

Mark 4: 1-20; “The Sower Sows the Word”, Sermon # 19 in the series –
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on August 17th, 2014, in the Morning Worship Service.

Here in our passage, we find that Jesus got into a boat and sat in it a few feet from the shore, “The whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.” This was how Jesus drew attention to the word of God. He, as the preacher, would have His hearers give Him their exclusive attention for a time, and He would be in the boat facing them and they would be on the land facing Him, listening to Him as He told them parables. He was in one realm; the sea, mysterious and deep. They were in another realm; the land, on the edge of the other realm where Jesus was. He would bring to them the mysteries of the kingdom of God which is what all preachers are called to do. This is the same kind of situation right here today in this sanctuary. We are not by the sea, but still the kingdom of heaven is near you. Jesus is now raised from the dead and seated, not in a boat, but at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The minister is the steward of the mysteries of God. And all who are here this morning must listen with a view to praying over their sinful earthly hearts, so that they might be savingly changed and come to bear fruit for God and thus glorify Him.

So what I would like to focus on this morning in relation to this 1st parable of Jesus is understanding it; even as the Lord Jesus speaks about it in verse 13 of this chapter. He says in verse 13, “Do you not understand this parable?” “How then will you understand all the parables?” This parable, and the explanation that Jesus gives to it will give us clues as to how to interpret all the parables. The disciples could not understand this parable without Jesus’ help, and I would suggest that you and I cannot understand this parable either, without focusing intently upon Jesus’ explanation of it. There are word pictures here in this parable which are meant, not only for our instruction, but also to warn us when we are not in the path to eternal life, and to bring us back into it. And there other words pictures which are meant to bring us comfort and encouragement when we are in the path to eternal life. We can know whether we have eternal life from studying this parable. What we should notice right away is that there are 4 different conditions of ground that the seed, the Word of God lands upon when it is sown. And these 4 different conditions of ground represent what takes place in the hearts of people that hear the gospel; and those who hear the truth of the Word of God concerning how the Christian life is to be lived.

These are not given to us so that if we find ourselves in one of the categories of soil that shows that we are unsaved, that it means that we cannot be saved. No, as long as we still have life and breath, it is still possible that God might have mercy upon us, and that we might truly be saved. But we must be warned of the seriousness of missing the true meaning of life and the salvation which is by grace alone. We must learn to pray about our hearts and repent of our sins, and seek to bear fruit unto God. Christianity is not something to be played at; it is knowing God and Christ. And knowing God we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling. The 4 places of ground where the seeds of the Word of God land are as follows. 1st- Some seeds, as they are sown, fall by the wayside. 2nd- Some seeds of the Word of God fall on stony ground. 3rd - Some seeds of the Word of God fall amongst the thorns. And 4th - Some seeds of the Word of God fall on good ground. We will only have time to examine the 1st two here this morning. We will look at the other two, Lord willing, next Sunday.

1st- Some seeds as they are sown, fall by the wayside. (Verses 3, 4, and 15)

“Listen!” “Behold a sower went out to sow.” “And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.” When it says, “a sower”, it means our Lord Jesus Christ in the first and initial sense. He came from the Father to show us the way to eternal life. Indeed He says in John 14: 6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

“No one comes to the Father except by Me.” There is a narrow path that leads to eternal life. And there is broad road that leads to eternal destruction. The word, “a sower”, most surely includes those who have preached and shared the gospel in every generation since the days of the apostles. For the same conditions of ground exist in people's hearts today as they did then. And the Great Commission of Matthew 28: 18-20 and Mark 16: 15 and 16 has not yet been fulfilled completely. I take it that the “wayside” of the parable is when the ground of a person's heart and mind does not yet understand the importance and significance of the Word of God to their salvation. The Word of God is snatched from the sinner's heart and mind by Satan before it can take root. We need to turn for a moment to Matthew 13 in order to verify that this is so. In verse 18 it says, “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” “This is he who received seed by the wayside.” This phrase, “and does not understand it” is not found in the explanation given by Jesus in Mark 4: 15. There; it simply says, “And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown.” “When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

So we have three things that are at work in the heart of the person who has this kind of “ground” for a heart. He has had the word sown, “in his heart”. And “he does not understand”. And because of this, Satan comes and immediately “takes away the word that was sown in the heart”. Matthew says that Satan, “snatches away” what was sown in his heart. The Word of God is designed by God to penetrate and to settle down into, the minds and hearts of men, and women, and children and to do a real work in them. But it cannot do this if the person does not understand it; if they do not receive it, if they do not believe it to be the word of God to them. Often, the unconverted people who hear the word of God, being preached to them by a man, do not grasp that this is God's appointed means of reaching out to them. They see a man speaking to them, but they do not see that he is God's sower. They do not see this glorious work of God, that though he is a mere man, He is broadcasting the seeds of truth to all who will hear. People often do not see that God's Spirit and His blessed influences are there attending the Word preached, convicting and convincing men of sin and righteousness and judgment. But the person listening by the wayside thinks that it is just the words of a man; that is all. He is one of the many people who have all kinds of opinions on the subject of religion. He thinks that his opinions are just as good as the preachers. He thinks that it is just one man's thoughts in relation to what other men think about the subject of God. He does not realize that God is speaking to him through the preaching of the Word. And so, after he has heard the gospel preached and the word explained, he thinks of how he does not want to think of himself as a sinner. And Satan comes to his heart and mind at that very time and snatches the truth away; that he is a needy sinner who must have Jesus Christ to be saved, and to live the Christian life of bearing fruit to God.

Before a person can be converted to Jesus Christ and believe the truth of the gospel, they must come to see that the Bible, the Word of God, is an authority. And it has authority over all the religious opinions of men. This is the truth that Satan especially wants to snatch. A person who would be saved must at the very least sense that the words spoken to him from it are authoritative. The words and the truths of the Bible are from God, and if they are attended with God's power, they will hold the mind and the heart captive to the truth which is being conveyed in the thousand ways that men may present it and preach it. All faithful sowers of God's word preach that Jesus Christ was and is the only sinless man. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. Jesus Christ lived a perfect and sinless life in obedience to every commandment of God's holy law. Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Jesus Christ alone gives the grace that saves us from our sins. All of the fruit of righteousness in our lives is from Him. All this is found in God's Word. When the Bible was written down by men, they were so moved and carried along when they wrote

down the words that they were preserved entirely from making any errors. They made no mistake in what they wrote down concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. 2nd Peter 1: 16 says, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." "For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" And then a couple of verses later he says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Satan casts doubt on the truth and reliability of God's Word at every point, if he can. The Bible is God speaking to men through other men whom He has called and commissioned to speak His word. It is authoritative in all matters related to our faith and our practice of Christianity. It is meant to be received and to be believed and to be meditated upon.

The Lesson that each of us must learn from this is that each person who would be saved, and grow up to be a mature Christian, must come to prize the precious seed of God's word the Bible. You cannot be "by the wayside" when you hear the Word of God. You must believe that in the preaching of the Bible God is having dealings with you personally; not someone down the aisle from you. The person who God is speaking to is you, and you cannot be a silent observer, or a non-participant. Do not be deterred away from the greatness of the reward of putting yourself in the way of listening and hearing and heeding the authoritative Word of God to your soul. As it says in 1 Corinthians 1: 21, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." So it is God's will that you listen, listen with all of your heart, and learn to do and to keep what God would have for you to do and to keep. He would have you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you, if you will believe in Him.

Take heed how you listen. For if you do not listen, praying to receive all that God has for you, Satan will come at the end of the sermon and will snatch the word from your heart. He will turn your attention to a thousand things which you foolishly think are more important than listening to His voice to you in the preaching of the word. He will make those earthly things of your pursuits, your hobbies, your projects and your goals to seem to be the most important things, when they are things which easily pass away. Those things of earth will not be important in the Day in which He judges you. Turn with me over to 1 Peter chapter 1 and you will see how the Christian bears fruit while the person who is "by the wayside" will not. Verse 22 says, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass." "The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever." "Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you." Let me ask you, do you fervently and sincerely love the brethren? I mean all of them, not just the ones you happen to get along with. This is one great and good indication that you are not on the wayside, but you are on the path of life.

Now 2ndly- Some seeds of the Word of God fall on the Stony Ground.

(Verses 5, 6 and 16 and 17)

"Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth." "But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away." The interpretation of this kind of ground, this kind of heart, is as follows: "...when they hear the word, immediately they receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and endure only for a time." "Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble." In Matthew's gospel it says, "...this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself but

endures only for a while.” “For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.” In Luke’s gospel Chapter 8 we have a shortened version of this parable and it says there in verse 6, “Some fell on rock; and soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.” And in the interpretation of it Jesus says, “But the ones on the rock are those who when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.” So the seed of the word of God is falling upon the heart here, but there is no depth, nothing that it can take root in. And the moisture is lacking also because there is not enough ground covering the rockiness beneath it to permit it to really be established as a plant.

What do these things represent? Well they represent a great number of persons who want desperately to believe that the Christian life is a happy life without cares. They hear the gospel and they rejoice that it is good news. It is the good news that if they believe in Jesus that their sins are all forgiven and God is going to do everything needed to bring them to heaven and to ultimate happiness. What a wonderful plan this is, they think. What a good and loving God I have believed in. Now all will go well with me in my life. “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” And then a short time later persecution or trial comes. Some family member or friend whom I have shared much happiness with, notices that I want to go to a Bible believing, Bible preaching church on Sunday, that I want to be baptized, that I want to read my Bible and understand spiritual things, and suddenly I find myself spoken against, disapproved of, and cut off in my relationship with them, even cut off from any association with them, cut off from my family inheritance. “What is wrong,” this person says to themselves? “Doesn’t God want me to be happy and blessed?” “Has He become my enemy?” “Why does being a Christian lead me to this discouragement, this sadness, this disappointment?” “I am no longer openly approved of by my friends and relatives.” “It must not be true that the Christian life is a happy life.” And so the person stumbles.

What can we say about this? Well, There is no doubt that the Christian life is a blessed and happy life. It is a life of rejoicing in the Lord always, Paul says, “and again I say rejoice.” But this is a far different thing than saying, “I will seek to be happy in a worldly sense always, and in that I will rejoice.” Some people confuse the two when they go about to try to live a Christian life, and they stumble when opposition or trial comes to them. They believe that God would never permit these things if He were a good God. A good God would always want me to be happy in a worldly sense. But this simply is not true at all. Christ would have you to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Him. The reason that you cannot be happy always in a worldly selfish sense is because there is sin bound up in that kind of happiness. There is a denial of all that God wants for you in terms of your living to Him and not simply to yourself. And it is God’s purpose to have you to find all of your happiness in Himself, the One who is eternally wise and good, and not in this world which is passing away.

Then too, we need to recognize that we must have depth in the things of Christ to have real and lasting and abiding life. You cannot make progress in holiness, you cannot make progress in knowing God and serving God and bearing fruit to his glory without there being depth to the spiritual soil of your heart. You must ask yourself whether Christ has given you the soft and tender deeper soil of a new heart. Has the hardness of your heart been broken up by the plowing of the law through it? In Jeremiah 4, verse 3 it says, “Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.” In Hosea 10: 12 it says, “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.” “You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity.” “You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way.” You see, that is the problem of the seed sown on the stony ground. All is well on the surface, but the hardness of the heart has not been broken up and removed underneath. Is your conscience tender toward the things that God

would have you to do and to be? The seed which fell on the stony ground “had no depth of earth”. That is because there was this great bed of rock right underneath the surface. That is often the case of those who make a profession of faith and then find that they cannot live out what they have professed. I like what Charles Spurgeon says about this. “The stony-ground hearer was all surface; everything about him was superficial.” “The rock never having been broken there was no depth of earth to plough.” “So in many men who profess to be converted, there has been no real estimate of sin.” “Yes, we are sinners,” they say, “Oh yes, yes, of course we are all sinners;” but to feel what it is to be a sinner is quite another thing.” “To be crushed down to the earth under a sense of having violated the thrice holy law of God, this many have never felt.” “And Jesus Christ — yes, he is a Savior, and they will say they take him for a Savior; but what it is to be saved, what it was he suffered, why he needed to suffer, what was the tremendous guilt that compelled such a sacrifice, they have never considered; in fact, they have never thought at all, and they do not mean to think. Bees descend into the flowers and suck out the honey, but butterflies alight on the lilies for a moment, and are away again, true emblems of flippant pretenders to grace.” “Ninny persons who profess to be Christians seem to have no acquaintance with the plague of their own hearts; they believe that there is something amiss within, but they do not know that their heart is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;” consequently, though they admit they need divine grace, they do not know how much they need it.” “They would subscribe to the truth, “Without me ye can do nothing,” but they do not know it experimentally.” “They are strangers to those failures and inward disappointments which lead a man to feel his nothingness.” “It is surface work; nothing is deep about them.” “That bed rock has to be removed before you can really live the Christian life.” (End of quote)

If you look over at Ezekiel 36: 26 and you will find that this is one of the blessings given in the New Covenant, a blessing which is given to every true Christian. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” When God does this, through Jesus Christ our Lord, you are given by His grace depth of soil in which you can put roots down. The Christian life would soon wither if there was no depth of soil. Not only is the plant scorched when it jumps up quickly at the beginning; that is that it cannot face persecution and trials of life; but it will also wither and die because it has no root. The Christian life is “taking root downward and bearing fruit upward.” (Isaiah 37: 31) And, “The root of the righteous yield fruit.” (Proverbs 12: 12) We must ask ourselves this difficult question this morning. Do we have the root of the matter in ourselves? Do we really have Christ? Do we really have a broken and contrite heart over our sinfulness? How do we think about God when trial and persecution comes? These are questions which we really must answer in order to establish the reality of our faith.

In closing I would have you turn with me over to Job Chapter 19. Here in Job 19, Job is suffering the greatest trial of his life. He has suffered the loss of his children, his wealth, and his health. His wife has told him to curse God and die. His friends believe that he is a hypocrite and needs to repent. Actually, behind the scenes God was boasting of him to the Devil and he was indeed a great and godly man of integrity. In verse 21 he says, “Have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me!” “Why do you persecute me as God does, and are not satisfied with my flesh?” “Oh that my words were written!” “Oh that they were inscribed in a book!” “That they were engraved on a rock with an iron pen and lead, forever!” “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.” “How my heart yearns within me!” “If you should say, ‘How shall we persecute him?’ – Since the root of the matter is found in me...” You see, Job knew that root of the matter was in him, even though he was being persecuted by his closest friends. The root of the matter was in him because he knew Christ. He says so in these Old Testament terms of

expression. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall take His stand at last on the earth." He was looking to that great day of judgment which is most certainly coming! Job believed that on the Day of the resurrection, that in his flesh he would see God. His eyes will behold him and not another. How he yearned for that day! This is how persecution is endured. It is endured by the power of the living Christ! This is how one comes to be on the right path and not by the wayside! It is by faith in Christ! This is how one comes to have the hard heart taken away and new heart given! It is found through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is how we come to have the root of the matter in us; it is because of Christ by whose grace our fallow ground is broken up and we take root downward and bear fruit upward. We will speak more of these things in the next sermon.

Notes on what a Parable is:

A parable, it has been said, is a heavenly story with an earthly meaning. This is truly so. B.H. Carroll says that, "There are two words used in the Greek for parable— one by John and the other by the Synoptics. The word used by John is *paroimia*, which means, literally, "something by the way." "Secondarily, it means a figurative discourse, or dark saying, suggesting more than meets the ear." "The word used by the Synoptics is *parebole*, which, Anglicized, gives us our word "parable." "The verb of this word means to throw, or to place, side by side, for purposes of comparison." "The noun means an utterance involving a comparison, as "the kingdom of heaven "is like, etc.", which is a similitude. He also says, "The ideas in the word are these: (1) To place two things side by side for comparison; (2) veiling the truth in a story, but with the veil so thin that the spiritually minded may easily apprehend it." I think that this definition is very good. But I would say that sometimes the veil is not so thin, but that even Christ's closest disciples had to ask him what some of them meant. A metaphor is a word picture. A parable is story picture. The parable is a story which conveys a literal physical reality which has a deeper spiritual meaning and reality behind it. Let me see if I can distinguish the terms which have brought so much confusion to the minds of people as they study the Bible. B.H. Carroll can help us in this. "A proverb is a short pithy saying and may contain a condensed parable." "A simile is a simple comparison in which one thing is likened to another in some of its aspects." "A similitude is more comprehensive than a simile and borders on the realm of the parable, as in Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*." "A metaphor is a simile without the comparative word, such as when a person says, "that man is a fox", instead of "that man is like a fox," which is a simile." "An allegory is an expanded metaphor, or the description of one thing under the imagery of another, as *Pilgrims Progress*." "A fable is a story in which inanimate objects or lower animals are represented as acting in the capacity of human beings, the purpose of which is to instruct or to impress some moral lesson. It differs from a parable in that it is not true to nature or to life." "A myth is a tale of some extraordinary personage or country, formed purely by the imagination...." "It is fictitious and usually has an element of the supernatural in it." Now all of these distinctions are good and should be recognized by all Christians who are serious about understanding the parables of Jesus. "The parable is a narrative true to nature or life, used for the purpose of conveying spiritual truth."