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[0:00] As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, if you've been a Christian for very long, maybe even if you haven't been a Christian for very long, you're probably familiar with what I think of as one of the most painful aspects of the Christian life.

And one of the most painful aspects of Christian community. I've often said that I believe that Christianity is a team sport. We need each other, and if that's the case, we can think of the Church as a team.

The painful thing that I'm talking about as we begin this morning, that I've seen again and again, is that sometimes people leave the team. When you find out that someone that you know, someone that you counted as a brother or a sister, is not following Jesus, that really hurts.

For me, as a pastor, not much hurts more than finding out that someone that I taught and cared for and did my best to disciple, is not walking with the Lord.

[1:37] That hurts, doesn't it? But it happens. Is there anyone here this morning who hasn't felt the pain?

I'm seeing someone that you thought was running the race with you drop out. I'm guessing not. It happens with some regularity.

How do we account for that? And how can that be avoided? What is the difference between those who continue to the end and those who don't?

I believe that those are questions that we can find the answers to in our Gospel passage for this morning, where we read about the parable of the sower. Here, Jesus is using imagery to illustrate what happens when the Gospel is proclaimed and when people hear it.

The proclamation of the Gospel, therefore, is like sowing seed. The range of responses to the Gospel end up illustrated by the kind of ground that the seed falls on in our parable.

[2:48] I would say that all of the wide range of responses can really be found in our text. The explanation of these responses carries a warning.

But I think it also should provide encouragement and comfort to believers at the same time. I want us to think about this range of responses together this morning as we look together at the parable of the sower.

So we'll start where Jesus does, with the parable, with the seed that is sown along the path.

Starting in verse 3 in our text, we read, He told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. I just have to say, it's a good thing that we get the benefit of hearing what this parable means, because it's not immediately obvious.

I'm not much of a farmer myself, so I would really struggle with this one. Jumping ahead to verse 19, Jesus explains, 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.

[4:12] This is what was sown along the path. So, let's ask, what does that look like in practice? Obviously, this is something that happens.

I have seen this happen more than a few times, I have to admit. Here's a great example of what that might look like. You share the gospel with someone, you even share it clearly, and you get to the end, and what do you hear from them as you're waiting for their response?

You hear, Well, I'm so happy that that works for you. Or you hear, Yeah, religion can be a good thing for those who are into that kind of thing.

Or maybe it looks like more hostile opposition. I don't think I have to describe what that looks like. As I think of the seeds sown along the path, I think of the range of reactions that I have seen when I have stood up to preach the gospel.

One of those reactions is what I think of what I call the spiritual blank stare. Anyone who's done any preaching is familiar with the spiritual blank stare.

[5:31] With the spiritual blank stare, a person has no idea what's being said. And here's the key ingredient. They don't really care to know what's being said. They don't care to find out.

In other words, it bounces right off. That's the seed sown along the path. Jesus moves on.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up since they had no depth of soil. When the sun rose, they were scorched.

Since they had no root, they withered away. What does Jesus mean by that? Jumping ahead to verses 20 and 21, here's what we read.

Jesus explains, As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while.

[6:36] When tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. I think that what Jesus is describing here is a kind of counterfeit, shallow faith.

I think many of us have seen the rocky ground play out in practice. It might look like this. Someone hears the gospel and reacts with enthusiasm.

That's all fine and good. The trouble is that it doesn't last. Why not? Well, because it's not rooted. It's shallow. Sometimes someone takes the attitude, Well, I'd like some kind of spiritual meaning in my life, so this sounds exciting.

Or maybe the attitude is, Heaven sounds like this really appealing thing. I'll sign up for this if it will get me there. Or, Well, this is what my friends and loved ones are into, and the kind of community and connection I find there is attractive.

[7:50] Or perhaps even more basically, You know, I kind of like this thing. It makes me feel good. If it stays limited to that, if it's not grounded in actually knowing Jesus, what happens?

You end up with a seed that's sown on rocky ground. Because inevitably, we're going to find out that being a Christian is not all fun and games. We're going to find out that the trials and tribulations that Scripture talks about are not a possibility, they are a guarantee.

We're going to find out that suffering is an inevitable part of the Christian life. We're going to find out, and this is going to depend on the culture we live in, how exactly this plays out.

We're going to find out that we're either going to face violent persecution for following Jesus, or at the very least, we're going to face fierce worldly opposition. And then the sun beats down, and what was planted gets scorched.

It pains me to say that I think that the seed sown on rocky ground is a particularly present danger for my generation. My generation entered adulthood in a culture in which orthodox, biblical Christianity is no longer a respectable thing.

[9:21] In fact, in many circles, it's not even regarded as something to be tolerated. And we've seen the result. I can't count the number of people my age I've known who used to profess faith in Christ, but now are not orthodox believers.

There's a lot of cultural pressure, especially among my generation, not to be an orthodox Christian. It's a reminder that being a Christian costs us something.

Trials will come, worldly respectability will be lost, but faith of the rocky soil isn't equipped to deal with that. Why not?

Because the faith of the rocky soil isn't rooted in Christ. Jesus moves on next to the seed sown among thorns, picking up in verse 7.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Jesus explains, as for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

[10:54] So what does that mean? I think the path, the seed sown among the thorns attitude can be kind of summed up like this. this gospel Christianity thing is fine.

I guess I'm in on that. But here's the thing you need to understand. This attitude says, I have a lot of important stuff going on in my life.

I have a lot on my mind. By the way, I thought that this Christianity thing was supposed to make my life easier. What gives with that? Well, you know what?

I tried it because I thought it would make my life easier and it didn't work. Or maybe it looks like professing faith in Christ, but then being lured away by whatever shiny new thing has our attention at the given moment.

That could possibly be the more pressing threat in a materialistic society like the one that we live in. Whether it's neglecting the gospel due to hardship or due to prosperity, the end result is the same.

[12:13] The person represented by the seed sown among thorns drops out of the race. God is the God who will be the God who will be the God when we consider all of this together, we can say that what we've seen so far is how many ways it can happen that the proclamation of the gospel does not take root and flourish.

So that's the bad news. It's good for us to know what to look out for. We're getting to the good news. We're about to talk about the good soil. Jesus says, other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.

And he explains, what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundred fold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

The good soil is the person who hears the gospel, who believes the gospel, and is transformed by the gospel.

The good soil is the person who is truly united to Jesus, and because they are united to Jesus, bears fruit. the good soil is the person who truly knows Christ, and trusts in him completely, who has received forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

[14:10] The good soil is the person who abides in Christ. as Jesus says in John chapter 15, Abide in me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

him. Jesus says, apart from him, we can do nothing, but in him we will bear much fruit through our union with him.

How does someone become good soil? That's a question. Think back to the first sermon I remember hearing on this passage. I was probably about ten years old at the time.

Why I remember this particular sermon I have no idea, because I was counting the ceiling tiles at the same time. But the preacher said at the end of the sermon, only God can make you into good soil, and he will do that if you ask him to.

[15:34] You see yourself in the various kinds of bad soil that we have talked about this morning. I pray that this is what you will take away. Reminded of what the great theologian and reformer Martin Luther said, Luther said this, to know Christ and to believe in him is no achievement of man but the gift of God.

If you have received the word, if you have believed it, if you have trusted in Christ, if you have been joined to him, in other words, if you are good soil, remember two things.

The first is that all of it is the free gift and grace of God. You and I, if we are good soil, didn't make ourselves into good soil, and we didn't plant the gospel in our own hearts.

Praise God for his grace to us. You didn't open your own blind eyes to the truth. that is the work and the power of God, and remember this morning that he did all of that because he loves you.

The second thing we should remember, now you're called to bear fruit. How do we do that? I think it's simple.

[16:55] Harkening back to John 15, I think we can say that we bear fruit by walking closely with Jesus day in and day out.

By abiding in him, by abiding in him, you can be sure that you will bear much fruit to his glory.

If by the grace of God you are good soil, here's what that means. It means that your life and all that you are belongs to Jesus Christ. Use your life to glorify and exalt the name of Jesus.

Something that the parable we've looked at this morning demonstrates to us is that there are so many ways for us to waste our lives.

We've looked at some of those. Falling away in the face of trouble. Great way to waste your life.

Making the cares of this life your God is a great way to waste your life.

[18:09] Pursuing riches and material things as your God. That, too, is a great way to waste your life.

life. Going to close with one final question this morning then in light of all of that. What is the one thing that is worth it?

What's the one way, and there is only one, to not waste your life? There's only one way, one thing that is worth it, and that is knowing Jesus and walking with him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.