

95-03-12Mark

We thank you for this day. We thank you that by your grace you have preserved us to this point. You have located us here in Tahlequah, Oklahoma on this day.

And we have the privilege of assembling with other believers and praising your name and thanking you for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the love that he expressed to us on the cross in saving us, in cleansing us from sin, and giving us an eternal relationship with you. We pray now that as we look into the truth of your word, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our souls. We pray that as a result of these things our minds will be renewed and we will be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. At the time of Jesus Christ, the written word of God, the law of Moses, had been in the hands of Israel for roughly 1,400 years.

1,400 years of possession of the law of Moses. And we know that in the years following 1,400 B.C., that word was amplified and added to through the historical books, the works of the prophets, and so on. But Israel had the word of God in written form in their hands for 1,400 years by the time Jesus came to this earth.

In that time, and by the time of Jesus Christ, what had happened? What was the situation in Israel when Jesus came? A lot of tradition, a lot of human interpretation had built up around the word of God. In the Navy, and you know how much I like to talk about the Navy, in the Navy we have ships, right? And these ships spend time in the sea. And as they sit there and float in the water next to the dock or out at sea and so forth, little life forms attach themselves to the hull of the ship.

And this was even more common back in the age of sail when we had iron ships. No, we had wooden ships and iron men. Now we have iron ships and wooden men.

But back then, particularly, these wooden ships were a wonderful place for life forms to start to build up and grow. And ships would become barnacle encrusted. And after a certain period of time, this encrustation would become so great that the smooth surface of the hull would be roughened and filled with obstacles to the point that the wood would be weakened and the progress of the ship through the water was greatly slowed because of all of these rough surfaces.

There was a lot of resistance. And from time to time, they would have to put a ship in dry dock and get under the water line there and scrape off, chip off these barnacles and these encrustations to get back down to the original wood that that ship was made of. This still takes place today, even with iron ships.

We still have to clean the barnacles off the hull so that the ship can be efficient and move through the water like it's supposed to. In the 1400 years that Israel had the law of Moses, it became

barnacle encrusted to the point that the original law was no longer visible. By the time of Jesus Christ, there was so much commentary on the Old Testament that the commentary took up more paper than the word of God itself.

The five books of Moses could be contained on a single scroll. But the Mishnah, the commentary on the law, had swelled to fill volumes. And we can get copies of this even today.

The Talmudic writings, the Mishnah and so forth, all the different categories of commentary and interpretation. And this had become the norm. This is what people looked to.

When they thought about what they were going to do on any particular day, it was conditioned by tradition. It was conditioned by the interpretation of men. These were the worthy scholars that had made these interpretations in the eyes of the people.

Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai and Gamaliel and all of these other great interpreters and scholars and students of the word had helped to form these interpretations and these traditions. Some of them were very good. Some of them were accurate.

Many of them were not. Many of them were amplifications and additions that had nothing to do with the intent of God. And over that 1400 year period, much of Israel could no longer see and interpret the word of God because it had become encrusted.

Now, about 1900 years ago, our New Testament books were written. We have had these books 500 years longer than Israel had the law. Do you think it is possible that we have had some barnacles attach themselves to our New Testament and to our understanding of it? Do you think that over the course of the centuries, we have started to take some things for granted? We have accepted interpretations as the truth without bothering to get beneath those interpretations and check them against the genuine article.

I think it is possible. I think it is likely. And I think that we have seen some of those things in our studies of the New Testament in Colossians and here in the Gospel of Mark.

If we want to rightly divide the word of truth, we have to be sure that it is the word of truth that we are looking at and that we are not interpreting interpretations, that we are not going to Scripture with our minds already made up about what it says. This parable that we have in Mark chapter 4 is a classic example. Over the years, yea, over the centuries, this parable has come to be understood by a lot of believers as talking about the Gospel.

This of course is the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils. Many good and faithful interpreters of the Bible understand this to be talking about the Gospel. And it is not my intention to say that they are bad scholars or to impugn their integrity or their desire to understand the word.

But I do not think that we can suffer barnacles on our ship if we want to be thoroughly furnished

unto all good works. We have got to look at what Scripture says. Now last Sunday, we looked at this parable in the light of what Scripture says.

We went to more than a dozen passages in the New Testament where *sozo*, the Greek word that is translated deliver or save or heal, is used for things other than eternal salvation. We know that deliverance in the plan of God comes through faith. That is both deliverance from the lake of fire and it is deliverance in daily life.

Any kind of deliverance that we want to talk about that comes from God, whether it is salvation or deliverance in suffering, deliverance from persecution, deliverance from pressure, deliverance in our daily lives, it all comes the same way. It comes by grace through faith. We cannot automatically assume that every time we see the word save or every time we see the word deliver, that is talking about eternal salvation.

If we do that, we will find ourselves in error because that word is not always used for eternal salvation. By jumping to a conclusion, by making an assumption, by assuming that everybody that has ever gone before and looked at this parable is correct in seeing salvation, we can miss truth that God has for us. We have to judge what Scripture says by what Scripture says.

Now, the primary reason that this parable is understood to be salvation is based on Luke chapter 8 verse 12 where Jesus, in interpreting this parable to the disciples, says the seed that falls on the hard-packed ground is snatched away by the devil in order that they might not, having believed, be saved. That if they believed, those people represented by the hard-packed soil, if the seed stayed there and they made it the object of their faith, they might be saved, it says in the King James. And that is the word *sozo*, which means to be delivered.

And when we see that, we say, well, Jesus says if they respond to that seed, they would be saved. Therefore, this seed represents the gospel and eternal salvation is in view. Now, these principles apply to salvation.

It is true that the Word of God includes the gospel of salvation. And it is true that when we make that seed of the gospel the object of our faith, we are delivered. But this parable is not addressing itself to salvation.

It is addressing itself to the lives of believers. And how do we know that? One of the ways we know that is by our study of the word *sozo* last week. In the Gospel of Luke, the very same book where Jesus says the devil takes that word away, lest, having believed, they might be delivered, we saw more than a dozen passages where Luke uses *sozo* to refer to something besides eternal salvation.

Another reason is right here in the Gospel of Mark itself and in all of the accounts of this parable. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this. Look in Mark chapter 4, verse 11.

After delivering this parable to the crowds, to this huge assembled company on the banks of the Sea of Galilee there, as he stands in the boat, when he was alone, after he had left the crowds, his disciples came up and asked him about the parable. And he said to them, in verse 11, 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.

Now, there is a truth contained in this parable. Everyone would agree. The question is, is that truth the Gospel of salvation or is it a message for believers? Think about this.

Jesus is teaching in parables so that some people will understand and other people's lack of understanding will be revealed, right? He says, in order that, seeing they may see and not perceive. Hearing they may hear and not understand. We saw two weeks ago that the purpose of parables is to reveal.

The purpose of parables is to reveal. If there is a single thing that you remember from this study, the purpose of a parable is not to conceal. That is a terrible thing to say, that Jesus would go around trying to deceive and hide the truth.

He himself addresses this in this passage, as we will see. He says, 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 their blindness and their hardness of heart will be revealed.

Now, is God hiding the truth from them so that they will stay blind and so that they will stay hard of heart? He is not. Look what Jesus says down in verse 21 of this chapter. After explaining this parable, which we have reviewed in some detail, he says in verse 21, Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Don't we bring a lamp to put it up on a lampstand? There is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.

It is not Jesus' purpose to come and bring the light of the gospel and hide it under a basket and only let certain people peek under the basket, and those are the ones who will be saved. If we decide that this parable is talking about the gospel, that the seed represents the gospel, and that some people don't get the chance to understand it and believe it, we are saying that God decides who is saved and who is not. Now, there is a segment of Christianity that believes that, but we do not because that is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches responsibility. We as human beings are responsible for the decision that we make about Jesus Christ. If you strap your child to a chair and then tell them to get up and clean their room, and they don't get up because they are strapped to the chair, and then you discipline them, spank them, and say, You didn't clean up your room.

That is terribly unfair and unjust, isn't it? You have given them an instruction that they cannot accomplish, they cannot obey, because you yourself have prevented them from doing it, and then

you discipline them for it. That is the position that some people put God in. God creates people, puts them on the earth, commands them to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, or go to the lake of fire, but then He does not give them the ability to do so.

Blasphemy. That is blasphemy. That is an impugning of the character of God.

And I would not want to stand before God on the Day of Judgment and explain that I have not only believed that myself, but had taught others that God commands people to accept Jesus Christ, but does not give them the ability. The Bible nowhere teaches that. What does the Bible say? Jesus brought the light, not to put it under a bushel, not to put it under a basket, but to put it up on a lampstand.

And that light shines and it reveals. It reveals the truth of God. Jesus says, if you have an ear to hear, hear.

If you are here and listening to this Word, hear it. Let it soak in. It's your choice.

That's why there's a command to hear. If you don't have the ability to hear, why on earth would God command you to hear? How could He give us a command that He Himself has not given us the ability to obey? It makes no sense. It impugns the character of God.

It is blasphemy. It is blasphemy to say that God is so unjust and unfair that He would not allow someone to see that light, that God would hide that light under a bushel basket. But that's what we must conclude if we say that Jesus is presenting the Gospel here in parable form, because He says those who are outside can't understand those parables.

Rick, you might want to catch the phone. Jesus is teaching the truth and He desires for it to be revealed. He desires for it to be heard and understood.

He desires that it be the object of faith. What does the Bible say? Not our tradition, not our great scholars of the past and all of the writings that come out of 5-point Calvinism and so forth. That is not the issue.

If you're wondering what's going on here, I think Ricky Vaughan is calling us on the phone. What is the issue here? What does the Word of God say? It is not the will of God that any perish, but that all come to repentance. Now, the Word of God is either right or it's not.

It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. So, if God wants everyone to come to repentance, He's not going to be a schizophrenic. He's not going to be a split personality and say, well, I want everybody to repent, but I'm only going to give a fraction of them the ability to do so because I don't really... He either does want us to repent or He doesn't.

However, if the issue here is human choice, it's our decision. Now we're on the hook. We are

responsible to respond to the command of God.

God says if you have an ear to hear, pay attention. Listen. Jesus starts out this parable with that word.

In fact, He says it twice in two different ways. He says, listen, behold. These are imperative commands in the Greek and they're very strong and abrupt.

It's like what a Greek soldier would have heard in the army. His company commander might have stood in front of the formation and said, listen up. Pay attention.

Look. Jesus gives these two short, quick commands. Pay attention.

Hear. It is Jesus' desire that people hear this parable and understand it and it's their choice. We talked about that hard-packed soil last Sunday.

One of the things that I did not point out to you I'd like to mention to you this morning. That is, where does this hardness come from? Why did this soil get so hard-packed? We know that that's a representation of a hard heart. We went over to Ephesians 2 and 4. We saw in Ephesians 4.18 that it talked about the hardness of heart.

Throughout Scripture, particularly the New Testament, it talks about the hardness of heart that is sometimes encountered. What is that hardness? I think there are a few facts that will help us put this into perspective. The Greek word here is porosis.

You've heard of osteoporosis, right? In fact, we have a little bit of confusion because when I first heard the term porosis, I thought, well, it's getting pores in it. It's getting hollow places in it. It's getting pores.

That's what's causing it to be weak and to snap at certain points. Both of these words come from Greek. There are two words in Greek called poros.

The only difference is there are two different kinds of Os. If you've been around the fraternities and sororities and so forth and you've heard these Greek letters, you've heard of the letter omega. That's one kind of an O. You might think of it as a W in Greek.

There's another O that's like our round O, and that's omicron. It's omicron and omega. Well, there's one poros that's P-omega-R-O-S, and there's another one that's P-omicron-R-O-S.

There's only the difference of the one kind of O and the other. One of them is the word that we get pore from, the pores that are in the skin of an orange or in our own skin, those pores. It means a passageway, a tunnel, or a hole.

That's the one that is spelled with an omicron. That's not the word that this porosis is based on. It's not holes in our heart that we're talking about.

This porosis is the one with the omega, with the W. This is the porosis that comes in Greek. In fact, it was used for things like a callus. In classical Greek, they talked about the building up of a callus.

This was a porosis. If you had a gallstone or a stone in the bladder or in the kidney, this was described by the Greek physicians way back when, and they used this word porosis. What they used to call chalkstone that would build up in the joints, which we know today as arthritis, that bone growth, which many of you can bear witness to, was called by the Greeks porosis.

It is a hardening, a callusing, a building up of sediment. It is like the growth of barnacles on a ship. It is like the incrustation that takes place.

One of the things that all of these examples have in common, every usage of this word that I've been able to find in both classical and Koine Greek, it's always the result of a process. Think about that. It's always the result of a process.

If an oyster builds up a pearl in its body because of a grain of sand that has gotten inside its shell, how long does it take for that pearl to develop? In some cases, it takes years, depending on the size of the pearl that they're trying to cultivate, and they plant these grains of sand. It is a process that takes place over time. Can you build up a callus in a single day? Do you develop arthritis in your joints in a single day? It's a process.

It takes a repeated, ongoing buildup of hard surface. That's the word that's used in the Bible for hardness of heart. It's not an instant slamming of the door in the Lord's face.

It is a process that takes place over and over again. It is a pattern of thought. It's a pattern of life.

And not only unbelievers, in the case of the Gospel, but also believers, in the case of the Word of God, can build up porosis. We can build up porosis in our soul. We can become hard-packed.

We don't like to think about this. We like to believe that last point of five-point Calvinism, perseverance of the saints. If we're saved, God is at work in us, to will and to do His good pleasure, and that if we're saved, it will be kind of an automatic process, and we will be getting better and better, and we don't really have to worry too much about that.

That is manifestly not the case. I would say the majority of us as believers have a porosis problem. We have areas in our life where we have repeatedly resisted the penetrating power of the Word of God, that sharp sword that desires to break up that porosis within us.

God wants to chip our barnacles off. He wants to get that slowing down accretion, that inefficiency that hides the truth and that insulates us from what God wants to do. He wants to chip that away.

That's why the Word of God pierces. It's why it lays us open, even to the joints and the marrow. You can't open up a human body any further than to go to the center of the bones and lay bare the marrow.

That's what the Word of God is designed to do in our souls. Now, we're going to look today, quickly, at this second type of soil that Jesus gives. We saw the hard-packed soil, and this is a picture of believers who don't even give the Word of God a hearing anymore.

The Word of God comes, that seed is scattered, and because they do not receive it, it doesn't linger in their minds very long. The devil will come and snatch it away. It will be replaced by something that they prefer, something that is associated with the way of the world, something that's associated with the travelers and the passers-by that follow that hard-packed road.

And we as believers can do this. We can fall for the prosperity gospel. Unbelievers can fall for this as well, but this has believers primarily in view.

We can be deceived. We can buy philosophy. We can buy tradition.

We can buy the same old line that has been given for years and years and years, and it's our responsibility to seek the truth. God has put His Word in our hands, and we are without excuse. We can't defend ourselves any better than the Pharisees could defend themselves in the days of Jesus Christ.

We've got to look at the truth. In order to do that, we've got to be receptive to the Word of God. We have to make a choice.

If we have an ear to hear, we've got to hear. We've got to heed that command that Jesus gives. Listen.

Behold, a sower went forth to sow. Jesus puts this truth in the form of a parable, and He expects that people can understand it. If Jesus is preaching the gospel here, why has He packaged it in such a way that those who are outside cannot understand it? Does Jesus not want them to understand the gospel? It makes no sense.

Jesus is teaching believers, and He is also exposing the porosis of those believers in Israel who have not bothered to make this choice and heed this command to hear. The second kind of soil, Jesus describes it in the parable up in verse 5 of chapter 4 of Mark. Some of this seed 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. Jesus interprets this kind of soil down in verse 16. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy, with gladness.

There's not this initial rejection. There's not this complete indifference to the word. They hear it, and they immediately receive it with joy, with gladness.

But they have no root in themselves, and so they endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Immediately they are scandalized.

Immediately they are as though they never had the word. That plant, that production that came from the word withers and dies and disappears. And it is as though the seed were never there.

Now, what can we say about this ground? What do we observe in Jesus' words? The ground seems receptive, doesn't it? The seed disappears into the soil, and we say, great, good. It's not this hard-packed ground. The birds aren't going to carry away this seed.

It's received it. In fact, it's received it enthusiastically, received it with joy. However, there are three words you can apply to this type of reception.

It is rapid, it is superficial, and it is temporary. It's rapid, superficial, and temporary. It doesn't nurture the seed.

It doesn't embrace it and take it deep inside. It keeps it out at a safe distance. It's hidden.

It's received. Nobody can tell that it was rejected, but it doesn't sink in deep. Superficial and temporary.

And under pressure, the effects disappear. Pressure shows us for what we are. Being in pain, being in isolation, being alone, being in a crisis situation shows us for what we are.

Peter had brave words to say about his loyalty to Jesus Christ until the pressure hit, until the words of a young servant girl put him in such fear that he couldn't function and he couldn't acknowledge his relationship with Jesus Christ in public. The same disciple that walked on the water, the same disciple that recognized Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, was placed in a position of denying Jesus Christ by the words of a single servant girl in a courtyard by a fire because of fear, because of pressure. And in some areas of that soil, the seed had not sunk in deep and taken root.

And when the pressure came, it withered and it died. So if we want to avoid being the stony soil, how can we do it? What should we look for? First of all, I want you to notice that it says, they hear the word and immediately it is received with joy, with gladness. It doesn't say that.

When we get down to the productive soil, the 30, 60 and 100 fold soil, it doesn't say that that soil received the seed with joy, does it? Do you find that unusual at all? It doesn't talk about the attitude with which the seed is accepted. It only talks about it with the stony soil. And we see here the entire spectrum of emotion, don't we? When the seed is first dropped on the ground, it is

received with enthusiasm and with joy.

But when the pressure hits, we run to the entire opposite end of the emotional spectrum. Now there is reaction. It's hot.

It's dry. It's hot. There's pressure.

And we run the entire emotional spectrum from joy to fear, from joy to panic, from joy to seeking the world's solution, from joy to human viewpoint, from joy to a complete lack of faith. That joy didn't last. It didn't sustain under pressure.

And one of the things that we see taught over and over in the Word of God is real simple. You can sum it up in three or four words. One word is a contraction.

Three words. Emotion can't think. Emotion can't think.

There is no rational, intellectual component to emotion. By definition, it is a feeling. Have you ever awakened or found yourself in the middle of the day and you suddenly feel down and you can't think of a good reason? You just feel down.

Your motivation is gone. It seems as though a cloud has passed in front of the sun and who knows what the cause may be. A chemical imbalance, something you ate, some random thought that sends you down a particular track.

Emotions aren't rational. There are times when we have no reason to be depressed and we suddenly find ourselves depressed. We find ourselves without motivation and we can't think of a good reason why.

Emotions can't think. Emotions respond to what we do think. And we can change our emotions and our emotional state by thinking proper thoughts.

If we find ourselves emotionally down, the solution is not to try to find some other emotional stimulation. The solution is to get our thinking straightened out. Emotions respond to thought and if our thinking is what it should be, our emotions will correct themselves in short order.

Emotions can't think. This word is received with joy. Amen, brother.

Hallelujah. I believe it. That's great.

Great sermon. Wonderful job. Is that word still there and still alive when the pressure hits three or four days later, three or four weeks later? That wonderful sermon that was so good, that wonderful word of truth that struck you and created joy in your soul, is it still there with its life and its power when the pressure hits? That's the measure of whether we are fertile soil or stony soil.

If we want to be challenged by the word of God, if we want to have our minds renewed, we have

to recognize that the word of God isn't always received with joy. In fact, if you don't find your toes getting stepped on, like I do, if you don't find that sharp sword piercing into your soul and revealing things that are ugly and things that you don't want to see, something's wrong. There is a stone in your soul that's preventing the penetration of the word.

What did we say at the outset of this sermon? The word of God is profitable for doctrine, for rebuke, for correction. What does the word of God say about rebuke and correction? Do you remember over in Hebrews? What does it say in Hebrews 12, verse 11? No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. Sometimes when we hear the word of God and it's doing its life-changing, supernatural, renewing work, it's going to be painful.

We're not going to receive it with joy. I fervently hope that from time to time you leave this morning's service grumbling with a furrow in your brow and unhappy because the word of God has done its work and has pierced into your soul like it does into my soul and like it should for all of us and show us things that we don't like to see. Reveal to us the places where we still need to change after, lo, these many years, we're not a finished work of God.

The word of God ought to produce depression in us from time to time. It ought to produce some discouragement and some God-given guilt, some God-given sense of a need for change. No rebuke is pleasant, the word of God says.

It's painful. It hurts. That's what a spanking is supposed to do.

It's supposed to wake us up by its pain. And if the word of God does not step on your toes from time to time, then your toes are not in the right place. If the roots of the word of God do not sink into the center of your soul and break up the chunks, then we've got rocks in our soul.

There's something the matter. It's not always an occasion for joy to receive that word. It is sharp.

It is piercing. It will lay us open to the bone if we let it. But it's our choice.

Jesus gave the command. It's not an automatic thing. You can sit here under the sound of my voice.

You can keep the Moody Broadcast Network on 24 hours a day. And if you don't choose to hear and to listen, that word will encounter the stones and the first time the pressure hits, it will be gone. Its effect on us will be insignificant.

It's our choice. We choose. We decide.

So it requires faith. Sometimes it's painful, but Hebrews also tells us that afterward, after that pain, it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. The peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Some of the warmest times that I have had with my daughters are a short time after I have had to

discipline them. After they have malfunctioned and they have received what they knew would come, which is discipline. And it's painful.

And it's sorrowful. And many times, a big part of the pain is their sense of disappointment at having failed their parents. Some kids are like that more than others.

Some children, when they realize that their parents are disappointed in them, it cuts them to the quick, worse than any spanking, worse than any standing in the corner, worse than any loss of privileges. The knowledge that they've disappointed their parents is a far more stinging rebuke than anything else. That's how we should be.

But afterward, when there is that restoration and that confirmation that although we have engaged in discipline, it hasn't changed the fact that we love each other and we care for each other and we desire only the best for the children that we discipline. And there is that time of fellowship and that time of peace. The peaceable fruit of righteousness follows that painful discipline in our lives just like it does in the lives of children that we are training.

That's the message we find in Hebrews chapter 12. You may also note that in order to receive that Word and break up the stones, it requires faith. It's kind of an obvious point, but we sometimes miss it.

We can hear some great things. We can say, you know, that makes a lot of sense. That rings true.

I think that's the truth of the Word of God. But we've got to do more than that. We have to make it the object of our faith.

We have been through faith and hope and love a time or two here. And you will recall that the object of our faith is the Word of God. The Word of God embodies and expresses Jesus Christ.

And He is the ultimate object of our faith. Not only do we hear these things, but we have to embrace them. Take them in, painful though it may be, and let it work its supernatural work within us.

James 1, 5-12, talks about the role of faith in our lives. It also requires humility. And in that same chapter of James, James 1, you can look at verses 18-21.

It requires patience and perseverance. Romans 12-12. Be joyful in hope.

Patient in affliction. Faithful in prayer. When the sun comes up, we better be embracing that seed and bringing it in deep and not let the sun wither the effects of that Word in our soil.

It's a decision we make. It's not an emotion. We don't think back.

When you were under some big, terrible pressure in your life, when you were in a crisis situation,

did you ever say, well, you know, I was at a fellowship dinner at Tahlequah Bible Church six or seven months ago and we just had a whale of a good time. And thinking back on that, I really find a renewed sense of strength and endurance here. Thinking back on good times that we've had or on joy that we've experienced in the past isn't a source of strength under pressure.

It's the Word of God. It's the promises of God. It's our faith in what God will do, not on some experience that we've had in the past.

And so many Christians get discouraged and disillusioned because they're on an emotional roller coaster. They come on Sunday and pump up emotionally for the week, but long about Thursday when the cares of this life start wearing them down, that emotional pump doesn't provide any power. And they say, I've got no power in my life.

I just feel like I'm an unbeliever in terms of resources and strength and endurance. Why? We can't rely on emotion. Emotion can't think.

Emotion can't make the Word of God the object of faith. We have to choose to think about the Word of God and choose to trust it. It's our choice and it's our responsibility.

And when we do that, it may rebuke us. It may correct us. It may make us take a different course of action than we've always taken.

It may chip some barnacles off of our hopes. But when it does, afterward, it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. We have to be willing to endure some painful correction if we want to.

No rebuke is joyful. The joy will come not only now, but also at the end. You may recall in 1 Peter 4 verses 12 and 13, Peter says, Beloved, don't think that it's strange when you endure this fiery trial, which is to try you as though some strange thing were happening to you.

But rejoice, because to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, when His glory is revealed, you also will be glad with exceeding joy. In this life and in this age, we have to choose to be joyful. We have to choose.

That's why we have a command to rejoice. Peter in this passage says, Rejoice when you partake of these sufferings. Remember Paul says, Rejoice evermore.

Again I say, Rejoice. It's a command. Commands involve choice.

We have to decide to obey. But soon, there will come a day when our joy will be spontaneous and will be automatic. We won't have to choose to be joyful when the Lord returns.

If we partake of His sufferings now, there's an entire separate study on the sufferings of Christ as they're mentioned here by Peter because it involves We look at Peter and we say, Well, if I suffer

as a Christian, if I'm persecuted because I am a believer, which is a pretty rare thing in this day and age. We can read stories of people that have been martyred for their faith. But that's not what Peter is talking about here.

The sufferings that we endure as believers are used by God to shape us, to correct us, to try our faith and work patience. When we partake of the sufferings of Christ, Christ suffered the whole 33 years that He was on this earth. He learned obedience through suffering.

And He learned that obedience long before He got to the cross. We share the sufferings of Christ when we take those sufferings and make them the occasion for faith. And when we do that, we can rejoice now and we know that we'll rejoice in the future.

So in this picture that Jesus paints for us of the field and the seed falling on the soil, it's our choice. What kind of soil are we going to be? Are we going to be hard-packed soil and I can't wait to get out the door. I've got to roast in the oven.

There's a game on this afternoon. I've got things to do and people to see. That's the hard-packed soil.

The Word of God never even makes a dent. And tomorrow... What did they talk about in church yesterday? Oh, I don't know. Same old stuff.

Hard-packed soil. We don't want to be the soil that's got the stones in it. Are we going to protect and insulate certain areas of our life and certain areas of our thought and not apply the Word of God to it? Not endure that painful removal.

What would it be like if you went to the dentist and said, well, I've got this abscess and I have these cavities but I don't want any pain. If it's going to take pain to fix this, well then, don't even bother. We endure that pain because we know that on the other side we're going to have peace and we're going to have a productive set of teeth.

If we want to be productive in the Christian life in a genuine sense, it's going to be painful. God is going to humiliate us in areas where we need to be humble. He's going to correct us in areas where we need correction.

We've got to let God's Word sink its roots into us and break up those stones in the soil. And it's our choice. Let's close now in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the ministry of Jesus Christ. We thank You for His example. We thank You for His teaching in the form of these parables where He sought to reveal the truth of the Kingdom, the truth of Your plan and program for human history.

And we pray now that as we go forth into this week that when the sun rises and shines upon our soil that the Word of God will sink deep, that it will be penetrating us in every area of our lives so

that as You bring pressure upon us, as You discipline us and chasten us, it will survive, it will last and bring forth that fruit of love and joy and peace. It will enhance our faith. It will enhance our toleration and our love for one another so that in every way, in every aspect of our life, we reflect the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We ask it in His name. Amen.