore of the Sea of Galilee that he began again to preach as he had done on previous occasions.

But there was such a large crowd that he stepped into a boat which was then rowed out at a little distance from the shore and he began to teach.

Jesus, during his earthly ministry, believed in regularity of worship. For we read that his custom was that on the Sabbath day that he would go to the synagogue and there he would worship with the people.

[ 1 : 16 ] In chapter 1 of this gospel itself, we are told that when he went into Capernaum, that straightway that he went on the Sabbath day and that he went and entered into the synagogue and taught.

That was his practice. Wherever he was on the Sabbath day, he went and entered into the local synagogue and there he worshipped with the people.

But this regularity did not prevent Jesus from spreading the good news whenever an opportunity came before him.

He did not limit himself simply to the synagogue. But at every turn of opportunity, he would speak to the crowd.

So we find him teaching from a mountain. We find him teaching in homes. We find him teaching in the deserts. We find him teaching when a group had gathered in a cemetery.

[ 2 : 23 ] And now we find him teaching even from a boat. And here he is setting an example for us to use every opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

To spread the good news of the gospel. Of the good news of God's provision in his grace for sinners like me and you.

He never selected his audience. He proclaimed the good news to all. He spoke to anyone who was willing to listen.

And Mark informs us that he taught them many things by parables. The telling of parables formed an important part in the teaching of Jesus.

And to this day, parables are all well known. Those which are recorded for us. Obviously, Jesus spoke more parables than is recorded here for us.

[ 3 : 35 ] However, by using this method of teaching in parables and using things in the parables that was well known to the people. By using that method, he caught the attention of the listener.

Even in the synagogue, there were things that could distract. But especially when they were in the open air or by the Sea of Galilee, there were many things that could distract them.

So Jesus knew that the way to keep the attention of the people were to tell a story of something that was familiar to them.

The people of Jesus' day would have been familiar with parables. There are parables in the Old Testament. And the rabbis used this kind of method in their own writings and in their own teachings. So he is using a method with which the people that are around him would be very familiar with. And by this method of using parables, Jesus stimulated his hearers to think about spiritual things.

[ 4 : 52 ] He was trying to make the people think for themselves. He didn't want the people just to be passive listeners, but to be active listeners.

And it is the same today under the gospel. We don't want you to be passive listeners, but to be active listeners.

To make you think for yourself. As James exhorts us in his letter, but be a doer of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

He didn't want to take away the responsibility from the people, but is encouraging them to think about their souls. To think about where they stand in their relationship to God.

And Jesus used this method of parables so effectively, not only to illustrate and clarify truth, but also to capture the imagination and to direct the will and to lead to obedience.

[ 6 : 09 ] And that is our desire as we come to present the gospel to you. We don't want to take away your responsibility from you.

But we are encouraging you to think about your own standing with God. Your own relationship with God. Now the first parable that Mark presents to us is that of the sword, which we also have in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

And Mark records for us that when he was alone, that they were about him with the twelve, and that they asked him the parable. So that in addition to the twelve known disciples, there were also others present who belonged to the wider circle of Christ's followers.

And the question, they questioned Jesus regarding parables. And they wanted to know two things. Why he was using parables, and what was the meaning of the parable of the sword. And Mark delivers the parable in verse one to nine. Then in ten to twelve, he explains the purpose of parables, and then he returns to explain the parable of the sword that he has just given to us in verse 13 forward on to verse 20.

[ 7 : 40 ] But we're going to focus this morning on the parable of the sword. Now for the parables spoken by the Lord, probably this is one of the best known ones.

And it is interesting because not only does our Lord give the parable, but he also gives to us the interpretation or the meaning of the parable.

As we noted already, our Lord often borrowed his comparisons from easy and familiar things such as we have here. We have the sword, we have the seat, and we have various soils.

And by such easy and simple comparisons, he gives to us spiritual instructions. There are many key terms that appear throughout the chapter.

For instance, the word sowing appears many times, and it's defined as sowing the seed or sowing the word. See, it appears and is referred to many times.

[ 8 : 46 ] But the most important, I think, is the verb to hear, which occurs, I think, around 13 times. And it certainly brackets this parable that we have here for us.

Who is the sower? Well, in general, all mankind are sowers.

For Paul reminds us in his letter to the Galatians, he says, Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit shall of his spirit reap life everlasting.

So that there is a sense in which all mankind are sowers. No doubt the preacher of the gospel is a sower.

[ 9 : 51 ] But there is also a sense in which every believer is a sower. The preacher sows the seed in his teaching capacity.

But every believer sows the seed in their conduct and in their behavior and in their walk in life. We have often heard the saying that the Christian is the Bible of the world.

In me and you, the world weighs out Christianity. And therefore, we must be careful how we sow. You notice that in this parable there is emphasis laid on the fact that a single sower went forth to sow. There is a sense in which we are all individual sower.

We are all going to be individually accountable for the way in which we sowed the seed of the word in our conduct and in our behavior.

[ 10 : 55 ] We're all going to be accountable for the way in which the world evaluated our conduct and our behavior.

For the way in which the way out Christianity and in our behavior. The preacher is going to be accountable for the way in which he sowed the seed in his preaching and teaching of the word.

So we see how important is the sowing. When we see bread on the table, there would be no such thing if the sower had not gone out to sow.

And if that is true in the natural world, it is also true in the spiritual world. We all need to go out as individuals to sow.

Eternity will one day testify all that resulted from my and your sowing. Eternity will one day testify to brands that were plucked from the burning.

[ 12 : 05 ] To lamps that were lit by the Holy Spirit. To people that were saved and to everlasting salvation. Through us going out to sow.

Who knows what may follow our efforts. Life and death, heaven and hell depend upon the sowing of the good seed of the gospel.

So it must be the most important event that can ever happen. It is a most solemn event that can ever happen. And that is the sower who goes out to sow.

Here we are simply told that a sower went forth to sow. We do not know anything at all about him. Except that he was a sower. His individuality seems to be swallowed up totally in his task as a sower.

[ 13 : 06 ] In a sense really he has lost his personal individual identity in his task. And his identity is now as a sower.

He has become for all a sower and nothing but a sower. How good that would be for me and you if in this world we were to be identified simply as the sowers of the gospel.

That's the way that people were to identify me and you. Simply as a sower of the good news. A sower of the gospel.

Maybe at times you feel discouraged. We may not have so big a hand as others so shall. And cannot sow quite so much at a time.

Nevertheless, go and sow with your smaller hand. In Ecclesiastes we are told, He that observes the wind shall not sow. And he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

[ 14 : 12 ] As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit. Nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child. Even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

In the morning he says, Sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand. For thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that.

Or whether they both shall be alike good. There are many things that may discourage us. The apathy of the day may discourage us.

The indifference that people have towards the gospel and towards Christianity may discourage us. Nevertheless, what the Bible says is, In the morning go out and sow, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.

For you know not what is going to prosper. Our responsibility is to sow the seed of the word. It is to sow the gospel.

[ 15 : 12 ] Whatever hostility there may be in our communities. Whatever hostility may be in our very homes. Against the gospel. And against Christianity.

Our responsibility is to God. And God tells us, Go and sow the seed. In the morning sow it. And in the evening withhold not thine hand.

It is God alone that gives the increase. What seed do we have? We have the good seed of the kingdom of God.

We have the word of God. In the letter to the Hebrews we read, For the word of God is living and active.

Sharper than any two-edged sword. Piercing to the division of soul and spirit of joints and of marrow. And discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[ 16 : 11 ] What is the significance of the two-edged sword? Well, the Romans used short double-edged swords. Because they were smaller and lighter.

It was easier for a soldier to carry for a long distance. And easier to handle such swords. And manoeuvre. Easier to manoeuvre in a battle. If you start looking, You'll find this phrase, for instance, When the apostle John received his vision of Jesus on the Isle of Patmos.

He said, In his right hand, He held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.

And his face was like the sun shining in full strength. Notice that this two-edged sword came out of the mouth of Jesus. Why would Jesus have a sword in his mouth?

Shouldn't the sword have been in his hand? Well, the reference there is to the word of Jesus. And that's the sword that we have to have in our own battle. In this world, in our own warfare.

[ 17 : 17 ] We have to have the sword of the word of God. The word of God piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.

And of the joints and marrow. And as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The emphasis is that this two-edged sword is sharp. Is there anything sharper? Is there anything that can truly penetrate so deep into the soul of man as the word of God? I'm sure there are many here this morning who can testify that it was a very sharp sword. The day that the word penetrated into their souls and into their minds and into their understanding. Into their very heart. The word can be a light which shines on the road that a man threads. So that one may see the path and that one may see any danger. Any danger which may be in his path. He who makes the word of God, has guided and marks its teachings, is in the right way. [ 18 : 34 ] He will clearly see the path. He will be able to mark the road in which he ought to go. And to avoid all those by-paths which would lead him or her astray.

He will see where those by-roads that turn off from the main road. He will see any obstruction which may line his path. He will see any cliffs that he may be near to. Which in a dark night he might fall over. It shows us how to follow the right and avoid the wrong way.

And man needs such a guide. And the word of God is such a guide. Now the lamp of the world is not the sun. But we bless God for the light shining us in a dark place. To guide us until the sun of righteousness shall come. And there will be no more need for the lamp. Where did he sow?

[ 19 : 36 ] Well he sowed in the open field. He did not keep the seed to himself. But he scattered it far and wide. His object was a very limited one.

He did not go forth to make the seed grow. For that was beyond his power. He simply went forth to sow. And our responsibility is to sow the seed.

Yes we are limited in one sense. Because we cannot make the seed grow. That is beyond our power. For it is God alone that can give the increase.

Not everyone is going to receive the seed with open arms. The same sun that melts the ice also bakes clay as hard as breaks.

Nevertheless the sower must go forth. And he must go forth with expectations. It is one of the things that we were taught as students in the college. We were taught that every time we went out with the gospel.

[ 20 : 45 ] To go out with expectation. And the sower as he goes out to sow the seed. He goes out with expectation. Sometimes people respond to the gospel.

As passengers respond to the instructions before take off from airport. Or at the pier in Stonaway. We are told what to do in case of emergency.

We are invited to listen. But I challenge you. How often we ignore those instructions. We are perhaps preoccupied in other conversations.

Or reading or staring out the window. Perhaps even dozing off. We don't listen to those instructions given to us on the plane or on the ferry.

Maybe we say to ourselves. We have heard those instructions before. And you know people treat the gospel in the same way. That announcement is dealing with life and death issues.

[ 21 : 48 ] And yet we ignore them. But no company would allow the message to be skipped. Simply because no one seems to bother or to listen. And so with the seed of the gospel.

We must not skip to sow the word. Simply because people can't be bothered to listen to it. The word may not be received.

But it still remains the same powerful word. And just as these companies will not skip the instructions they give.

Although they know that people are not listening. They're distracted. They're looking at other things. Maybe dosing off. Maybe today you are here. You are distracted. Maybe you're dosing off.

Maybe you want to put your head on the pew. And just dosing off. Still it is my responsibility to sow the seed. It is my responsibility to take the word of God to you.

[ 22 : 48 ] Because the word is still as powerful as it was. I cannot ignore giving you the instruction. I cannot ignore giving you the message.

I cannot ignore giving you the gospel. We're told that some of the seed fell by the wayside. Those who hear the word, especially the preaching of the word, but pay no attention.

Maybe that is due today. You take no interest whatsoever in the word that is preached. Sitting under word, your mind is taken up with other things.

And at the end of this service, you will go your way, knowing no more than when you came into the hearing of the word. You will just leave.

Not any better than when you came in. But may I tell you this. You will leave with a heart that has been hardened more than when you came in.

[ 23 : 50 ] In Hebrews, again, we read, For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, nor been mixed with faith in them that heard it.

There were none the better for it. The reason for this was because they did not receive the word by faith. They did not trust.

They did not commit themselves. There were mere hearing of the gospel. Mere hearers of the gospel. But the hearing of the gospel is not enough.

To profit from the gospel, it must be believed. It must be trusted. You must commit yourself to the Christ that the word brings before you.

You must see the incarnate word, Jesus Christ, through the written word. There is no church where scores of such people are to be found who are mere hearers of the word, but not doers.

[ 25 : 02 ] Sunday after Sunday, they allow the devil to snatch away the seat of the word. But feeling nothing, caring nothing, no interest in the gospel.

Is that a picture of yourself today? You feel nothing. You care nothing. You're just not interested in the gospel.

Maybe you've come here just to tick a box. I've been in church. Or maybe you've come here just to keep peace at home while I've gone to church.

Maybe you're here just so that people will see you, say what a good person that person is. But my friend, that is not enough. If the truth is that you feel nothing and care nothing and have no interest in the gospel, then you are in a very slippery path.

If you have no interest that Christ died and rose again, you know many die in that state and they are lost forever. And I'm sure that the pews here were filled with such people.

[ 26 : 10 ] And the truth is that they're lost. Some seed fell by the wayside. Some seed fell on stony ground. And here we find that the seed made temporary impressions.

Those who take pleasure in hearing the gospel, sometimes moved by the gospel, moved to tears by the gospel. They are not careless.

They are not inattentive. But sadly, what is true regarding such is that the old things have not passed away. Yes, the gospel on a Sunday makes an impression.

But what about Monday? Well, and there may be still slight impressions, but Tuesday, it's all gone. Some of the seed fell on thawny ground.

And to a certain extent, they obey the gospel. Their conscience are affected by it. Their affections are stirred up. They acknowledge that it is right and good and worthy.

[ 27 : 15 ] They may adopt some of the habits that the gospel commends, but they stay short of commitment, of full commitment to the gospel. Something appears to chain and fast, and they never get beyond a certain point.

Is that you today? You are here today, and you say, yes, the gospel is right. Yes, the gospel is good. Yes, the gospel is worthy. I try to live my life.

In accordance to what the gospel commends. But you never get beyond that point. And you stay at that point. What the gospel wants you to do is to commit yourself to Jesus Christ, to commit your life to Christ.

Some of the seed fell into good ground. And notice the distinction on all the others. It fell into the good ground. What happens?

The word of God exposes a person's innermost being. The word makes us to discover who we truly are.

[ 28 : 27 ] That we are depraved and hell-deserving sinners. That in us dwells no good things. That our lives have been spent contrary to the requirements and to the claims of God.

The word searches us out, and we see ourselves as lost, ruined, undone, helpless. Without God, without hope in the world.

God's word can penetrate to the heart of a person and causes a change. And that is why you find those hearing Peter's message responding where it is written for us.

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. Has the word of God ever made such an impression upon you that it was a cut to your very heart?

Has the word of God ever taken you to the place where you say, that's me. I'm undone. I'm ruined. I've got no hope for death.

[ 29 : 34 ] I have no hope for eternity. I am out of relationship with God. I have no peace with God. Has the word of God ever pushed you in such manner?

Has it penetrated as no word of man ever has into your uttermost being? Has it exposed the workings of your wicked heart?

Spurgeon preaching on this parable said, we are bound to preach the gospel. Whether man will hear it or whether they will forbear, let man's heart be what they may.

I am not loosened from my obligation to sow the seed on the rock as well as in the furrow, on the highway as well as in the ploughed field. The sower may be aware of hardened hearts.

The sower may be aware of hostile response. The sower may be aware of cornice and indifference among the hearers. But in this parable, the sower without to sow.

[ 30 : 39 ] And in this parable, the sower lost his crop three times. Yet he continued to sow the seed. And in the end, he reaps a great harvest.

So we must continue to sow the seed of the word, convinced of the inherent power that there is in God's word, that it shall not return unto him empty.

The parable ends with the good news that as we sow the gospel, that some people will believe that they will bear good fruit. God is faithful to his word.

And in the end, he will have his harvest. He will have his harvest. He had three quarters, bore no fruit.

But there was a quarter that brought forth fruit and joy to the sower of the seed. But there are, the parable tells us, there are three ways of hearing without profit.

[ 31 : 44 ] And only one way of hearing a right. There is only one mark of being a right-hearted hearer. And that is to bear fruit.

And what is the fruit? Well, there must be visible repentance. Sorry, sorrow over sin. The breaking of the heart over sin.

There must be a visible repentance. Another fruit, there must be a visible faith in Christ. A trust and a commitment to Christ.

And there must be a visible holiness of life. A hatred of sin. A desire after holiness.

Well, as we said, it brings before us not only different soils, different hearers. But the question for me and you today is, how do we hear?

[ 32 : 46 ] How do we hear? What class of hearers are you ranked under today? Will you not at least believe the words of Jesus Christ?

There may be many perplexing thoughts today going through your mind about the Christian life. Maybe the evidence around you is not very persuasive for you.

We're not perfect. There's an imperfect belonging to every Christian while he is in this world. And maybe you're judging Christianity on the imperfection of the saints, but they are striving towards perfection.

But the least thing you could do and the more honourable thing that you could do today is to believe and to trust and lean on the true words of Jesus Christ and seek to bring forth the fruit of

repentance, of faith, a desire for holiness, a desire to follow Jesus, a commitment to Jesus Christ. May the Lord bless our thoughts. Let us pray. Amen.