

THE PARABLE OF

the Sower



GRACE ABOUNDS CHURCH

PRESENTED BY PASTOR JOHN ROBERTS

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Good morning, everybody. If you have a Bible with you, go ahead and turn to Mark chapter four. We are going to spend some time with one of the best-known stories Jesus ever told.

I think one of the dangers of a familiar passage is that we can hear the first few words and say, “Oh, I know this one.” We know where the seed lands. We know there is a path and rocks and thorns and good soil. We know the ending. So, our brains can check out before Jesus has had a chance to speak to us.

But I want to ask you not to do that this morning. Hear it again. Hear it as if you had never heard it before, because Jesus is not giving a farming lesson. He is talking about what happens when the Word of God meets the human heart.

Now, I am not much of a gardener. I need you to know that right up front. I have managed to kill plants that the little plastic tag specifically described as “hard to kill.” *(congregation laughs)* That feels personal, doesn’t it? You bring home a plant that practically promises, “You cannot mess this up,” and three weeks later it is brown and leaning toward the window like it is trying to escape your care. So, I am not speaking to you this morning as an agricultural expert.

But the people listening to Jesus knew this picture. They knew what it looked like when a farmer walked across a field scattering seed by hand. The seed went everywhere. Some of it landed where you wanted it. Some of it did not. And Jesus says:

³ “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

— Mark 4:3-8
New International Version

There is one sower; there is one kind of seed. What changes is the soil.

That matters, because sometimes when we are not seeing the growth we want in our lives, we immediately assume the problem must be somewhere outside of us. Maybe I

need another book. Maybe I need another podcast. Maybe I need another preacher. Maybe I need a more dramatic experience. And there is nothing wrong with learning from good teachers, but Jesus keeps bringing the question back to the condition of the soil.

A few verses later, He makes the picture very plain: ¹⁴ *The farmer sows the word.* That is Mark 4:14. The seed is the Word of God. The question is, what kind of reception the Word finds when it reaches us?

First, Jesus talks about seed that falls by the wayside, on the hardened path. It never gets beneath the surface. Before it can take root, it is gone.

Have you ever heard a sermon and thought, “That was really good,” and then by lunchtime you could not tell anybody one thing God had pressed on your heart? *(congregation chuckles)* I am not asking you to raise your hand. I am trying to protect all of us here. But it happens. We hear, we agree, we move on. The Word touches the surface, but we never give it room to enter.

And sometimes the hardness is not rebellion in the dramatic sense. Sometimes it is simply hurry. We can be so rushed that nothing has time to sink in. We read three verses while checking the clock. We pray while thinking about the email we need to send. We sit in church while mentally making the grocery list. Our body is in the room, but our attention is already in the parking lot.

So here is one question for us: when God speaks, do I make room to hear Him? Not just to hear sound. To receive it.

Then Jesus describes the rocky ground. The seed springs up quickly, and for a moment, it looks wonderful. There is life, there is enthusiasm, there is movement. But there is no depth, and when the heat comes, it withers.

I think most of us like quick growth. We like the testimony that says, “I prayed on Tuesday and everything changed by Wednesday.” *(congregation laughs)* We like that. I like that. If God wants to do that, amen, I am available. But a lot of spiritual growth is quieter than that. Roots grow where nobody applauds them.

Nobody walks past a field and says, “Would you look at those magnificent roots!” You notice the fruit. You notice what is above ground. But what keeps the plant alive in August was formed underground when nobody was looking.

Your private life with God matters. The prayer nobody hears matters. The obedience nobody posts about matters. The decision to forgive before your feelings catch up matters. Opening your Bible on the ordinary Tuesday matters. Roots are not glamorous, but when the heat comes, roots are what hold you.

And the heat does come. Jesus never promises that good soil gets a private cloud to keep the sun away. The same sun that shines on the healthy plant shines on the shallow one. The difference is not whether hardship arrives. The difference is whether there is depth.

Somebody needs to hear that today. A difficult season does not automatically mean you are outside the will of God. Sometimes the heat simply reveals where your roots are.

(congregation says, "Amen.")

Then there is the seed among thorns. This one is different because the seed actually grows. The problem is that something else grows with it.

Jesus later explains that the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word. Notice the language: choke. The plant is not ripped out in one dramatic moment; its life is crowded out.

That one makes me uncomfortable, because a lot of the things that crowd our lives are not evil things. Work is not evil. Caring for your family is not evil. Paying the mortgage is not evil. Planning for the future is not evil. But even good responsibilities can become so loud that we give God whatever scraps of attention remain at the end of the day.

And then there are the things that are not responsibilities at all. We have all discovered that you can pick up your phone to check one thing and forty-five minutes later, you are watching somebody restore a rusty lawn mower in another country. *(congregation laughs)* You did not choose that journey. The algorithm chose it for you. But there went forty-five minutes.

The question is not merely, "Is this bad?" The better question may be, "Is this choking what is good?" Is this taking up so much room in my heart that the Word is being crowded to the edges?

And then Jesus gives us the good soil. I love that He does not describe good soil as flashy soil. Good soil receives the seed, keeps it and bears fruit.

Listen to verse 20:

²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

— Mark 4:20
New International Version

Hear it. Receive it. Bear fruit.

That is such a simple picture of discipleship. Hear what God says. Receive it as truth, not merely as information. Then allow that truth to become visible in the way you live.

If the Word tells me to forgive, fruit looks like forgiveness. If the Word tells me to care for the overlooked, fruit looks like compassion. If the Word tells me to trust God, fruit looks like obedience even when I do not have every answer yet.

And notice that Jesus does not say every healthy plant produces the same amount. Some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred. That means your faithfulness does not have to look exactly like somebody else's. You are not required to produce another person's fruit. You are called to be faithful with what God has planted in you.

So, this morning, I do not want us to leave here evaluating everybody else's soil. It is very easy during a sermon to think, "I hope so-and-so is listening to this." (*congregation laughs*) You know who you are. Do not elbow them. Let the Holy Spirit do His own seating arrangement.

The question is personal: Lord, what is the condition of my heart? Is there a hardened place in me? Is there something I have heard repeatedly but refused to receive? Are my roots shallow because I have been living on somebody else's faith? Are good things and distracting things growing so thick around me that Your Word has no room to breathe?

Or am I becoming good soil - receptive, rooted and ready to bear fruit?

Jesus ends with, "^{9b} *Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.*" In other words, do not admire the story and miss the invitation. Listen.

So, before we pray, I want to give you just a quiet moment. No music yet. No rushing. Ask God one question: "What kind of soil am I giving You right now?"

And whatever He shows you, do not respond with shame. Soil can be worked. Hard ground can be broken up. Rocks can be removed. Thorns can be pulled. God is not exposing our hearts so He can condemn us. He is inviting us to become receptive again.

Let us pray together. Father, thank You for being generous with the seed. Thank You that Your Word is living and that You continue to speak to us. Give us soft hearts. Give us deep roots. Show us what is crowding You out, and give us courage to make room. Let Your Word take root in us and produce fruit that looks like Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

(*congregation says, "Amen."*)

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