

The Mystery of Gospel Sowing and Growing

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[0:00] Young folk, any here tonight, the young people and also those who may be online. So you know it's very, very important that we try to help one another. It's one of the things that we should do in life.

People will often say that the day we're living in is a very selfish day and that people by and large are out just for themselves. But I don't think that's true. It might be true with some people, but there's still an awful lot of good and an awful lot of people are kind and helpful and they do good things to and for one another.

And it's obviously something I would hope that you would pray, that the Lord will help you to be, when you're young, to be doing good for others. And it's amazing when you do good to others that you will often find that others will do good to you.

Now, there's a big word, and it doesn't matter at all whether you remember what this word is. And it's called, and I don't even know if I'm saying it right, it's symbiosis or symbiosis.

And what that means very simply is that there are two different things come together, two very opposite things, things that you would never put together. And these two things come together and they work for one another, for the good of one another.

[1:25] And I was reading recently, and it's where I saw this word, because I didn't know that word, and so that's why I had to write it down. But now I know the word and I can understand what it means.

And what it was talking about was that there is a bird. They call it the crocodile bird or the Egyptian plover.

And it does something that I don't believe that anything else would do. Because supposing you were on a riverbank, supposing you were in Africa, you were away on holiday somewhere where there are crocodiles.

And you're by the riverbank, and this crocodile comes out of the swamp or out of the river and decides to lie on the bank of the river and have a wee spot of sunbathing.

I don't believe that for a million pounds that you would go down and touch that crocodile, pet it, and maybe scratch its teeth and try and open its mouth.

[2:27] I don't think you would even dare do that. Because you and I know that one snap from the crocodile, one snap, and that's it.

Well, this bird, when the crocodile comes out from the river and lies down at the riverbank, this bird flies down and it walks on the back of the crocodile and it starts pecking.

Little parasites or little things that are stuck in the back of the crocodile. And then it pops down and it runs along to the mouth of the crocodile.

And when the crocodile sees this little bird, it does the most amazing thing. It opens its jaws. Now, I don't know that anybody else would dare do that because you wouldn't put your head or your mouth or your hand or anything in.

This bird pops in to the mouth of the crocodile. And it starts taking stuff out from between the teeth of the crocodile.

[3 : 36] Bits of food or leeches or whatever that might be there. So that the bird is actually getting its own little tuck in. It's eating.

It's getting things for itself. And the crocodile is getting its teeth cleaned. So that's what this word means where two totally different things come together and they actually end up working for one another.

So it's an amazing thing. So that's why we see that it's so important that we are working for one another.

And you know, the church, in a sense, is full of people like that. Very, very different people. Because that's what the Lord does. We're not all the same type of people.

We have all kinds of different backgrounds from different homes, different this, different that. We're all different.

[4 : 37] And yet God is able to use us all so that we're able to work together. And it's one of the most wonderful things. So you ask the Lord to, first of all, to make you somebody who's willing to work and to help people and to do good to people.

But also ask that you might become part of the family of God so that you will be used in all the different things that are going on. Let's say the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Amen. Let us read God's word now from Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 4. Again he began to teach beside the sea.

[6 : 07] 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 and the land. And he was teaching them many things in parables.

And in his teaching he said to them, Listen, 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 thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into the good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing, and yielding thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

And he said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

[7 : 16] And he said to them, To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God. But for those outside, everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

And he said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word.

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. These are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

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.

[8:33] 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.

And he said to them, Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed and not on a stand? For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest, nor is anything secret except to come to light.

If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. And he said to them, Pay attention to what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

For to the one who has, more will be given. And from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed in the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows.

[9:45] He knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts a sickle in, because the harvest has come.

And he said, With what can we compare the kingdom of God? Or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.

Yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

With many such parables, he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Amen. And may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. We turn again now to just, I want us to consider from verse 26, the parable of the growing seed.

[11:12] And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed in the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows.

He knows not how. The earth produces by itself first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

Now, as we know, this parable, the parable of the sower, which is at the beginning of the chapter, is one of the best-known chapters, certainly one of the best-known parables of Jesus.

It's the longest, certainly when we take in the interpretation of the parable as well. Now, as we know, Jesus tells these parables not just as stories with spiritual truths, but they are there as kind of mirrors to our own lives in order that we may kind of see where we're at ourselves to try and understand just who we are in the face of God's word and God's truth.

Now, we could say that every single Lord's Day seed is being sown. Whenever we open God's word, whenever we read the Bible, God's word, seed is being sown.

[12:47] Anytime that the word of God is preached, like as it is just now, this seed is being sown. Every funeral service, every wedding service, every time anybody opens the Bible privately to look at the word, then again we see that this word is being sown.

And the beauty of it is that God's word will do its own work. God has promised that the seed will eventually, the seed that he desires will eventually bear fruit.

And it won't return to him empty. This is not just a New Testament concept. We find that in the Old Testament as well because it tells us, for instance, in Isaiah, God's word says, it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Now, at the beginning, we see in the parable of the sword, just going to look at that very, very briefly because that's not what we're focusing on tonight, that there were the four different responses to God's word. And in a sense, every time God's word is preached or every time that we come to God's word, one of these four things happens.

And we see that the first is that the sower sowed the seed, that the birds of the air came down and they picked away the seed.

[14:12] And Jesus likens that to Satan and he says, Satan is always around and about when God's word is being sown. And that he is the one, the great enemy of our souls and he doesn't want us to hear, he doesn't want us to concentrate, he doesn't want us to think on God's word.

He will do anything and everything to distract us and take us away from the truth so that we don't focus upon God's word, which is the most important thing of all. So Satan will do anything and everything in his power so that God's word won't find a ready soil in your heart, the soil of your heart.

So we've also got to, it's one of the things that we should be praying about is that we, that our hearts will be responsive to God's word. And then we see that the second one is what we term the stony ground hearer.

And here's somebody, here's God's word and God's word seems to go into their heart right away. But then it's as if nothing happens from it.

Yes, to begin with, it's like an immediate response and you say to yourself, well this person's really impressed with the gospel. There's a response in their life, a response in their heart, but it doesn't last.

[15:29] It's just like a fleeting emotional response because the seed hasn't really gone down. It hasn't taken root because it's all rocky soil and it just can't get, can't take root.

And Jesus said those are like the hearers, these people that they hear the word but as soon as the heat of the day, as soon as the trials of life come, they give up, they turn away.

And maybe there are many of you tonight and you've followed the Lord for a long time and you've often been tempted to turn away, to go back. But you haven't, you can't, you won't.

And it's very interesting that it's often the same trial, the same type of trial that will make those who aren't really rooted in Jesus turn away.

The same type of trial will make the true Christian hold faster. And then the third type of hearer we see is where the seed is sown among thorns.

[16:32] And we know what happened, that sprung up, everything looked good, the soil seemed to be pretty good, but the thorns strangled, they choked the seed so that it wasn't able to grow, couldn't bring any fruit.

And Jesus says there's a lot of people like that. And things seemed to go quite well to begin with, but then all the cares of this world and the love of riches and all these things that the world offers so much and all that we're caught up with so much happening in the world, and it strangles, it stifles, it squashes out the life.

And again, we have to be very careful that that sort of thing doesn't happen to us as well, where the good seed, the cares of this life take away the good seed out of our heart, and as it were, where everything gets choked.

You know, the world will offer you everything, but the world won't leave you anything at the end of the day. Anything and everything that it gives you, it takes back. But the beauty about Jesus is that what he gives you, he doesn't take back.

When he gives you himself, it's forever. And so it's so important that we focus upon Jesus. But then we have the final sower, and we find there that this seed, it's sown on good ground.

[18:00] And of course, there's a difference, and these are the people who respond to the word. They take the, receive the word gladly. It goes into their heart, into their life.

These are people who've come to see their need of Jesus. And can I say tonight, if you've never really seen your need of Jesus, ask him tonight to show you, to make that need known to your heart.

Because you know, the gospel, unless you really see a need, the gospel doesn't make too much sense. It's only when we begin to understand our need before God that the gospel really, really begins to come together and make sense.

So you ask the Lord, if you haven't already seen that, Lord, help me to see my need. Help me, Lord, to see that I do need you. Now, as we say, this is the seed that fell on good ground and where they received the word, this is the type of passion that Jesus is talking about from verse 26.

And the Lord shows us that there's a very clear parallel between the natural world and sowing in the natural world and the sowing and what takes place in the spiritual world.

[19:23] So, when you think about it, the first thing that we'd say is that the sowing of seed into the ground is a fairly unspectacular thing.

It's a very normal thing. It's very ordinary. It's no big deal. And in fact, you might prepare ground, sow seed, maybe pull the ground over a wee bit, maybe you will, maybe you don't.

But you know, somebody coming along, they might not be too sure whether seed was sown there or not. They might say, I think he's going to sow seed there by the looks of it. Or maybe he has sown seed.

I wonder if somebody's going to sow. You just don't know. So there's nothing particularly spectacular about it at all. And you know, so it is with the good seed of God as it's being sown into people's hearts and lives.

Because sometimes when that seed is being sown, everything is very unspectacular. And sometimes it can, the seed can be sown when the seed is taking root when most people present might think that there's absolutely nothing happening.

[20:36] Sometimes this is what exactly what happens. And it can be during a service and during a sermon and the minister's preaching and people are looking at their watches and they're saying, boy, it's dry as dust tonight.

We should hurry up. I'm absolutely getting nothing for my soul. And while that is being said and that is being thought and that might be the general feeling there, at that very time the good seed is being sown into somebody's heart.

God is at work. Now we know that there have been occasions and times under the preaching of God's word when the very opposite has been through and where people are so aware of the power and the presence of God and great things have happened.

But sometimes it's so unspectacular and that nobody would know for one moment just what was going on. And so that's one of the things and that's why we should always be slow to assess and slow to judge about how things are.

And the thing is that when the good seed goes into the soul, into the seed, it doesn't always bear fruit right away. Sometimes it's like as if it's lying dormant for quite some time and at the appropriate time that word will take root.

[22:00] Sometimes it happens right away. But you know, from this, what we would say fairly unspectacular growing, the beginning, and this gradual growth, amazing things happen.

You take, for instance, and I suppose it's one of the clearest illustrations of this, is the day that Spurgeon was converted. Remember how because of a snowstorm he went into the church and the minister couldn't get through and a layman or an elder took the service and he just couldn't, he wasn't getting on at all and he could do little more than repeat the text.

Which was, look unto me and be ye saved. All the ends of the earth for I am God. And Spurgeon said, I heard and I looked and I believed.

Little did that man know at that time that one of the greatest preachers ever was going to be converted under what many people would have said was a really poor sermon.

But the good seed was taken and went down into that heart. And we all know that in God's hands Spurgeon was used in his preaching for the salvation of a vast number of people.

[23:20] And so this is the way that God's word works. It's a gradual growth. And the work of grace in itself is mysterious.

The whole thing is so mysterious. And we get the same parallel from planting a seed. Because when you plant something it, as we said, it isn't just that it's unspectacular but nothing seems to be happening so often.

Supposing you plant something there's no point in taking a chair and saying you know something, I'm not going to shift from here until I see this grow. It doesn't work like that. You could sit there all day and you'd say to yourself, oh, nothing.

You could sit there for days and you'd be saying, maybe then very eventually this little tiny shoot might begin to appear. But if you went away for a month and came back, then you would see the growth.

And it's often like that too in God's kingdom. Because sometimes the seed goes down, goes into the heart, into the soul, and nothing appears. And you know there are times that people have, particularly young people, have tried to get away from the influence of the gospel.

[24:38] And I'm sure you know people, you know them fairly well, people who have gone as far away as possible to avoid the gospel. People have emigrated, people have joined the army, they've gone to these kind of extremes, and that's been at the back of why they've done what they did was to try and get away from the Christian upbringing that they had, and to remove these thoughts from their mind.

But it didn't work because the good seed had gone into their heart. And in due time, God's Spirit applied that truth that they had heard many years earlier.

God began to work in their soul. And so there was this growth began to take place. And that should be a great encouragement to all of us.

with regard to witnessing, to living for the Lord. Because, you know, we can get very downbeat and frustrated by it. And sometimes you say to you, is it worth it?

What have I seen? You know, sometimes you could be a Sunday school teacher, you could be a youth leader, you could be involved in all the youth work throughout the years.

[25:51] Maybe you've given years and years of your life into that type of service. Maybe you're somebody who has been involved in every form of outreach that's ever taken place. And you say to yourself, you know, I don't really see much.

I wish I could get some clear evidence. But, you know, you and I don't know exactly what God is doing within people's lives. Only the great day will reveal it.

And I believe that we're all in for surprises when we see what God has actually done and the part that you've had to play along the way.

Because so often we think we're not doing anything. Or what have I done that's of any lasting good? And yet God will one day show you, no. Remember this, remember that, because Jesus tells us that on that great day that Jesus is going to tell them that they did this, that, and the next thing, and he's going to say, when did we do that?

And Jesus said, in as much as you have done it to one of the least of my brethren, you've done it unto me. So God's measurement of things is very different often to ours.

[27 : 08] Again, you just look at the way the gospel grew under the Lord Jesus Christ. He started with a little band of twelve.

And look at where the Christian faith is today. You think of Pentecost where thousands came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you look at the history of the church, the growth, on it goes.

It doesn't get a lot of publicity, but it's happening. Millions and millions and millions worldwide coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It all comes from the tiny little seed that is sown into our hearts. You ask that the Lord would do that for you tonight. We're born again in a moment, but the growth is ongoing.

There's first, that's what it tells us here, that first of all, there is the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. There's a development.

[28 : 11] You know, we've always got to remember when a person is young in the faith, just like a little plant or whatever it is, it's tender. We've always got to be gentle and careful. We're not talking necessarily about a person's age numerically, but their age in following the Lord.

We've always got to be careful, because often people are tender in these early years, but then there's a growing maturity eventually until the time when it's ripe. And it's here that again we don't understand, because it tells us in verse 29, but when the grain is ripe at once, he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.

And here's the big, I suppose, question we often have to ourselves, one which we can never answer. And sometimes we look at Christians and we say to ourselves, oh my, they are really ripening.

But sometimes we don't notice, but God has seen. And God often puts in the sickle, and we're left bereft down here. God but there's no being bereft in glory or for the one that is taken.

Because God is wise, God knows what's best, and he, remember, is the great harvester. And at the end of the day, that's what it's all about.

[29 : 34] We're so obsessed with this life and what this life produces and what this life does, but it's looking to the life that is to be. And this is all a preparation for that.

And so, this is what it's about. And the great question we always have to ask ourselves is this, am I ready? Supposing the harvester comes tonight, am I ready to go to be with the Lord?

I've told this story before, and you probably remember it, but it kind of demonstrates just what we have here. Years ago when we lived in Calanish, and we had a few sheep, and my father and I had cut the grass, we were cutting hay to have for the winter.

And we were working all afternoon and we were going to go back out at night to try and get it done because the weather was decent. And when we went in for tea, my mother was saying, you know, she said, I sat down for a little before tea, and I fell asleep.

And she said, I dreamt that I was in this place in Skye, a little village, well, it's near Kilmure, and Kilmaloog, and there's a tiny wee offshud in there.

[30 : 56] And there was a lady there, my mother was very friendly with, Mary, Mary McLeod. She said, I was in Mary's house, and she said, Mary, and she said to my father, the two of you were standing at the door, and she said, I went out to the door, and she said, everything was golden, and there was a golden harvest, and she said, then this golden reaper came, and she said, then I woke, and I just said, oh, well, you had that dream because you saw us, we were working out and gathering sheaves, and that, but my father, good dad, she didn't know, he said, either Mary or I are going to die, he said, I've heard of this before, so we went back out, and I kept looking at my dad, I would say, oh, don't you lift that, I was kind of worried, something, you know, but he didn't seem over, he seemed a wee bedadgeted in the house, but because he was absolutely convinced that one of them was going to die, and anyway, we were working, going on, just kind of getting later, because we were trying to get it done, and my mother shouted to us, and went over, and she said,

I've just had a phone call from this woman's husband, Willie, to say that Mary passed away really suddenly, just sitting in the chair, and my mum asked what time, and it was the time she had the dream, and you know, in a sense, it was a, it always stuck with me, but it was a little glimpse of there is a golden harvest taking place, and there is a golden reaper coming, and that's the important thing, that we are ready to go, and I often thought about it about my dad, and I was saying, well, he didn't seem too concerned, because he was absolutely convinced, that either himself, or this lady, was going to die that night, and yet he just went back out, and carried on as normal, and I was saying to myself, that's an example of being ready, when he knew that either himself or this lady would pass away, are we that ready?

I hope so, we can only be ready by looking and trusting in Jesus. Lord our God, we pray to bless us, we ask that we may indeed look to the great harvester, the one who rules over all things, we pray, Lord, that you will make us ready in our hearts and our lives, for when that time comes, when we will have to go home, we pray that you will be with each one of us, and that you will keep us safe, that you will guide us throughout life, because we need guidance, so often we don't know what to do, there's often so many doors and ways before us, but we pray that you lead us in the right way, pray to bless the fellowship tonight, again, we pray your blessing on David and James as he interviews him, thanks again for him and ask that he'll be encouraged in his time here, watch over us then and do us good, take us to our home safely, we pray, in Jesus' name we ask all, Amen.

We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 126, 126, and this is from the Scottish Psalter, page 419, in Zion's bondage, God turned back as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody, they among the heathen said, the Lord great things for them hath wrought, the Lord hath done great things for them, when joy to us is broad, as streams of water in the south, without bondage, Lord, recall, who sow in tears a reaping time, of joy and joy they shall, that man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing, shall return, Psalm 126, when Zion's bondage, God turned back,

God turned back, as men of the dream knew her we, then filled with laughter was our life, our tongue with melody, they among the heathens, said the Lord, great things for them hath wrought, the Lord hath done great things for us, when joy to us is drawn, as streams of water in the sea our

[36 : 27] God is Lord reborn, whose swollen tears are reaping time, more joy enjoy, and joy they shall, that man who bearing precious seed, in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing shall return now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.