

## Mark 4

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[ 0 : 00 ] Chapter 4 I'm particularly focusing on the parable of the sower.

At verse 9 we read, And he said, Jesus said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And before we seek to open these words, let us again bow our heads in prayer.

We thank thee, Lord, that thou hast proved to be the help of the helpless, the one who gives grace in all our times of need.

And truly we feel this a time of particular need, as we stand before the glorious and inspired word of God.

And give us spiritual insight, that we may understand it. And give us grace to hear it in the depths of our heart and being.

[ 1 : 18 ] And give us grace to receive it and embrace it. And from this moment forward to seek to live by it.

We thank thee for thy word. And that the entrance of thy words gives light. We pray for thy blessing upon each one of us as we gather around the world now.

Remember every individual here and every family represented. Remember those who aren't able to be with us in thy providence, who are ill and laid aside, or are held back for some other reason.

Bless them, we pray. And remember, we ask, all thy servants who stand to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ today, to the ends of the earth.

Bless them richly, that thy kingdom may come, and that thy glory may be seen in this world.

Remember these parts of the world, that are full of turmoil and strife, with wars and bloodshed, and hatred, seeming to rule the attitude and outlook of so many.

[ 2 : 46 ] We pray that the peace of the gospel may prevail upon these parts of the world, upon individuals, that they may love the Lord, and love their neighbour as themselves.

Go before us now, cleansing every sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we see that the Lord, in this particular chapter, as was his want, he was teaching the people with parables, by parables.

And the word preached makes different impressions on different people. The same sermon can be most enriching to one individual, whereas somebody else listening to the same message is completely unmoved, and goes away, the same as he or she came.

We see that, in this particular parable, the Lord uses the picture of a sower going out to sow. And as he sows his seed, the seed falls on different kinds of soil.

And I believe the Lord is here telling us that even under the same preaching, there are different kinds of hearts, different kinds of soul, soil, if I might use that expression, before him.

[ 4 : 36 ] There may be people in the congregation who are wayside hearers, people in the congregation who have their soul like the stony ground, people also who have a soul like the ground full of thorns, and people in the congregation whose soul is good ground, into which the seed falls and becomes fruitful.

people. Now, the results of hearing the gospel depends on the condition of the heart or the soul of the hearer.

Some would be willing to blame the preacher for maybe uninteresting sermons or sermons that aren't relevant to my particular situation.

little is ever heard of the hearers.

What are they like? Criticism of the pew is very, very rare. But criticism of a preacher is something that we hear often enough.

[ 5 : 56 ] We hear people coming away from a sermon saying, how did he get on? Well, that's a fine question. But I could ask, how did you get on?

How did the message impact your mind, your heart, your life? Well, that's the kind of area the Lord is here dealing with.

He's talking about different kinds of soil, the same seed. The word of God is preached, but it bears fruit only in one particular type of soil, the good soil.

So I was able to say two or three words on each of these four different kinds of soils, four different kinds of people this morning. First of all, then, as this preacher or this man who sows the seed goes out, some of the seed falls on the wayside.

Now, wayside hearers, who are they? Well, I suspect that they are a most numerous class of hearers, those who attend gospel ordinances, who don't go to church with a determination to get to know the Lord and to magnify his name and to come away from church invigorated to serve the Lord more and better.

[ 7 : 34 ] They are people who come, maybe as a matter of course, maybe because it's the kind of thing that their family have always done, come to church, back again, following a kind of routine of that nature and coming to hear the gospel is part and partial of that general routine of life.

It doesn't mean much more to them than that. But having said that, they come and the seed of the gospel, the word of God, falls upon their mind.

falls upon their hearing. And what do we see happening here? Well, we see that when this floor went out, the seed fell on the wayside.

And what immediately happened? It says here in verse 15, when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

it's a very, very wonderful book written by John Bunyan called The Holy War.

[ 8 : 54 ] And he's talking, among other things, in that book about the town of man's soul and how Satan sits at the ear gate of man's soul.

soul. So that what man hears from the gospel, Satan is ready to take it away so that the gospel will not influence that soul.

And so it is here. Satan immediately comes and takes away the word. Satan, it means the accuser. Satan comes and he sits at your ear as you're hearing the gospel and he accuses. Whom does he accuse? He accuses God.

And he says to you, surely you're not taking this word literally. Surely you're not taking this word to heart. It's been proved long ago that the Bible has things that are contrary to each other and you cannot take the Bible really as a rule of life.

[ 10 : 04 ] You better just forget about it and live your life apart from the Bible and Satan is at that work all the time. He seeks to take away the seed of the word because he knows that the entrance of God's words into your mind, into your heart, into your life would bring the light of God in and Satan is the prince of darkness and he wants to maintain that darkness in your soul.

Satan tells you well even if the Bible is true, really you're too young to accept what the Bible is saying.

Religion is for old people, religion is for people who are dying, religion is for people who really have nothing else to live for.

You've got plenty to live for, you've got your whole life ahead of you, you're younger and you're strong and healthy, really it's too early for you to think about these things.

So the seed falls upon that hard ground and immediately Satan comes and takes it away. Is that the way you find yourself?

[ 11 : 24 ] Going away from the house of God just as you came? Well the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword and when it enters into your heart it divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow and is the discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

It does its work once it enters the soul but Satan doesn't want that to happen. In the directory of public worship and in the catechism we are told how we should come to attend the house of God and it says that we should come with diligence, preparation and prayer.

every time we come to the house of God we should go on our knees ask the Lord go with me open my ears, protect my ears from Satan that he may not break through and take away the word that I'm hearing.

May the word of God be beneficial to me for eternity. So those who are the ways I'd hear it didn't bear any fruit unto holiness at all.

Secondly, he talks about some seed falling on rocky ground. Now this rocky ground it's evidently not ground that's just full of rocks and stones, stones, but rather it's a kind of a thin veneer of earth on top of solid rock.

[ 13 : 14 ] You see this in various parts of our own island. You find outbreaks of rock around it there is just a thin layer of earth but underneath that layer of earth it's solid rock and nothing can penetrate it.

That's the kind of picture we have here. rocky ground. They are the ones who hear the word immediately receive it with joy and have no root in themselves but enter for a little while and then when tribulation and persecution comes they immediately fall away.

The stony ground hear us. Isn't it interesting that they respond to the word? When they hear the word they immediately receive it with joy.

There are some people and they love to hear the diction of the Bible. They love to hear the way the words flow together.

Some people love to hear the history of the Old Testament. Some people love to hear of the sufferings of Christ and they have a feeling for him as he suffers upon the cross, as the soldiers spit upon him, as the soldiers plant a crown of thorns and put the crown on his head, as he is crucified between two thieves and people have such sympathy for the Lord Jesus as a man who is suffering at the hands of evil men.

[ 14 : 58 ] and it's as if that has an impact upon their emotions and upon their heart. They receive the word with joy.

Maybe it's the music of the singing of the Psalms. People are moved by it and they love to hear that music. but then it says when tribulation and persecution arises on account of the word they fall away.

Why is this? Well because they have no root in themselves. The gospel has had an emotional impact upon their lives.

The gospel has touched a chord deep in their being and they feel that they want to embrace this whole feeling and this whole experience.

But really the word of God has not gone right down to the very root of their soul at all. There's a layer of sentimentalism, a layer of something that responds to something in the preaching, something in the word, something in the service, says, but really that's not all that's required.

[ 16 : 26 ] Because when tribulation and persecution comes, they fall away as quickly as they began. Immediately it says, it grows and immediately persecution comes, they fall away.

it's a terrible thing for people who have had some experience of gospel power to fall away.

is the Lord not permitted with any of us. But rather seek to have the real deal in your soul, that the root may be there and that the hard, unbroken heart, the rocky heart that we have by nature, that that be broken so that the seed may enter in.

You may remember some years ago when there was a new section of Road Birt, this side of Gav, when you're going on to Inverness with your car.

And there was a large area there of rock and was blasted and both sides of the road were just sheer rock. But now, 20, 30 years later, it's all grown.

[ 17 : 54 ] And nobody, nobody's hand has put anything there. It's merely the way the rock has cracks in it and seed from surrounding vegetation has settled there and gone right into the rock and grows there.

And that's what we need by nature. We need more than sentimental involvement with the gospel, more than an emotional impact. We need the hammer of the spirit of God to break our unbroken heart.

We may weep over our sin and weep in the presence of a merciful God who is able to show mercy to the chief of sinners.

The stony ground. And then coming up to verse 18, those sown among thorns, thorns, they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

Thorning ground. Since we went down to back a couple of years ago, I've been doing quite a lot of work around the house, digging and getting things straightened out.

[ 19 : 17 ] It's amazing, there was some hedging there that tried to dig out and the extent to which these root formations went right into the lawn and elsewhere, even underneath the foot paths.

The network of roots. And this is what we have here. Ground that is full of thorns and the roots of the thorns spreading this way and that way.

This ground hasn't been cleaned, the ground we have mentioned here. Just like the rocky ground hadn't been broken, just like the wayside hadn't been ploughed at all, it was the thoroughfare upon which people walked this way and that way.

So this ground here hasn't been cleaned at all. It needs somebody to go there to dig out these roots, the roots of sin.

And we see here that the gospel comes and these people hear the word, thorns do their own business.

[ 20 : 42 ] It's as if these thorns are so prickly and so invasive and it says that the eventual outcome of the seed falling there, however much growth it may have done, it's strangled because of the way the thorns are so invasive.

And what thorns does he mention? Well he says the first thing here at verse 19 is the care of the world. The care of the world.

Do you remember there was another parable the Lord spoke of in Luke's gospel chapter 14. And this householder made a great feast and he sent his servant out to invite those who had been called to the feast.

And you remember there were three particular responses that that servant heard from those who had been previously invited and who had given indications that they would want to come.

The first one said I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it. The next one said I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must go and prove them.

[ 22 : 03 ] And the third one said I have married a wife and I cannot come. See the way the things of the world are strangling even this finest of invitations to a marvellous dinner and feast.

The piece of ground I must go and see it. He was very foolish to have bought a piece of ground not having gone to see it.

Wouldn't you agree? And the man who had bought five yoke of oxen evidently when people were selling oxen at these sales in the Middle East long ago not only were the oxen there but there was a field quite near the place of sale where the man who was going to buy could test the oxen and hitch them up to the plough and whatever he wanted to do see if they were actually able to do the work that he needed them to do.

But this man here said well I have bought these oxen and now I'm going to prove them. It's as if his life was so busy with the things of the world that really it was infringing and coming in upon the greater responsibility that he now owed to this man who had made the feast.

I hope there's nothing in your life that's choking the gospel. Is it your job? Is it your family?

[ 23 : 45 ] I know we have a particular responsibility to our wives, our husbands, our children, but is that choking the gospel in your life?

Surely the Lord doesn't want that to happen. When he says to the Ephesians through the apostle Paul, husbands love your wives and so on regarding the way we have responsibility to our children, it doesn't mean leave the gospel aside in doing that.

No, no, it's part and partial of living for the Lord to do these things, loving your family and working for them, but not to the exclusion of the things of God.

The cares of this world. What about Mary and Martha? When the Lord came to Martha's home, she was running this way and that way, preparing for the meal, and surely there was a lot of preparation to be made because the Lord was there and his disciples, at least thirteen men and maybe others, and Martha there was cumbered with much serving, and she was so frustrated in the end and she said to the Lord, do you not care that Mary isn't helping me?

Oh, Martha, Martha, he said, and he put her in her place. Mary has chosen that good part that shall not be taken from her because Mary was sitting, hearing his words, and hearing the Lord's teaching, sitting in his fellowship.

[ 25 : 22 ] Don't let the burdens of life, these things that are legitimate in themselves, don't let these things strangle the gospel and its influence in your life.

The other thing, of course, cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches, riches. The deceitfulness of riches. I came across a verse here in the book of Proverbs.

Riches certainly make themselves wings. They fly away like an eagle toward heaven. What we must seek is the riches that last for eternity.

when the Lord says to that church, in Revelation, I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire that you may be rich. He's talking about the currency of heaven.

He's talking about the vitality of the word of God, enriching one's life, giving us to be Christ-like, giving us to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior.

[ 26 : 33 ] But these people here, they were deceived by the riches of this world. Demas hath forsaken me, the apostle Paul says, having loved this present world.

I don't know exactly what that means, but he wasn't as committed to the apostle and the work of the gospel as he had been before. And of course there's the other thing, the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word and proves unfruitful.

Desire for other things. The scripture talks about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

These three statements encapsulate, I think, the other things that draws away from the gospel. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Ask the Lord that these things may not prevail upon us. But fourthly, this ground is good ground.

[ 27 : 55 ] The other three references highlight ground that is unfruitful, but this fourth one, fruitful hearer.

And what does it say? Good ground, the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold.

What made the difference difference between the first three soils and this good ground? Well, I believe that it was nothing good in the ground, in the soul itself, as it was.

But the Lord had come in and the Lord had done work in the soul by his Holy Spirit. The new birth had taken place regarding this good ground.

All things had passed away. The dominion of sin had been broken. Light had entered in. Light scattered the darkness of ignorance and of error.

[ 29 : 09 ] Thomas Manton, the Puritan, says that the two pillars upon which the kingdom of Satan stands are ignorance and error.

And these two pillars have been demolished so far as this fourth soil is concerned. This soul has had the light of the knowledge of the glory of God enter in and the errors of unbelief and godlessness have been dealt with.

And the word of God has come and the word of God now is heard and accepted and it bears food. The ones who hear the word and accept it, it says in verse 20, hearing with the ear, yes, hearing also with an accepting heart, with an accepting soul.

What do we accept in the Bible and from the Bible in this particular context? Well, we accept what it says about ourselves, don't we?

When it says there is none righteous, no, not one. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Man cannot be justified by his own efforts.

[ 30 : 34 ] The Bible says that repeatedly. We are lost by nature. we are hell-bound as we are in ourselves by nature.

And we accept that when we hear what the Lord is saying. We also hear what he says about himself. He is a judge, certainly, who will judge us at last.

But he is a merciful God who has provided a way of salvation for sinners, even in the person of Jesus Christ.

And those who hear that, and those who are good soil, they receive that salvation, they receive that Christ for themselves. It's as if he fits into this empty, barren heart of theirs so perfectly.

He fits into the longings that their souls have and he satisfies them to the very depths of their being.

[ 31 : 49 ] Maybe you're here this morning and you remember when you came to realize that Christ was a sufficient saviour even for you.

And you rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Well, these people they hear the word and they accept it and they bear fruit. Some thirty, sixty and a hundred fold.

How do we ensure that we bear fruit? Well, I think there's two or three things we have to remember. Having heard the word of God, that we also have inherited and received it, that we meditate upon it. Don't hear an awful lot of people talking about meditation on the word of God, but the Bible is full of it.

In fact, I came across a writer some time ago who said that for every hour's hearing sermon we should have an hour's reflection upon it.

[ 33 : 07 ] Not just to forget the text when you go out the door of the church, but carry it with you and go aside, go apart and reflect upon it, meditate upon it, pray over it, that the Lord may apply it with greater power to your own heart and life.

And of course, the final thing would be meditation and obedience. When you discover what the Bible asks you to do, no point in just leaving it undone.

When the Bible asks you to do something to bear fruit, we must be obedient. We must be obedient. And there are some people who are more obedient than others, evidently, and some people who are more meditative than others, and some people who are more prayerful than others in relation to the Word of God, because it says here that some bear fruit thirtyfold, and some are more fruitful sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold.

Many is the sermon we've all heard. Many is the sermon we've sat under, moved by the Word, and many is the recollections we have today in relation to people with whom we enjoyed fellowship under the Gospel, even in this congregation.

may God make us all fruitful, bearing fruit unto his glory, even unto holiness, and the end eternal life.

[ 35 : 05 ] Let us pray. We pray, O Lord, that thy word would be applied to our minds and hearts and lives, effectually by thy Spirit, we praise thee for the work of thy Spirit, and we pray that we may continue to grow in grace, in fruitfulness, and in Christlikeness.

Bless us in all that lies ahead, and forgive every sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Let us now sing to God's praise and conclusion from Psalm 72.

Psalm 72 in the Scottish Psalter, verse 16 to the end, of corn and handful in the earth, on tops of mountains high, with prosperous fruit shall shake, like trees on Lebanon that be.

The city shall be flourishing, her citizens abound in number shall, like to the grass that grows upon the ground. His name forever shall endure, like the sun it shall, men shall be blessed in him, and blessed all nations shall him call.

To the end of the Psalm, Psalm 72, Scottish Psalter, from verse 16, and we stand to sing. Abraham to the moon and Adam and who live inpiel the earth on tops of mountains high, with flows and those truths shall shake, like seeds On the river of the King The city shall be flourishing Our citizens of our In number shall thy truths

[ 37 : 40 ] Across the truths upon the earth If thee forever shall endure Last by the sun it shall Then shall be blessed in heaven And blessed all nations shall be born And blessed be the Lord our God The God of Israel For he alone hath wondrous works

In glory have they sell And blessed be his glorious name To all eternity The whole earth let his glory fill Amen So let it be Before the benediction I have a little apology to make I believe I thought that you had a bulletin of intimations issued Elizabeth Aaron Adam Is holy Am I Am I The Am I Am The Am I Am Am Am Am