

Chain Reaction

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[0 : 00] Well, this is the fourth session on this one parable, and as you may remember, it starts to look like this, that there is the road with the seed on it, and the birds come and get it, and then there is the seed which grows like this very rapidly, but it's got no root to hold it, and so it goes under.

And then there is the seed which grows there and gets started, but the thorns come and it just gets choked out, so it never gets a chance to grow.

And finally we've come to the good seed, well-rooted, good soil, and it grows, and it bears and bears and bears and bears and bears and bears.

These are all little fruits that you see growing up here. And that's where we're at today, talking about the fourth one. One of the commentators was talking about this parable and saying that there's a kind of pervasive sadness about it.

And the sadness derives from the fact that in three out of four cases, people don't come to some kind of profound and personal encounter with the Word of God.

[1 : 17] That's how it happens. And that's a great sadness. The picture that you need to be aware of, I think, is this, that there is this soil, and then there is the seed which is right there.

I trust you can all see that. And then there is the plow that comes along after the seed's there and plows it in.

So that what you have is a picture of the seed which is the Word of God, in the soil which is your life, of which there are four kinds.

You know, there's, I think, all four kinds in each of us. The plow comes along which are life's experiences. And the life experiences turns the soil over so that the seed is buried and should grow. And the sadness, I think, comes from the fact that life experiences, even if this plow goes very deep into people's lives, it's sometimes the seed never germinates.

[2 : 38] And so I want to just talk to you today about this business of a chain reaction. And the reason I call it a chain reaction is because in this instance, in the case of the fourth kind here, you get this tremendous return.

You know, if you got a little brochure from your local trust company saying, put your money with us and we'll give you 30, 60 or 100 fold return on it, they would do a good business, you know.

And most of us are looking for that kind of opportunity in life where you get that kind of overwhelming response. Something happens. The reason I thought of calling this story a chain reaction was because back in the days when they were still thinking about dropping a nuclear bomb to see what would happen, one of the fears they had is that once you had a nuclear explosion, it would set up a chain reaction and the whole of the planet would go boom, you know.

And so that ultimately, I guess there will be a chain reaction in response to the word of God so that the whole world will go boom spiritually.

And how that will happen and when it will happen, I don't know. But we're working on starting this afternoon. Just to go back and give you the picture so that you, again, can understand what I'm trying to get at here.

[4 : 16] The picture is that Jesus is talking to a great multitude of people and knows that within that great multitude of people, there's going to be a multitude of different responses.

And so he's talking to them and he's showing them what's going to happen with respect to the word of God, that is, that he's proclaiming or preaching to them.

But let me just illustrate this to you this way. You see, if I set myself up here as a preacher or a teacher, I say, now I want you to look at this because this is what I'm trying to explain to you over here.

Now, the difference between that and Jesus being a teacher and saying to you, listen, that the object of Jesus' teaching is always himself.

And I think you really got to get clear on that. When Jesus is talking, he's not saying there is the truth.

[5 : 32] He is essentially saying, I am the truth. And that's why lots of people dismiss him. Nobody can say that. You know, and that's why they, but that's what he does.

We had a breakfast study this morning and it was about the man who was paralyzed and carried by four of his friends up to the roof of the house, let down through the roof into the presence of Christ. There he was lying, paralyzed, and Christ said to him, your sins are forgiven. Which I think is wonderful. But, you know, who wants their sins forgiven?

I'm paralyzed. Can't you see that? Well, I, uh, that isn't even the issue. And, uh, but as Jesus goes on and deals with the crowd of people that were pushing in around him, he points out to them, look, the purpose of this is that you might know that the Son of Man, that was himself, has the power on earth to forgive sins.

They came back and said to him, nobody can forgive sins but God only. And Jesus said to them, right on. You know, that's right.

[6 : 52] Now you're beginning to see. Now, I, it's, it's much more subtle than that in the story, but that's what it is. Because when Jesus talks about the word of God, he's talking about himself.

When he talks about the kingdom of God, and says, I want you to pray for the coming of the kingdom, he's also saying to them, the kingdom has come, and here I am.

Now, he said, the kingdom may be very small and very insignificant in your mind, but the kingdom has come, and the kingdom will come.

And the continuity between the kingdom that we encounter first in the despised and rejected person of Jesus Christ is ultimately the kingdom in which he will be exalted and glorified.

That's, that's how it's going to work. And that's, that's why Jesus tries to tell them how important it is that they encounter this, this word of God.

[7 : 58] Now, one of the difficult things about this terrible that we've run into before is this. You know, where it says that hearing, they will not discern and seeing, or hearing, they will not understand, and seeing, they will not discern.

He tells them that that's, that's right at the heart of his teaching. Now, I think what it, what it means, and again, I, I tried to deal with this in the first session we had on this, but I think what, what, what Jesus is trying to point out to them is that the reason that people miss out on the kingdom is because it's too close to them.

And when he says this to them, I think he's pointing out to them that, that the reality of the kingdom is, is right there.

So that lots of people, as he, as he explains to this group, lots of people will hear this parable, but they won't make the connection.

They won't know what it's about. So he told us about the seeds, and he told us about the sowers, and it's a lovely picture, and you could understand why, where he was, and what he was talking about.

[9 : 19] It was a very apt illustration. I'm not sure what it was an illustration of, but it was very good, and it's easy to remember. But Jesus said to them, no, no, the thing is that you will see it, but you will not perceive it.

You will hear it, but you will not understand. You won't get the clue. Now, that, you see, I think is going to become particularly relevant for us when we come to that great day when we all stand before the judgment seat of God, which, as I've tried to persuade you in the past, is a great moment in our lives.

I mean, it's a great dignity and honor. You know, you won't not just, you're not just dismissed. You are an exalted being who ultimately stands before God.

That's a great honor that is done to you. But one of the great things in life is to give some thought to preparing for that moment. Now, you see, what's going to happen there is you're going to be asked whether you understood, and you say, well, I've heard all that stuff, but it didn't mean anything to me.

Too bad. I saw that, but I didn't think it meant anything. And I guess one of the great religions of the world is our carefully preserved ignorance.

[10:53] You know, that I did the best I knew how, but I was careful not to know how. You know. And so nobody can blame me.

And Jesus, in a sense, takes the ground out from under that argument. Because the universal human experience is we know a whole lot better than we are.

And that's the reality of our lives. You don't have to talk to anybody for very long to find out that that's there. You can't say, I did my best.

I did all that I knew how. But because you know a lot more than you'll admit. So Jesus says that one of these four things will happen when you are confronted with the word of God, which is Christ. He said, this will happen. Satan will pluck the seed away, because that is his purpose, that you should not encounter the word of God. Your response in the second instance may be too superficial and not radical enough.

[12:04] That is, you grow quickly, but you have no root. And a lot of people have had that kind of encounter with the gospel. And you see tremendous enthusiasm, tremendous openness, tremendous excitement.

This is great. But it lasts about four weeks. And then the sun comes out and beats down, and the whole experience just evaporates.

The third thing is that it's crowded out. And you remember last week, I went through the three kinds of thorns that crowded out. One of them is anxiety, which cripples you.

Inappropriate anxiety. And, you know, A.A. Milne wrote a poem about a sailor. There was an old sailor my grandfather knew who had so many things that he wanted to do that whenever he thought it was time to begin, he couldn't because of the state of anxiety he was in.

No. Well, that, you know, the thing you know needs to be done, you can't do because you're crippled by anxiety.

[13:12] That's one of the thorns that grows up, and you nourish it. And the second thorn that grows up is the, you know, the riches, the deceit of riches, the creation of a personal pleasant illusion, so that you make your life into a personal pleasant illusion, and you escape as much as possible any encounter with reality.

You know, that's why the plow has to come along. Boom. And hit hard in order to open up the possibility in your life of encountering that.

Anxiety, the creation of a personal pleasant illusion, and then the intense emotional assertion called desire. I had a lovely young couple come in to see me, and they were obviously very much in love with each other, and they were very thoughtful and very profound, and they said to me, we want to get married, but we know that it's a very serious step to take, and we don't think we should do it for five years.

And I said, good luck. And, uh... No, no. I mean, it was very difficult to explain to them that the way they were thinking about it and the way they were feeling about each other was going to be in contradiction, and they were going to get carried away, and so they needed to make plans accordingly.

And I think that's really what Jesus is saying here, is that intense emotional assertion can move in and wreck the whole scene. So you've got to be able to handle it, because most of us are intense emotional people, at least at times.

[15:08] And that's one of the... A lot of people, I think, think that's the great reality in life, but it often is the great reality for a few minutes, but not for very long.

I received... You know, I hate doing this to the publishing industry, but they're asking for it, I'm sure. The Globe and Mail report on business.

Now, I would say that in this magazine, they call it a report on business, it actually is a seed catalog for growing thorns, you know, because...

There's a lovely one here about a certain kind of whiskey, which is a noble blend, so rare that only small quantities are available.

Ha ha. Each bottle is numbered and registered to certify its authenticity.

[16:20] Ah. It can also be used as aftershave. No. No. No. No. There are articles in it that heighten your anxiety because the whole world in which you live is going to change before you have time to get home tonight.

That's one of the things it tells you. It creates illusions with bottles of whiskey and terribly relaxed people in it, who, in the light of everything it says, shouldn't be relaxed even for a minute.

And then it excites your desire for things that would be most inappropriate for you to have. And that's the world we live in, and that's why the thorns come and choke out the seed, which is the Word of God.

Well, that's what Jesus tells people. But then he says, the ultimate reality on which the kingdom is based is that there is good soil, and there is seed going into that good soil, and it's going to crowd everything else out of your life by such an amazing return of 30, 60, and 100-fold, that that's going to be the thing that grows up in your life.

Now, I have a very good friend, and my good friend works for a construction company. And last night, my good friend came home and dumped in our backyard about 200 feet of half-inch steel cable in 20 to 40-foot lengths.

[18 : 06] And said to me, I thought you might be able to use these. So I am now, from the garbage of a local construction site, the owner and proprietor of about 200 feet of steel cable.

Now, if any of you are interested, see me after. But this really was quite a loving and thoughtful gift. It's just that I can't imagine what I'm going to do with it. And he thought it would be very useful to me. And I'm sure he's right. It's just that I can't imagine how.

And I tell you that because I think that when Christ makes known to us the Word of God, we receive it in much the same way.

Thank you very much indeed. You know, but what am I going to do with it? It's going to, it's something I just don't know how to handle.

[19 : 31] I don't know where to turn with it. I don't know how to use it. I don't know how it's going to apply. I don't know what's going to happen. Because God has, in a sense, put in our front yard this gift, which is the Word of God, which is Jesus Christ.

And we say, well, I can't really relate to that. And it's, I think, for that reason that, that, you know, Jesus, when he's explaining this to people, he says, there is buried in the good soil of your heart the seed, which is the Word of God.

And so, at first, you don't notice. It's buried. It's gone. It's disappeared. You plowed it under. And only slowly will it begin to germinate.

And only slowly will it begin to take root. And only slowly will it break through the surface. And slowly, it will respond. And in due course, it will bear fruit.

And that fruit will really be what your life is all about. It will, it will come to mean something. it will come to mean everything.

[20 : 55] It will come to be what your life is all about. You know, obituaries are very difficult things, you know, because what you've got to do is you've got to hunt hard to put together a half paragraph of things which make somebody's life significant.

what Christ is saying, the significance of your life is to be found in receiving the word of God into your heart, allowing it to be plowed deeply into the soil of your heart, allowing it to germinate there and to grow there and to bear fruit there.

And that's, you know, that's what's to happen. And that's what Christ wants to happen. And that's what he purposes should happen in all of our lives.

And, and I think that, that, it is the amazing grace of God that that is his purpose towards us and that our, our deep and personal concern as we confront the person of Jesus Christ is to allow that seed to be sown in our hearts and to know that it will bring forth fruit abundantly.

well, we'll carry on next week. Let me say a prayer. Our God, for the deep understanding you have of the hearts of each one of us and for the wonderful way that you have made yourself known to us in the immediacy of your word in the person of Jesus Christ and that you have plowed this into our lives by the experiences of our lives.

[23 : 20] We ask that indeed your word may bring forth fruit in our lives. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen. Amen.