

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon title: The Parable of the Sower, Mark 4

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SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:1-13 ¹ “Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 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.”

⁹ Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹² so that, they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”

¹³ Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”

INTRODUCTION: Jesus taught a simple parable about the spreading of the Gospel. It was simple, yet the disciples did not understand it, so he explained it to them.

Let’s look at the four batches of seed in this parable and what happened to each of them:

1. The first seed was consumed by birds.

2. The second seed fell in rocky places.
3. The third seed was sown among thorns.
4. The fourth seed was sown on good soil.

He said in verse 14: *The farmer sows the word*. So, the seed is the Word of God.

First, THE FIRST SEED WAS CONSUMED BY BIRDS.

EXPLANATION: In other words, it never took root. Jesus likens the birds to Satan, who comes quickly to take away the Word sown in people.

I've thought a lot about this scripture. Is there a way we can easily define and identify these people? I think so, possibly. There have been times when I've attempted to share a scripture with someone in some way, and they had absolutely no interest in what I was telling them. In other words, Satan has blinded them so much there isn't much hope. Does this mean we give up on them? Some would say YES. I say NO. If you know someone who is not interested in what you have to say, remain a friend to the person. At some point, they'll have a need or a crisis, and you can reach out in a way they will listen.

ILLUSTRATION: Recently, I tried to make a reservation for something. I was not able to make the reservation because the event was full. Then I received a call a few minutes later from the same operator who told me the event was full. She said, "We've had a last minute cancellation, and if you still want this reservation, you can have it." I said, "Well, I said a prayer this would open up." She replied, "Sometimes the universe does this for us."

Folks, I've never prayed to the universe for anything. This woman was so prepared to say that, there was no doubt in my mind she'd heard the truth at some point but rejected it.

APPLICATION: How many of you here represent this first batch of seed? Is there anyone here, or watching by TV, or listening over podcast who would say, "I was like the first batch of seed. I was completely shut off to the Gospel. I rejected it over and over, and then one day, I heard and responded positively"?

Second, THE SECOND SEED FELL IN ROCKY PLACES.

EXPLANATION: It sprang up quickly and died. Jesus explained how this represents the person who accepts the gospel with joy, but because of lack of root and a hot sun, they withered away quickly.

This batch of seed is difficult for me to identify. These are people who heard the Gospel and responded because it was convenient at the time. These are people who prayed a little prayer but had no intention of completely surrendering. These are the people who see Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. My dad used to refer to this type of conversion not as a conversion but as a religious spasm, a temporary feel good, a brief encounter but nothing life changing.

APPLICATION: Does anyone here represent this seed that fell into rocky places, sprang up quickly, and died because there was no root? If so, then today you are getting another opportunity. If you had some religious spasm years ago, and it never developed into any genuine love of God, it never developed into any gratitude for Jesus' death on the cross, if it never developed into any care for the study of God's Word and a love for God's people, then yes, I think you are safe in diagnosing yourself as someone in this category.

ILLUSTRATION: You've heard me refer to the revivals of the 70s, which I remember quite well. I know there were many good things that came out of those revivals. But, there were some not-so-good things that came out of them, too—people who were talked down the aisle by the speaker, people who came with a friend but never really repented of sin, people who attended one time, made some type of decision, yet never followed up in anyway—no baptism, no nothing.

APPLICATION: If this describes you today, it's time to stop living in a state of false assurance.

Third, THE THIRD SEED WAS SOWN AMONG THORNS.

EXPLANATION: It resulted in plants choked by three things: the deceitfulness of wealth, the worries of this life, and the desires for other things. In other words, the person is distracted.

1. I do not believe it is a sin to be wealthy, but I believe it is a sin to let money control you. And, you don't have to be rich to let money control you. When you repent of sin and follow Jesus, everything you have comes to God's

disposal. You cannot say *Jesus is Lord of every area of my life except my money*. I am really surprised how people get fidgety when I bring up the stewardship of money. *Well, I give of my time, but not my money*. Do you know the Bible does not make an exception for that? Do you know the Bible does not allow you to make your own little agreement with God?

2. The next thing that choked out the third batch of seed is the worries of this life. Boy, don't we have worries?

- How will we make ends meet?
- How will I afford to pay my rent or mortgage?
- How will I afford to pay my bills?
- How will I overcome my health problems?
- What should I do about that person who cheated me?
- What should I do about the family member who causes problems in the family?
- Who should I vote for on Super Tuesday?

There is some irony here. Any worry which takes us away from God should actually draw us close to God!

3. The third thing that choked out the third batch of seeds is the desire for other things. This one is pretty clear to me. People have schedules so full, they do not have time to be a follower of Christ. It's not easy simplifying your life. It takes effort. If I were to ask most of you here today what would you really like to be doing with your life, many of you would say something other than what you are doing. Why?—because you've desired other things to the point you can't do what you'd really like to do.

Everything you choose to do requires a trade-off for something else:

APPLICATION: If you've ever learned about a Bible study you wanted to attend, you've got to trade something else to do it. If you've ever thought about living out your faith on some type of mission trip, you've got to trade something else to do it. The question is: Does your daily schedule line up with what you say is most important to you?

Does anyone here represent the one who has been closed to the Gospel because of the deceitfulness of wealth, the worries of this life, or the desires for other things? If this describes you, then you have another opportunity today.

Last, THE FOURTH SEED WAS SOWN ON GOOD SOIL...

EXPLANATION: It produced a healthy crop which reproduces itself.

The farmer finally has a successful crop. And, here are four reasons the soil is successful:

1. Good soil
2. The Word was heard.
3. The Word was accepted.
4. The seed produced a crop. In other words, it reproduced itself.

EXPLANATION: I grew up in the country, but I know very little about farming. Let us think about the farmer's role in spreading the seed. In the parable, the farmer's efforts yielded four results. The first three results were not successful. Finally, he made it!

He could have given up after the birds came. He could have given up after the sun came out and withered the plants with no roots. He could have given up when the thorns overtook his plants. But, he did not, and finally his efforts were successful.

ILLUSTRATION: From a sales point-of-view, if 1 out of every 4 calls resulted in a successful sale, every salesman in the country would want to work for that company. When I worked the Air Force recruiting chaplains, at one point, I had 62 leads. These were people who had expressed interest in being a chaplain. After making all of those calls, only two qualified, and only one made it in. That was 1 out of 62. Finally, after a lot of hard work, we were able to improve our lead base to 1 in 15.

APPLICATION: Persistence is the key to anything successful. If you've shared the Gospel like the farmer in the parable and you've not had success, don't give up. Keep sharing. Keep planting seeds. If the farmer had given up, he would have never seen the crop that reproduced itself. He had three sets of failures, and then he had

extraordinary success! His failure rate went from 3 to 1. But, the one multiplied itself many times.

CONCLUSION: I've heard different evangelism strategies. One of them taught it is better to win a person who will become a soul winner than to merely reach one person. I don't really agree with this strategy because you have no idea what will happen to the one person you reached for Christ. Once a person puts on Christ, the person's whole world can change. The timid person can become the most on-fire person people have ever seen.

So my advice to you as a sower of seeds of the Gospel is this—just do it. Don't worry about being calculated and careful with your seed. You don't have to be like a farmer who has a limited supply of seed, because the Gospel has an unlimited supply of seed. Feel free to plant it everywhere!

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Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA