

95-02-26Mark

Father, we thank you this morning for the opportunity to assemble ourselves together, to gather as believers of like mind and fellowship, worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and glory in the great salvation that you have given us, the wonderful provision you have made for us in the present, the wonderful hope that you have promised us for the future. We thank you for those things that sustain us and give us a supernatural peace and a supernatural joy in this life. We pray now that as we look into the truth of your word, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our souls, give us understanding and comprehension, help us to concentrate, to see these things clearly, and make them a part of the resources in our souls, so that as we go forward we may live in a way that pleases you and glorifies Jesus Christ.

For we ask it in his name, amen. We are in the gospel of Mark. We are starting a new chapter this morning, chapter four.

We have seen that Mark is a gospel of action. It records the activities in Jesus' earthly ministry in a very dynamic way. We have seen him emerge after being announced by John the Baptist to announce the coming of the kingdom of God to the nation of Israel.

We have seen him call his disciples. We have seen him teach in the synagogues, cast out demons, heal the sick, preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Mark generally records the fact that Jesus preached.

He does not often tell us what Jesus said, but as we begin chapter four this morning, we are going to have the actual content of what Jesus taught. He is going to address the crowds that he has been addressing all along, these great crowds that thronged in such numbers that he needed to escape from them at times and go up on top of the mountains to be alone with his disciples, to get out in a small boat so that they did not crush him. We saw that the issue that Jesus Christ is raising in the nation of Israel is the issue of God, God's will, God's identity as the God of Israel, and himself, Jesus Christ, as Israel's Messiah, God's son.

By many proofs, God the Holy Spirit is establishing the identity of Jesus Christ through his teaching with authority, his healing, his casting out of demons, his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Those Israelites that knew the word of God should have found it easy to identify Jesus Christ as the Messiah. And yet we find that the crowds are coming, but they are not attracted to Jesus because they understand that he is the Son of God.

They do not come and assemble by and large to hear him teach. They come for the spectacle. They come for what he can do for them.

They have a purpose in their life, which is to be freed from disease or to be freed from adversity, to be freed from demon oppression, to be freed from the oppression of the Roman government that has ruled Israel for so long. They come to Jesus with a hope of getting their problem solved.

He is the means to an end for them.

We've seen this in the reaction of the crowd. We have seen this in the words of Jesus. We have seen him point this out in parable form in talking about the old cloth and the new patch, the old wineskins and the new wine.

And we have seen again and again that he raises the issue, what do you think of Jesus Christ? What do you think about the word of God that is being preached? This is going to be pointed out to us in a very graphic way this morning as we begin chapter four. Jesus has just identified at the end of chapter three the importance of sitting at his feet and learning the truth, absorbing and comprehending what it is that he is saying. It's not the spectacle alone.

It's not the miracles alone. It is the truth that Jesus conveys. Jesus identifies himself as the way, the truth and the life.

No one can come to God the Father but through Jesus Christ. And that truth is the central issue that he is hammering on day by day by day as he confronts the nation of Israel. He pointed this out when he said, they told him that his mother and brothers were outside and he looked about him.

And in Greek it's very graphic. He looks around in a circle. He looks at those who are circled inside the house, sitting at his feet in the posture of disciples, the posture of those who have submitted to the authority of a teacher.

They are seated around him in a circle. This was the classic Greek and Semitic model for disciples. He looks at them and he says, who is my mother, my brothers or my sister? But those who do the will of God.

And of course to do the will of God we have to know the will of God to learn that truth. Now he's going to point this out in a very graphic way here in chapter 4. And again he began to teach by the sea. We've seen the significance of being by the sea, the great highway that runs along the seashore that makes us accessible to anyone and everyone.

He's not in the synagogue where it's Jewish people only or religiously oriented people only. He's by the seashore. He's accessible to everyone.

He is in an area that provides a natural source of amplification for his voice so that everyone can hear. A great multitude was gathered to him. And this word for great is the superlative in the Greek.

This is the biggest crowd yet. There are so many people that there isn't even a question of him trying to stand by the seashore. So he's going to get into a small ship.

This is also not the little boat that he asked the disciples to have ready earlier in case the crowd

became too pressing. This word is a little different. This means a normal size fishing boat.

So Jesus seeing these crowds has made arrangements for Peter or one of the other disciples to take one of the standard fishing boats and moor it close to the shore which provides enough distance to protect him from the crowds, elevates him above the surface of the water, gives a great reflective surface for his voice to be carried to this gigantic crowd that is assembled all along the seashore in this natural amphitheater. This great multitude was gathered to him. He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea.

And the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then he taught them many things by parables. And he said to them in his teaching, 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. Some fell on stony ground where it did not have much earth. And immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth.

And when the sun came up it was scorched and because it had no root it withered away. Some seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced.

Some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred. And he said to them, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. But when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parable.

And he said to them, to you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. But to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they should turn and their sins be forgiven them. And he said to them, do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all parables? The sower sows the word.

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. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground, who when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness.

And they have no root in themselves and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns.

They are the ones who hear the word and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things entering in, choke the word and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground. Those who hear the word, accept it and bear fruit.

Some thirtyfold, some sixty and some a hundred. This is an important parable of the thirty-five parables that Jesus told that are recorded in scripture. Mark gives us seven.

This is one of the few parables which Jesus explains in detail. Jesus has done the interpretation for us. The teaching in parables is something that has been the cause of some confusion.

We have different ways of looking at parables. Different people have seen different things in the parables. So I thought this morning, as we see this great parable and if we understand this one, we can understand others.

If we don't understand this one, Jesus says, how will you understand any of the parables if you don't get this one? So this is an important parable. So I'm going to give you a few points on parables in general. This particular kind of teaching that Jesus uses.

Five points on parables. Five parable principles. You want some alliteration.

First of all, what is a parable? The word parable comes from the Greek. Para means alongside. Balo or balane is the Greek verb that means to throw.

We get our English word ball from this. So it means to throw alongside. To compare one thing to another thing.

Probably the best English translation for the word para, balo, is comparison. Jesus taught them by comparisons. It's a comparison.

It may be just a brief analogy of one thing to another or it may be a story. But a parable is a comparison. That's our first point.

Secondly, a parable is not an allegory. As we define the concept of parable, we see that it is a comparison but it is not an allegory. What is the difference in a parable and an allegory? In a parable, there is one main point of comparison.

There is one idea that this story or this comparison is trying to illustrate and get across. It's a single idea. It makes one argument and makes that very, very clear and very, very well.

An allegory makes many comparisons. We do have some allegories in the Bible. For example, Psalm 23.

Recall Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. It goes on to make many points of comparison between the Lord as a shepherd and the people of God as the sheep. He leads beside still waters.

He causes us to lie down in green pastures. He restores our soul. His rod and his staff are used to comfort.

There are many different points of comparison in this story. That's an allegory. Another example of an allegory is Matthew chapter 7. The wise man builds his house on the rock.

The foolish man builds his house on the sand. There is a comparison of the house to a person's life, of the rock or the sand as the foundation upon which that is built, of the storms as the adversities and the pressures of life, and so forth. That is an allegory.

It is an extended comparison where there are many, many points to be made and to be brought out of that comparison. A parable makes one point and makes it well. There may be several points of comparison, but the purpose of the parable is to make one.

This is important as we look at parables that we don't read too much into them. We don't make them more than they are expected to be. A famous example of taking a parable and turning it into an allegory is the case of Augustine and the story of the Good Samaritan.

Are any of you familiar with the way Augustine views the parable of the Good Samaritan? Good. That means I can tell you and you won't fall asleep. Augustine saw a lot in the story of the Good Samaritan.

He sees the first man who passes by, the priest, representing the law of Israel. The second man who comes by, the Levite, that's the prophets, the books of the prophets. The Samaritan who comes along is Jesus Christ.

He picks up the unbeliever out of the ditch and places him on the donkey. The donkey is a picture of the incarnation. We are sustained by the work of Christ who takes him to the inn.

There is a meaning for every single thing. The inn is the church and the money that is left are the various parts of the New Testament message and so forth. Each point of the story is made to be something that we are all familiar with.

He really makes this, as they say, get up on all fours and walk. He makes many lessons, many points of application from this parable. When we look at the parable of the Good Samaritan, we see the point that Jesus was trying to make.

That is, who is your neighbor? Jesus is answering the question, who is my neighbor? That is the point. So a parable is not an allegory. Scripture does use allegory from time to time, but we do not mix up parables and allegories and we don't give an allegorical interpretation to a parable.

These are principles, but when we start putting them into practice, we'll see that this keeps us straight and prevents us from distorting the word of God. Now, the third point on parables, why did Jesus teach in parables? He tells us in this passage. You recall that they asked him the question in verse 10, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables and he said, To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that seeing they may see but not perceive, hearing they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might turn and their sins be forgiven them.

This has been the occasion for a lot of head scratching because it sounds like God is purposely veiling the gospel to some and revealing it to others. And as we have seen in our previous New Testament studies, it is extremely important when we see an Old Testament reference to realize that this is a footnote, this is a bookmark that says go back to the section of Old Testament scripture that this quote reminds you of and read the whole thing. You recall in these days there weren't chapters and verses in the scriptures.

This is why sometimes a prophecy that might be in the book of Zechariah is attributed to Isaiah. It says in Isaiah the prophet thus and so and you look in the Old Testament it is in Zechariah. Why is that? Because these scrolls were one great long document and if it is the Isaiah scroll it might have Isaiah and Zechariah together.

When you made a reference you couldn't say well if you go down to the prophet Zechariah and you look in chapter 3 verse 2 because there were no such divisions so you would refer to it in a general way. Old Testament references were to ideas, to entire passages that taught a truth and when a New Testament author quotes a verse or two from the Old Testament he is not saying now this is all I want you to think about. He is saying in the same way that we might refer to John 3.16 I might say well you remember God so loved the world.

I expect you to be able to fill in the rest of that verse from your memory. You know what I am talking about when I say God so loved the world. You say oh yes he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So these New Testament quotes are designed to take us back to chapters and concepts in the Old Testament. If we go back to Isaiah and research this which we don't have time to do this morning we discover that Isaiah is talking to a people, the people of God, the nation of Israel, out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb, pictures of the believer but they are a nation that has departed from their God. They have pursued other interests.

They have gone after riches. They have gone after idols. They have gone after prosperity.

They have followed other things than their God and Isaiah brings the message of condemnation and judgment for apostasy, for rebellion, for disobedience, for neglecting the word of God and obedience to that word. This passage comes from that. The conclusion that you will find if you read a commentary or a hermeneutics book talking about parables as to their purpose, people will say Jesus' purpose in preaching or teaching in parables was two-fold, to reveal and to conceal.

They base it on this passage where he says those who are outside have not been given the opportunity to preach in parables and it will reveal to you and it will hide it from these others. I would submit to you that that is not Jesus' purpose. Jesus' purpose in communicating is not to hide the truth.

So for point three, why did Jesus teach in parables? The answer is to reveal. The purpose of teaching in parables is to reveal. Now there are two things that are revealed in that teaching.

For those who are sitting at Jesus' feet, who are following the wisdom that we saw in our scripture reading this morning, if you receive my words, lay up my commandments with you, incline your ear to wisdom, apply your heart to understanding, lift up your voice for it, seek it as silver, search for it as for hidden treasure, what does it say? Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. He doesn't say if so be God has decided in his sovereignty to grant you understanding, then you will understand. There are conditions for understanding the word of God, aren't there? My son, if you will receive my words, if you will lay up my commandments with you so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding, if you lift up your voice for wisdom and cry out for understanding, if you seek for it as silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand and you will find.

When Jesus teaches in parables, it reveals two things. To those who have inclined their hearts to the word of God, to those who have sought it as silver and searched for it as for hidden treasure, it is a revelation of the truth of God. For those who have set aside the word of God, who have neglected its importance and have pursued other things, it reveals their hardness of heart.

It reveals their lack of motivation toward God, their lack of obedience, their lack of interest. It is a revelation. It is not the parable that conceals the truth from those people.

It is their hardness of heart that conceals the truth. It is their failure to incline, to apply, to seek, to search, to lift up their voices for understanding. That's why they don't understand.

A parable does not confuse or obscure the truth to those who are seeking it. It is only a source. It points out the lack of perception of those who have a hard heart.

So point three, why did Jesus teach in parables? To reveal. It illustrates and reveals the truth of scripture to those who are seeking it, and it points out, it reveals the hardness of heart of those who are not seeking, because they hear the story and they completely miss the point, and it reveals the hardness of their hearts. Our fourth point on parables, there are approximately thirty-five parables of Christ that are recorded in the Gospels.

All of these relate to one of three things, either Jesus himself, the kingdom that Jesus preaches, or the followers of Jesus. It points out something about those who follow Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, his kingdom, and his followers are always involved in the parables that he teaches.

Let me give you four steps to understanding the parables. I think a good summary of these is found in Dr. Roy Zook's book called Basic Bible Interpretation. These are pretty much taken from his summary.

To understand a parable, we need to do four things, four steps to understanding any parable.

First of all, note the story's natural meaning. What is the natural point that this story makes? In the parable under our gaze this morning, the sowing and the seed in the soil, what is the natural meaning? What happens to a seed depends on what kind of ground it falls on.

That's the natural meaning. Any gardener, any farmer can tell you that if you haven't plowed the field and you try to sow wheat or sow oats, and you haven't plowed, you're going to have a very, very poor crop. That that does come up will have a shallow root and won't last very long.

That's the natural meaning of the story. So that's the first step. Be sure we have a grip on the natural meaning.

Secondly, determine the problem or question that that parable addresses. Why does Jesus tell this parable? Is he answering a question? Has he observed something in the crowd that causes him to tell this story? What is the occasion for him telling this parable? Thirdly, ascertain the main truth that that parable illustrates. So we've got the natural meaning of the story, the problem that it's addressing, and thirdly, the main truth that that parable brings out or illustrates.

With those three things, we can accomplish the fourth step in interpreting parables, and that is to validate that main truth that the parable teaches from other parts of scripture. There is a wonderful and very important principle related to parables that was perhaps best summed up by the Bible handbook by Joseph Angus and Samuel Green. These two men in the Bible handbook have a little section on parables, and they say something very important.

In fact, it's so good that Dr. Dwight Pentecost in his book, *Things to Come*, quotes this, prints it right on the page in his book because it's so good. This is what Angus and Green say about parables. It is important that parables should not be made the first or the only source of scripture doctrine.

In other words, we don't go to a parable and find a new truth that isn't taught somewhere else in scripture. It's not the first or the only source of this truth. Doctrine otherwise proved may be further illustrated or confirmed by parables.

It's illustrated or confirmed by the parable, but we are not to gather doctrine exclusively or primarily from their representations. So a parable is an illustration. It's just like if I stood up here on Sunday morning and all I did was give you a series of illustrations and never told you any biblical truth, you would have to try to analyze my stories and my anecdotes and extract some meaning from it that would apply to your spiritual life.

And of course, we don't do that. I may tell you a story or an anecdote or point out an illustration from scripture that brings out the truth of something that we see in the Bible. But the truth has to come from the word.

And then the illustration amplifies it. Parables are illustrations. They're comparisons to make truth

that is taught other places in the Bible more clear.

You say, well, that kind of makes sense. I don't really have a problem with that. I'm not.

It seems like we pretty much do that. There are some parables that we are better at doing that with than others. We don't all see the same things in some of the parables, and there are some parables from which we have inadvertently drawn our primary truth.

We won't look at those this morning, but it will come up in our study and we'll see that these principles are vitally important when we get to parables like the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. How much truth about the afterlife have we drawn from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? Can we confirm all of those principles that we draw from that story from other places in scripture? I just toss that out for your meditations this week. Take these four principles and apply them to that parable sometime in your studies and see what conclusions you draw.

But here we are with the parable of the sower and the seeds. We've seen the role that parables play in the teaching of Jesus Christ. So let's apply these four steps now to this parable.

The first thing we want to do, of course, is to understand the story's natural meaning and reading through it. We pretty well understand that. We see that it is not the quality of the seed that is the issue.

In fact, this word here, when he says some seed was sown by the wayside and then it says other seed fell on stony ground, other seed fell among thorns, other seed fell on good ground. That word other is the Greek word *allos*, which means other of the same kind. All of the seed is the same.

It's all good seed. The results in terms of the crop don't depend on what kind of seed was sown because this is all the same seed. The natural point of this story is the nature of the soil determines the crop.

The nature of the soil determines what happens to the seed. So we've accomplished our first step, haven't we? OK, what is our second step? Determine the problem, question or situation that this parable addresses. Where is Jesus as he teaches this parable? Where has he retreated to in a sense? He has had to get clear off the shore, he's up in the boat, huge crowds have gathered.

We saw what they were doing the last time he was down by the seashore, flinging themselves at him to try to be healed. If I can only touch him, my problems will be solved. I want to come down and see what great thing he'll do today.

And we noted that he has pointed this out in many different ways. He said, look, the people that have a relationship with me are those who hear the word of God and do it. That's what I'm looking for.

His inner circle of disciples are the very tiny minority in this huge crowd that are listening to what he's teaching and absorbing it and taking it to heart. If they had recognized Jesus Christ as the Messiah, as the son of God, they would not be flinging their bodies at him, would they? They would be bowing down in reverence. They would be asking him questions like, how can we best please the Lord? How can we bring on the kingdom of God? But that is not their purpose.

And these same people will assemble to see him crucified in just a few short years. So the problem, question or situation that this parable addresses is, what is the response of the people to the teaching of Jesus Christ, to the issue of Jesus Christ as it is presented to them by God, the Holy Spirit? God, the Holy Spirit has enabled and performed these great miracles. Why? Just to dazzle dazzle the people, just to draw a crowd.

What is the purpose of these great and mighty works that he does? It is to confirm his identity, to identify him as the promised, prophesied Messiah. And that truth ought to produce a response of faith and a response of obedience. And instead, it has produced a circus.

It has produced a sideshow, a great entertainment event. So Jesus is addressing this. The Pharisees, the scribes have come down and said all these great works that he's doing, he's doing these in the power of Satan.

He's casting out demons by the prince of demons. And people are saying he's nuts, he's crazy. His family, 40 miles away, has heard that he's out of his mind and they've come up to check on him.

This is the problem that Jesus is addressing. What will people do with the issue of Jesus Christ himself? What will they do when faced with the truth? The seed has been sown. The seed is even now falling on the ground in Israel.

What will they do with it? What kind of soil will they be? Our third step in understanding this parable is to ascertain the main truth that is illustrated by it. And we see in Jesus explanation the answer to that third step. What does he say in verse 14? The sower sows the word.

The seed here represents the word of God, the truth of God's plan and purpose in human history. 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 what happens here? This seed never gets the chance to germinate. It never gets the chance to receive the moisture and the nourishment of the soil and begin its sprouting process. Now, this word that is being preached, is this salvation? Is the issue here the gospel or is it the truth that faces believers after salvation? We as believers in this age always want to ask that question, don't we? We draw kind of a sharp line between, well, is somebody saved or not saved? And then after we get past that, we say, well, now as believers, are we or are we not responding to the truth? Are we responding to the word of God? Jesus doesn't make that distinction here, does

he? He says this is the word.

The word includes the gospel. The word includes the kingdom program of God. The word includes whatsoever things I have commanded you.

All of those things that characterize a disciple are embodied in the word. People who limit this parable to the gospel do themselves a great disservice because it is not talking about the gospel of salvation alone. The seed is the word and the word encompasses the entire plan of God, which includes but is not limited to salvation.

So now what happens here? The first case, the seed, the word falls on hard ground and it is not received. It doesn't sink in. It lays right on the surface.

And it says that immediately Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. Satan comes and takes it away. It was there and now it's gone.

This can happen in the case of someone who hears the gospel. And they don't take it to heart. They don't meditate on it.

They're not convicted of sin and righteousness and judgment at that point. And two weeks later, after having heard a great, clear gospel presentation, you might walk up to them and say, have you heard the gospel before? And they say, oh, yes, somebody was trying to get me saved a couple of weeks ago. Well, do you recall the principles that they told you? What was the gospel that was given to you? They may not even remember.

Well, I just remember that Jesus was involved and they kept telling me I was a sinner. And I don't know. Satan has come and taken that knowledge away.

It doesn't lay there forever and continue to convict and to bring someone to the point of decision. And the same thing happens after salvation. We as believers, if we do not follow the guidance in Proverbs chapter two and Proverbs chapter three of receiving and inclining ourselves toward the word of God, treasuring it, seeking it, searching for it, making it a priority in our life, it's not going to stay there waiting for us to hit a huge crisis and then suddenly reach out and seize it.

It has to be absorbed and meditated on and made a part of our thinking when we receive it. And that is a continuing process, as we'll see when we get further along. So the preaching of the word of God is an opportunity for us, isn't it? It's an opportunity to absorb that supernaturally empowered word, the sword of the spirit, that which contains life and production within itself.

That's the first case. The seed never gets a chance to germinate. It lays there.

It's not received and it is taken away. The second case, the seed that falls in shallow soil. What does Jesus say here? The one sown on stony ground, when they hear the word immediately, they receive it with gladness.

These aren't people who reject the word or ignore it. They receive it with gladness. It sounds great.

That's what I wanted to hear. That's wonderful. Amen, brother.

And yet they have no root in themselves and they endure only for a time afterward when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake. Immediately they are scandalized. Immediately they scandalize them.

They are scandalized. And this is important because we have a hard time getting this word over into English. It's variously translated stumble, offended, sin.

But what happens here? There is a superficial response. There is a superficial acknowledgment of what the word says and what the word teaches. They receive it with joy.

There's no opposition. There's no argument. This is wonderful, but it doesn't sink in deep.

It isn't allowed to get in and sink roots deep into the soil. It's up on the surface. It's a surface kind of thing.

It's a superficial kind of thing. There are rocks in the soil that haven't been plowed up and eliminated. There are hard spots in the soil.

This soil has hardness. It's just not up on the surface. It's buried beneath a veneer of soil.

It looks like fertile soil. It looks like it would be a good place to raise a crop. The hardness just isn't on the surface.

The hardness is beneath the surface. But the same thing happens. The seed can't sink in where it needs to be.

And under pressure, this type of believer falls apart. The word doesn't stay. It doesn't produce fruit.

It doesn't survive pressure. Now, this is probably one of the places that we don't like to look too much because this happens to all of us. We hear a great truth in scripture.

We see a great promise of God in the word. My God shall supply all your needs. He will provide seed for the sower and bread for the eater.

If we exercise that stewardship toward him, he will care for us. We can cast all of our cares on him and so forth. He will strengthen.

He will help. He will uphold with the right hand of his righteousness. All of those promises that we memorize.

But now, today, the pressure has hit. I don't think God had this in mind when he made those promises. I don't think he realized just what a fix I would be in.

I don't think he realized how serious my dilemma would be. I don't think he would realize that the rates were going to go up and my finances would be short. I don't think he realized what this family member would do that put such pressure on me.

I don't think he realized that I would be betrayed, that I would be given the short end of the stick, that people would abuse me the way these people are. I don't think he knew about this endurance battle that I have to fight day after day after day with pain. Or with bitterness or with suffering or with this pressure that comes from people or this pressure that comes from my old sin nature.

I'm under pressure now and those are just words. I don't really think that that's what I don't think that applies to me. I don't think I can claim that for myself.

That's a shallow understanding of the word. God gives us the word for the times of pressure. He gives them to us for the crisis.

Anyone can believe when things are good. Anyone can trust and obey when there's no pressure and there's no challenge and there's no crisis. Jesus said, you all are nice to people who are nice to you.

Well, you do well. Even the unbelievers can do that. But I say to you, love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you, who stick in the knife and twist it, who shortchange you, who badmouth you, who wrong you. Those people that you want to bear a grudge against. Those people that you harbor bitterness.

And anger against. He says, love them, do good to them, pray for them. That takes supernatural life and supernatural power deep down in our soul.

We don't get that from a superficial nod to the truth of the word of God, do we? We have to let God put that inside us. So that's the second case. This seed germinates, but it's in shallow soil.

And when the pressure hits, it doesn't have an effect. And what happens? This is interesting, particularly for those people that try to say this seed is the gospel. If you're going to interpret this parable as referring to the gospel, you run into difficulties in this second kind of soil.

Because what happens? The seed germinates, it sprouts, the sun comes out, and it dies. And it is dead, and it withers up, and it is gone. Which pretty well forces you into believing that one can lose their salvation if they don't persevere.

Because if that plant is the life of God that comes from the gospel, as many people interpret this

parable, what do you do with the plant dying? It is just as dead as if there never were a seed. And what this tells us is we're talking primarily here about believers and about our responsibility to take in the word of God and be nourished by it, to grow and bear fruit and that our fruit should remain. So this seed, after the sun has risen, is scorched, and as a result of having no roots to sustain it, it dries up.

There are many believers today whose lives are indistinguishable from unbelievers. Wouldn't you agree? Do we not look about us? Sometimes we look at ourselves and see that we are indistinguishable from an unbeliever. There is no plant, there is no supernatural life, no supernatural power.

Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. We're indistinguishable from those in the world. That seed may have sprouted at an earlier time in our life, but the pressure came, it died, and we look just like anyone else.

The third case. These are the ones sown among thorns. They are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the desire for other things entering in, choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.

This word for choke is a great word in Greek. You have to almost choke to say it. It's one of those words that sounds like what it means.

They call that onomatopoeic. It's tsumknaigo. Tsumknaigo is this word.

Choke. It is choked. This word in fact is used in Luke for when Jesus is with these crowds and they press together so tightly that they are virtually choked.

Squeezed into where they can't function. This is what happens in this third kind of soil. This type of person hears the word, but three things choke it.

What are those three things? The first one is the worries of this age. Deep concern. Paul says over in 2 Corinthians, he says, I worry daily about the church and he uses this word.

It's a deep concern. It's a concern that goes on from day to day. And sometimes we don't realize that our deep concerns have crossed the line into worry.

And because we focus on that deep concern, it's choking the growth and the life that the word of God is supposed to place inside us, supposed to create within us. A deep concern can stunt our spiritual growth. The deep concerns, the worries of this age, of this world, the financial pressures, the concerns we have for family members, the concerns we have over health, over one another, concerns we have about the future, the concerns we have about the past, things that we've never been able to shake.

Those deep concerns can choke. The second one is what he calls the deceit of wealth. The

deceitfulness of riches.

This word for deceitfulness is interesting because *apate* in Homeric Greek meant the allurement. It's not just something that fools you, but it fools you because it looks so good and it's really not. It's the apple that turns to ashes in our mouth.

It is the allure, the false promise that this holds out. And wealth, financial security, holds out a great promise of security and well-being, doesn't it? The great dream that is commonly held out in fables and in stories is great riches. He became a millionaire overnight.

All of his problems were over. And that's really a false promise, isn't it? People who are rich have worries over losing it, have worries over how best to use it, how best to invest it, how best to preserve it and keep it and perhaps increase it, how to disperse it when one shuffles off his mortal coil and so forth. The deceit, the fact that wealth will bring happiness, that is its great choking power.

The idea that financial security or any form of material security will provide happiness is a false allure. And it chokes and stunts the growth that we're supposed to have as believers. And the third type here is the strong desire toward other things.

Epiphemia. Sometimes this is a positive thing. Paul said, I have a strong desire to come see you, talking to one of the churches.

Epiphemia, but it's also the word that is translated lust. The desires that we have. Why is it that we desire things? Have you ever thought about this? The psychologists have come up with the five levels of need, Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

We have at our basic instinctive level the need for food and clothing and shelter. We have the need for safety and security. We have the need for material things and to be able to control the circumstances around us.

We have the need for fellowship and approval of people in our periphery for their esteem, their good opinion of us. And at the top of the hierarchy of needs is what they call self-actualization, where you're happy with the world, you're happy with others, and you're happy with your own self. You see people stand up and say, I like myself.

You like me, I like myself. I'm happy with myself. I've reached that pinnacle of having all my needs met.

But we never do. In this life, in the natural realm and in the realm of the flesh and of the human, there is never some of these needs. God built us to depend on him.

And without dependence on him, we will always feel need. And no amount of wealth, no amount of security, no amount of acceptance, no amount of fame can ever fill those needs. And so we

constantly have desires.

So we can see that this parable has a lot to say about our lives as believers, our production, and we're going to continue our study of it in coming lessons. But for now, let's close in a word of prayer. The Gospel of Matthew closes with that injunction, with what we have come to call the great...