

A sower went out to sow

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[0 : 00] The Gospel according to Mark chapter 4. And we may read again at verse 2.

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,
Hearken, behold, there went out a sower to sow.

Now, in this parable, we have an illustration of the various kinds of reception with which the Gospel meets.

Wherever the Word of God is read, or wherever the Word of God is preached. And while we normally call it the parable of the sower, the emphasis is certainly upon the different conditions of soil into which the seed that was sown fell.

It was the one sower. It was the one kind of seed. It was the one kind of sowing. And yet, there were these four different results of that sowing.

[1 : 32] And what the parable does is focus our attention upon our own state of mind, upon our own attitude, our own responsiveness to the Word of God.

We have to take heed that we hear. And we have to take heed that what we hear is in accordance with the Word of God.

But we have to take heed how we hear. And that our response to the Word of God is the proper kind of response.

And that is not something that we should take for granted. Because this parable makes it clear that there are kinds of responses to the Word of God which superficially resemble a right response, but which are not right responses at all.

So what we want to try to consider for a little while is these different kind of responses to the Word of God.

[2 : 54] Not so much in order to make ourselves acquainted with the situation in the church at large as to make us examine ourselves and ask ourselves into what category do we come in relation to the Word of God.

Now first of all, there are those hearers of the Gospel, those readers of the Word of God who resemble the ground that is described here as by the wayside.

As it came to pass, he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

These are they by the wayside where the Word is sown. But when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the Word that was sown in their hearts.

Now it seems that through the fields of corn there were paths, rights of way along which people had been walking for years and generations.

[4 : 17] And no doubt it was along one of these paths that the Lord Jesus himself walked when it says that he walked through the corn and his disciples plugged the ears.

These paths were so trodden by the feet of many and by the feet of generations that although some of the seed fell on them, there was never any fruit, there was never any crop growing on these paths.

And the seed lay there on the surface and the birds came and they carried the seed away. And there are so many people whose reading of the Bible and whose listening to the Gospel resembles that situation.

Their hearts are hardened against the truth and it is easy work for the devil to take away whatever they hear before it has any opportunity to get into their minds or to get in to their hearts.

There's a combination of circumstances there. There's the hardness of the heart against the Gospel and there is the activity of the devil who as soon as people hear the word removes it from them, removes it from their mind so that they don't have time or opportunity or inclination to think about it.

[5 : 58] How often in the house of God people's minds are occupied from beginning to end by thoughts that have no relationship whatsoever to the Gospel or to the things of eternity.

Dr. Guthrie mentioned that he was speaking to a man on his deathbed who said to him that he had always been in the church that he had listened to many sermons but that he had never heard one because he said as soon as you started preaching my mind went back over the business of the past week weighing it all up and then my mind went on towards the business of the next week planning what I was going to do and I never heard a sermon that you preached.

And there are many people if they were honest with themselves who might have to make a similar confession. How easily our minds are distracted even a fly or a passing thought or the slightest movement can take our minds off what we're reading or off what we're hearing and although we're still reading or although we're still hearing there's not an idea getting into our minds from the word of God at all.

Well I don't think we have to labour that particular point. It is very obvious that there are people and although the word is known to them although they have been reading it and hearing it yet the resistance of the heart to the truth the lack of interest in the truth the unwillingness to receive the truth is being reinforced by the devil using thoughts and habits and happenings to take the mind away from the things of God so that for all the sowing of the seed there's not any fruit there's not any good result at all.

It's an awful state to be in to be favoured with the word of God and with the gospel and yet never to have the slightest place in one's thoughts or in one's mind for it.

[8 : 46] What a terrible awakening such a person is going to have because I believe that there's a sense in which nothing is ever really forgotten.

Everything will be brought to mind again and will it not be an awful thing in the depths of hell to have all these chapters of the Bible and all these sermons which we never really read and never really heard at all brought back to us in a situation where they can do us no good whatsoever.

There's another kind of hearer the seed we are told some of it fell on stony ground where it had not 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 these are they who when they have heard the word immediately receive it with gladness and have no root in themselves and so endure but for a time afterward when affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake immediately they are offended now these people are much more promising the seed is sown and before you know it there is something appearing above the surface but the response is superficial and it's covering up the fact that there's no real reception in the heart and mind for the truth that that person is just as averse to the truth as the other even although there has been this immediate and glad superficial response to the gospel

I think I think this is a very serious condition that's being described here because it's so deceptive if a person has no interest in the gospel well you know that that person is a stranger to grace and to God but if a person has an interest in the gospel and if the gospel has an influence on a person's life the fact that that effect and influence is superficial hides from that person and from others the dangerous truth that the word has never been received into the heart and mind in a way that has transformed it and brought it into obedience to God we're told there's no depth here there's no root and another gospel says there's no moisture it's superficial there is nothing beneath the surface there is no life as it were under the surface of the earth there is no reception of those influences which are necessary for real spiritual life and growth the word meets with an immediate response the person has no difficulties with the gospel he believes that there is only one

God he believes that the Bible is the word of God he believes that all men are sinners that he's a sinner himself he believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God that he came into the world to save sinners that his death is necessary for the salvation of sinners that whosoever believes in him is saved he believes there's a heaven he believes there's a hell he has never had any problem with these things and the word of God when it comes to him it creates a certain gladness a certain enthusiasm a certain measure of appreciation in him I think one of the most alarming cases in the Bible is the case that we have brought before us in chapter 6 of this gospel the case of King

[14 : 09] Herod and you remember that when Herod heard about John the Baptist he sent for him because he wanted to hear him himself and he had him in prison and when he was in prison he was listening to him preaching and we're told that Herod feared John knowing that he was a just man and unholy and observed him and when he heard him he did many things and heard him gladly Herod knew that John was a just and holy man Herod protected John Herod often listened to his preaching and his preaching had an effect upon him it made him do many things what do you think he did perhaps he was getting down on his knees and praying perhaps he was trying to straighten up his life he heard him gladly he enjoyed the preaching of John the Baptist and yet a little while later we read that he ordered that his head be cut off in order to gratify the woman with whom he was living immediate response immediate gladness making one do many things making one feel quite pleased with oneself and yet no real religion no real union with Christ no experience of the gracious influences of the

Holy Spirit and you would never know that that was the case until times of trial and testing came which brought out the difference between the false and the true this is where the need for self examination comes in because we must beware lest we are left to go on year after year with a superficial interest in the gospel which is not genuine when afflictions come when persecutions come because of the word of God they are offended they stumble they lose their enthusiasm they lose their gladness at the gospel sometimes the word itself has that effect on such a person you remember the crowds who were following Jesus after the feeding of the thousands wanting to hear every word that fell from his lips but when he started preaching to them the reality of

God's election when he started preaching to them the necessity for eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ they said these are hard sayings who can hear them and they went back and walked no more with Jesus and here is something to notice that very often the person who is a superficial follower of Christ will be glad to hear certain things in the Bible but there are other things that he finds offensive I think we ought to be very careful if there are truths in the Bible that we don't want to hear if there are things that humble man and bring man down to the dust before God that we prefer not to remember when the word comes when it afflicts us when it offends us then perhaps we're being warned to beware lest we are superficial in our attachment to the truth and then of course there are other troubles that come and God's people feel their troubles they wouldn't be afflictions if they didn't feel them whom the

Lord loveth he chasteneth and some of God's people go through very deep valleys and go through experiences which almost drive them to despair but there is one difference between the genuine believer and this superficial believer whatever troubles the Christian has however they almost threaten to destroy him the Christian is driven back eventually and always upon Christ and upon the grace of God whereas this other person goes back and walks no more with Jesus he doesn't want a Christ who brings trouble and trial with him but the Christian wants Christ whatever trials following him may bring so there's this superficial believer this person whose interest is very slight even if it does stir up his emotions even if it does make him feel good at times and then there's this other class of unsatisfactory hearers we're told about the seed that fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no fruit these are those who hear the word and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things entering in choke the word and it becometh unfruitful now here is a picture of the human heart in its fallen condition very like what would have happened in the garden of eden after the fall it must have been a great pleasure for adam to be looking after the garden of eden before the fall when there were no weeds no thorns no thistles but what a change followed sin and the curse and now it's natural for the soil to produce weeds and thorns and thistles if you leave any ground to itself it's not going to bring forth naturally the most pleasant crops and fruits however much it had been tended in the years gone by if it's left to itself its natural product is weeds and thorns and thistles and every kind of thing to choke anything good that might be sown that's like the human heart the natural fruit of fallen nature is sinful sinful thoughts sinful words sinful actions as it says here the cares of this world the deceitfulness of riches the lust of other things or as another gospel says the pleasures of this life these are there first before we ever hear the gospel the seeds of all these things are deeply embedded in our foreign nature and when we hear the truth when the seed is sown when we read the bible when we

listen to the gospel it's falling in amongst all these things which are so hostile to the reception of the truth now we can see how any one of these things counteract the gospel's influence the cares of this world when a person is so anxious about the things of time and sense necessary things that they occupy his mind incessantly what shall we eat what shall we drink wherewith shall we be clothed how am I going to deal with this problem how am I going to overcome that particular difficulty how am I going to secure this necessary object when these things take up a person's mind take up his time take up his attention excessively unseasonably constantly then the word of God gets no opportunity to take root in that person's mind it goes in one ear and out another it passes over one it has no effect upon one it's the same with the deceitfulness of riches whether a person has them or not riches can deceive a person if a person has them and relies on them and feels satisfied and secure because of them then that person is going to resist the truth of God like the rich young ruler that man who had so many desirable qualities and yet riches had such a place in his affection he was so dependent on them for his happiness that he did not give place in his heart to the words of Jesus calling him to leave all and follow him but even when a person doesn't have riches they can deceive because his mind is set upon obtaining them or more of them than he has they take up his affections and how to obtain them becomes his great concern and in either case riches deceive when they become an obsession when they become so important to us that obtaining them or retaining them is the great thing the word of God meets with resistance from that source also and there's the lust of other things the pleasures of this life some of them wicked and some of them good in themselves but when anything temporal becomes an obsession with us when we find our joy and pleasure in anything here when our life becomes the pursuit of some pleasure or another then the word of

[26 : 16] God falls on us like seed on thorny ground it's choked whatever impression it may make at the time once we're obsessed again with our cares or riches or pleasures the word fails to bring forth fruit so that's another kind of condition it may in some ways not seem so bad to look at as others there is something growing there but it's being choked and it'll come to nothing in the end well isn't it a good thing that there is some good ground and when the seed falls on it it springs up it brings forth fruit some thirtyfold some sixtyfold and some and hundred these are they which are sown on good ground such as hear the word and receive it and bring forth fruit some thirtyfold some sixty and some and hundred as it says elsewhere an honest and a good heart now that's the problem with us the seed is good and we are having that seed sown we've been acquainted with the word of

God I suppose since we were acquainted with anything but the problem is with our own fallen nature superficially one person may differ from another some may be indifferent some may be superficial in their interest others may be obsessed with the things of time and sense some may be very respectful to the truth some may be hostile to the truth but the natural man is described by the apostle Paul when he says the carnal mind is enmity against God it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be the trouble with us by nature is that we do not have the love of God in us

Jesus said that the Jews were condemning him they were refusing to believe him and he said I know what is wrong with you I know you he said that you have not the love of God in you how can you believe who receive honor one of another when you've got the wrong motivation when you've got the wrong attitude when your nature is hostile to God when you don't love God how can you receive his word that's the problem with us whoever we are whatever our natural response to the gospel is we haven't got a right attitude to God our carnal mind is enmity against God that's why it's so serious a matter to consider what is our attitude to the

Bible what is our attitude to the truth because it is indicative of our attitude to God himself and if ever there is to be an honest and a good heart if ever there is to be a receptiveness to the truth it must be on account of a tremendous transformation a tremendous change taking place in the very nature that we have so that we cease to be at enmity against God and we begin to love him and to respond in faith and in obedience to whatever he says what we need is what John tells us Jesus reminded Nicodemus of he must be born again there has to be a complete regeneration a complete renewal of nature giving us an attitude to God and his word which we didn't have before no earthly sower can do that but God can do it or there will be no one receiving the truth we don't receive the truth because we're naturally more amenable to the gospel than others it's a great encouragement to see some of the people who today believe the gospel and perhaps a few years ago no one would ever have believed that they would be sitting at the Lord's table or standing in a pulpit because they were so hostile to the truth it's not that we're naturally more disposed than others to the gospel but God can give us that new disposition they hear the word they receive it they understand it as it says in one of the other gospels they keep it it has a place in their hearts and minds and it brings forth fruit in their lives and the fruit is like the seed from which it grows what kind of fruit is brought forth when the word of

God is received into the heart and mind fruits that are like the word itself fruits that are the natural effects of the word upon us teaching us as Paul said to Titus the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly righteously and godly in this present world we have to ask ourselves today then have we received the word of god not with some superficial response but in the very depth of our being so that it has changed our whole attitude to god and to ourselves and to the saviour and so that there's a receptiveness in us to his word even when that word conveys unpleasant truths to us

[33 : 47] I think that christian people will be glad even when the word of god chastises them because they have learned that there is nothing worse than for the word of god to have no effect upon them at all what kind of soil is in our hearts I think perhaps if we are christians we'll be feeling there's a bit of them all in us there's the wayside and there's the stony rocky ground and there's the thorny patch but is it not a mercy if somewhere within us there's our readiness to receive and to believe and to love the word of god let us pray may thy word come with thine own blessing into our experience that we may receive it not as the word of man but as it is indeed the word of god we ask that with the forgiveness of all our sins in jesus name amen