

95-03-26Mark

This is a good time for the children to be dismissed to go down to children's church. You thought I was going to forget, and I probably would have. Mark chapter 4, the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils.

As you will recall, Jesus placed a great emphasis on this parable. He said, if you don't understand this parable, how will you understand any of the parables? And we have discovered in our examination of this teaching of Jesus that this parable focuses on the truth of faith itself. How do we take in and assimilate the truth that God communicates to us through His Word? That's what this parable is about.

And if we understand that process, if we understand this parable, that is going to enable us to benefit from all of the parables, indeed all of the teaching of the Word of God. And if we miss this great and important truth, we are going to have a very difficult time understanding what Jesus is getting at in His other parables, and the truth that He desires to communicate to us. Now we saw last time, we had a picture in the bulletin that looked like an upside down horseshoe.

A horseshoe with the open end up. And there is an arrow on the left side of that vessel, or that container, that is the place of entry. There is an arrow pointing in.

And this is a symbol or an illustration of the intake place of our soul. This is a place where we hear the teaching of the Word of God. And there is a decision point right there at that opening.

When we have the preaching of the Word of God, the teaching of the Word of God, we make a decision. Are we going to take advantage of that and hear it? There are people who attend church on Sunday morning. There are people who turn on their radios and listen to good teachers who are broadcast over the airwaves.

There are good teachers on television from time to time that preach the Word of God. We make a decision as to whether or not we are going to expose ourselves to that teaching, to hear it. And that is decision point number one.

If we say yes at that point, we assemble ourselves together to hear the teaching of the Word of God. We make it when the Word of God is being taught. We are there.

We hear the words. We are present and accounted for. And we have the opportunity to hear it.

We have said yes at point number one. That Word of God, that teaching of truth, enters into our soul. And now we have a second decision point.

And this might be down at the bottom of that vessel. This is down inside us. This is not a visible thing.

You can see if someone has assembled or hasn't assembled. You can tell if someone has turned on their radio or their TV or their tape recorder to hear the teaching of the Word of God. That is usually a visible decision.

But this second point down inside our soul, only the individual believer knows what happens at that second point. And God Himself. It is between the believer and the Lord.

What are we going to do with that truth that we have heard? Are we going to meditate on it? Are we going to try to digest it? To assimilate it? To incorporate it into our thinking? Or is it going to be sort of an academic truth that we can repeat and we can talk about at a superficial level, but it doesn't really transform our thinking? We decide whether or not that takes place in the privacy of our own soul. It is a decision between ourselves and the Lord. What are we going to do with that truth? Hopefully we will follow the teaching of Scripture, the commandment of Scripture.

We will receive that blessing that comes to the man who not only hears the teaching of the Word of God, but meditates on it day and night. That person who lets it instruct and correct and rebuke patterns of thinking, ways of thinking, traditional reactions, traditional priorities that we may have had for many years in our lives. We let the Word of God sink in and break up the hard places in our soul.

That is a decision that we make. We are the only ones that know. Nobody else can do it for us.

I can't get into your soul and say, now believe this, trust it, meditate on it, think about it. Make it part of your prayer line. Make it part of your thought line.

Make that Word of God the object of your faith. I can't do that for you and none of us can do it for each other. It is a decision that each of us makes.

So we have said yes at the point of hearing. We pray God that we say yes at the point of trusting. And assimilating and incorporating into our thinking that Word of Truth.

And now up on the other side of that vessel, on the right hand side is the place of output. The production of our soul. The application of the Word of God to our experience.

We can hear the Word of God and know it. We can believe it and change the patterns of our thinking and change our priorities and change our perception of life. What should we do in any given circumstance? How should we act around certain people? What decision should we make at this decision point in our life? The Word of God can transform our thinking and give us knowledge of the will of God in each of these areas.

But there comes a point where now we are in that place. We are at that point in our life where it is time to make a decision. It is time to act.

It is time to fulfill a priority that we know to be right. And we have a decision point there. We may

fail right at the point of application.

We know better. We know the truth. We know what we should be doing.

And yet we get distracted. We fall back on an old habit or an old pattern of behavior. And at the point of really putting that into practice, we shrink back.

We fail. These three decision points, adhering, assimilating, incorporating, and at the point of applying, are what Jesus is telling us about in this parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils. That first type of soil, the hard packed soil, this is the believer at the point of hearing.

In fact, any person at the point of hearing. This is analogous and the principle applies to the gospel. At the point of hearing, some people reject.

They don't go to the Billy Graham crusade. They won't listen to a gospel presentation from a friend or a relative or on the radio or in a tract or in a book. Get that away from me.

I'm not interested. I know what that's all about and it's not for me. Some people need a crutch.

I don't need a crutch. If you find that helpful to you, that's great. I don't want to hear it.

There are people who are believers, who are saved. The blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed them from all sin. They are counted with the redeemed.

They will be in the eternal future with God and yet, on a daily basis, they don't interest themselves in the word of God. They don't assemble themselves together with believers of like mind. They don't take advantage of the services where other believers gather and hear the teaching of the word and share the word of God with one another through their fellowship.

They reject at the point of hearing. I'm too busy. I've got other things going on.

It's not important to me to do that. If I happen to have a night free or a morning free, maybe I'll show up, but it's not a priority for me. Rejection at the point of hearing.

That's the hard packed soil. And that seed is not going to lay around there forever. The birds of the air will carry it away and the opportunity is lost.

That's that first decision point. Many of us make that decision to assemble. We hear the teaching of the word of God, but we get down here to the point inside our souls, the place where only we and God can see.

And we've heard the teaching. We can tell you what was talked about. We can spit back out the facts that we've learned from the word of God.

We can give you chapter and verse. We can quote the passage. We can give you point one,

point two, and point three.

But it hasn't incorporated itself into the thinking of our soul. It has not been mixed with faith in them that heard it. Many of the Jews in Moses' day and in the generations that followed memorized the Ten Commandments.

They memorized huge portions of the law. They could quote it to you backwards and forwards. They could tell you the middle letter and how many letters there were ahead of it and how many letters there were after it.

How many commandments there were that were positive in nature. How many commandments there were that were negative in nature. They could give you all kinds of facts about the word of God.

But it did not incorporate itself into their thinking. They didn't answer that critical question then for themselves, so what? If this is what the word of God says, how should we then live? Francis Schaeffer's great book title. How should we then live? If these things are the truth of the word of God, so what? How should that change me? What difference should that make in my life? For that process to take place, we have to think beyond the Sunday morning service, beyond the Sunday night service, beyond the Wednesday service, beyond the Daily Bread article or the radio program or the other source of the word of God that we've heard.

We've got to spend other time. What would happen if the only time we spent processing food was when we were sitting at the table eating it? We would have severe digestive trauma, would we not? If the only time we ever spent processing food was when we were sitting at the table taking it in and we got up and our digestive system shut down, we'd be in a terrible mess. We wouldn't live very long.

No nourishment would get to our bodies. That assimilation, that drawing of nourishment and strength from the food is an ongoing process that permeates our entire day. And without it, we couldn't survive.

Spiritually, the same thing has to take place. This is just the meal table here this morning. This is the beginning of that process, the hearing of the word.

The critical second step is to spend some time to make it a priority. Is it important enough to us to think about the word of God on our off days like Monday afternoon, Tuesday lunchtime, Thursday morning, Saturday afternoon, to say, now what was it we were studying there in the word of God in the Gospel of Mark? Does that make any difference in the situation I'm in today? The dishes I'm washing. The car that I'm driving.

The job that I'm fulfilling. The children that I'm raising. The children and grandchildren who are off in other parts of the country that I'm writing a letter to and I'm talking to on the phone and telling

about my life and my day and so forth.

The people that I speak to when I go down to eat a meal. Does it make a difference? Is it something I think about and incorporate into my thinking? Nobody can do that for us. We have to do it ourselves and we have to decide to do it.

It's a decision that we make. That's that second type of soil that Jesus talked about. Here's the kind of soil where it receives the seed but it doesn't sink in.

It's shallow soil. There's rock just beneath the surface. It doesn't sink in where it can germinate, where it can sink its roots in and make a difference and grab hold and get an anchor, a foothold in the soil.

And because it doesn't sink in and it's just laying there on the surface, when the sun rises and the pressure hits, what happens to that seed and the plant that comes from it? It withers and it dies. It is as though the seed were never there. Pressure will show us whether or not we're making that second decision.

If we fall apart under pressure, if we're victims of worry, fear, anger, bitterness, jealousy, if we fall back on human solutions and we grasp at straws and we try one thing and another when we're under pressure, if we find ourselves disoriented and confused and uncertain about the will of God and uncertain about the future and we have no peace in our soul, you know what has happened. The seed is in the soil at a shallow level and the sun is rising and our plant is in the process of wilting. Where is the problem? The problem isn't that we can't find the right solution.

The problem is not to go back and get more seed. Sometimes when we're under panic and under pressure, that's when we want to come to church. Well, you know, I haven't been down to the church house in a couple of weeks.

My life is really going into the gutter here. Maybe I'll go back down to the church and get my batteries charged up. And we think that the answer is to get back here at stage one and hear more of the word of God.

But we've seen people do this over and over again, haven't we? When the pressure hits, why we're in church every time the doors are open and as soon as the pressure's off, well, we're not there anymore. The problem is not whether or not we're assembling and hearing. The problem is down here at stage two.

The problem is what are we doing with that word? Do we think it's important enough to listen to God's words and God's truth, to think about it at times other than the service, and to say, what difference does that make to me? What should I be doing differently in the light of this truth? Shallow soil. If we don't let that seed sink in, if we've got other things that we think are more important, as soon as the sun rises, our plant will wilt. If we succeed in hearing the word of God

and meditating on it and incorporating it into our thinking, the sun is going to rise.

There's going to be the opportunity for application. We talked last time about the fact that that same sun that rises and wilts one person's plant is the necessary energy that produces leaves and stalks and stems and seeds and fruit in another plant. A plant can't grow without sunlight.

It can't metabolize the nourishment that it receives from the soil without that very sunlight that will be wilting other plants. God allows adversity. God brings adversity into our lives to grow our plants, to nourish that seed that's in our soul, that word that's in our soul, and bring it to fruition, bring it to production.

In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. This pressure that you experience is for your benefit, it's for your growth.

It's to mature and bring to fruition that seed that is in your soil. And that's that third decision point. At the point of application, are we going to remember, this is it, this is the big test.

I've heard the information, I've studied, I know it, I believe it. Here comes the place and the time of application. Do I have the courage to trust God at this point, that what He says is really true? I've incorporated it into my thinking, now am I going to incorporate it into my actions? If we fail at this point, we're like that third type of soil that Jesus pointed out, the kind of soil that has received the seed, and the seed has gone in and sunk in its roots, and it's grown up a stalk, but at the point of producing fruit, what happened? Thorns grew up.

Other things were allowed to grow up and choke the Word and make it unfruitful. And at the point of application, if we fall back on human solutions, well, everybody else I've ever known in this situation, this is what they did. And people are going to say, I'm crazy if I don't do the same thing that everybody does in this situation.

If we fall back on human solutions, we fall back on the thorn plants. We let the thorns grow up along with the Word of God, and we say, well, the Word of God is true, and I believe it, but we've got this experiential truth here. In my experience, you've got to do this, or bad things will happen.

We tolerate and allow to grow these thorn bushes that choke out the Word, and the Word winds up being unfruitful. So we've got three decision points. We can't be hard-packed soil.

We can't be stony soil. And we can't be soil that tolerates the thorns that spring up, those distractions that choke the Word. What did Jesus say those distractions were? Do you remember? There were three that he mentioned as examples.

Those thorn bushes. The cares of this life. The deceitful allure of riches.

What are these things? Distractions in life. These are things that we believe will make us happy, that we believe will make us successful, that we believe will make our lives meaningful. What is

the allure and the deceitfulness of riches? What is it that people see in riches? Primarily they see security, confidence.

This is what I can fall back on. If everything is over here, I've still got money in the bank. I won't be broke.

I won't be homeless. I won't be without resources. Security, confidence, trust winds up being in these other things in life.

We fall back on what we've done in the past. We fall back on what we've got in the bank. We fall back on what has been promised to us by way of support.

And if it isn't there, we fall apart because that's where our confidence was. We've allowed thorns to grow up and choke the Word. So we've got to concentrate and be aware of these three decision points.

We can't fool ourselves and say, well, I've been in church every Sunday. Why is my life a mess? We're only looking at decision point number one. Or we say, I believe the Word of God and I trust it, but I just seem to fail every time the pressure hits.

We've got a problem either there at number two of really assimilating the Word of God and understanding it and incorporating it in our thinking, or number three, the point of application. So Jesus has pictured this for us in a wonderful way in this parable of the sower and the seed and the soils. And he says there is soil that produces fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold.

This is the victorious life that Eva mentioned earlier. This is making our life count after salvation, bearing that fruit that God has planted us as a field in order to bear. That's why we're here after salvation.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, we think sometimes, if right at the point of accepting Christ as our Savior, God would just transport us to the heavenly realms. Why do we have to stay here in this fallen world? Why do we have to be here where we're able to sin and able to fail and we suffer and we go through the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune here on the earth? Why does God leave us here? It's well within His power. At the point that we accept Christ, our personal rapture takes place and we go to be with Him.

It's because we are that field. God desires to plant that seed in us and have it sprout and bear fruit. That's our purpose.

If we understand this parable, we'll understand all the parables because we'll understand God's purpose for our life. In order to understand that purpose, one of the important things is to understand what that fruit is. What exactly is that fruit that is born on that plant that springs from the seed? What is the relationship between the Word of God, which is that seed, and the Holy

Spirit? Are they not hand in hand? Are they not equal measures? Doesn't Ephesians say that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God? My favorite picture of this that I've shared with you before is epoxy.

You've got one tube that has the resin and you have the other tube that has the hardener. Either one by themselves gives you a sticky kind of smelly, gooey mess. But when you mix them together in equal proportions, you get the strongest glue available.

It is useful for dozens of things. You can glue your hat to the underside of a bridge. You can mend china.

You can glue airplanes together. They use epoxies to glue together some of these modern jets and things. That epoxy is the strongest glue we know how to make.

It's made from equal parts of two substances that by themselves are not very useful at all. And the presence of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit, to us as believers, without exposing ourselves to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit has no voice. He has nothing in our soul to remind us of, to lead us into.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth. If we refuse to hear the truth, the Holy Spirit is not going to communicate it to us verbally. He says, look, it's in writing.

You've got a Bible. You've got preachers. You've got a radio.

You've got tape recorders. You've got multiple sources in this day and age of the truth, and that's what the Holy Spirit works with. On the other hand, if we ignore the ministry of the Holy Spirit and his enabling, empowering, the insight that he gives us into the truth, we can become great academic students of the Word of God and be completely unfruitful.

We can quote chapter and verse. We can tell you all kinds of wonderful facts about the Scripture. We can rattle off theological documents until we're blue in the face and our audience has left.

But without the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit that makes it real and accomplishes that assimilation in our soul is meaningless. How can we lose the ministry of the Holy Spirit in that way? The Bible tells us if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. If I am unable to forgive others, Jesus said, if you can't forgive others, your Father in Heaven will not forgive you.

Unconfessed sin, unresolved sin in our souls. God the Holy Spirit is not going to wade through that muck and that mire in our souls. 1 John 1.9 says if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Part of that meditation process down here at stage 2 is looking at the Word of God and saying, I've got error in my life. I'm bearing a grudge here. There's this person that I just can't stand to be in the same room with.

This person that I'm constantly angry with, that I'm impatient with, that I look down on, that I find fault with. I don't like their habits. I don't like their way of speaking.

That discord in our soul, that sinful attitude, as long as that's there, that's going to limit what the Holy Spirit can do for us. We've got to use that Word of God that has come in through hearing and analyze ourselves. What does James say? We've got to look into that mirror of the perfect law of liberty and see ourselves as we are and make a change.

If our hair needs parting and combing, let's look into the mirror and part it and comb it. If we've got dirt on our face, let's confess that sin to the Lord and give the Holy Spirit free reign in our soul to use the Word of God and that balance of the ministry of the Spirit and the presence of the Word of God is a dynamic engine. That's where the power of God is.

We know that God, the Holy Spirit, is the power by which the plan of God is executed. It is true even for Jesus Christ Himself. The miracles that He did were done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ Himself set an example for us. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures and He responded to the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit in His humanity. And that's the pattern for us.

He is our example to seek and encourage the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, the rightful ministry, not gibbering and not trying to heal one another and so forth, but to assimilate and take advantage of the Word of God that's in our soul. The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the very center of our being, the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow. The Word of God is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Now why does all of this take place inside our heart? Why is it that that's where the Holy Spirit resides? And that's where the Word of God resides, because that's where the truth is born. That's where the motivations, the thoughts and intents of the heart are formed. Jesus said, it isn't what you do on the outside that defiles you, it's what comes out from inside that defiles you.

Eating without washing your hands doesn't make you a sinner. It's from inside the heart that come envying. Envy.

Top of the list of sins, envy. Wishing that we had the situation that somebody else has. Wishing that our circumstances were different than they are.

That we didn't have the sunshine shining on us that God has put in our particular life for us to grow. I don't like that sunshine. I wish I could kind of put up some shade here.

Maybe I'll grow a little thorn bush here and get some shade from that pressure and that sunshine. I'd like to be like that plant over there. Envy.

Jesus listed that as one of the things that springs from the inside. That's a thorn bush. That's

something that chokes off the production of the Word of God.

Bitterness. Do we look at some episode in our current circumstances or our past life and say, you know, I've never been able to get over that. That just really has chapped me ever since it happened.

And every time I see this particular person it reminds me of them. And we feel that root of bitterness springing up in our soul. Why is it called a root of bitterness? Because it's taking root in that very soil that's supposed to be producing that fruit from God's Word.

The soul is the battleground. The soul is the field. The soul is the place where the seed takes root.

And the things that we do are simply reflections of what's going on in our soul. One of the most common things that happens for believers today, and probably believers of every age, think about that picture again. Here's the hearing of the Word.

Here's that critical loop down below where we make a decision point about whether or not it's going to change us on the inside. And then we come back up to the top and over here is that point of application. The most common problem that we as believers have today is we don't want to take the time to go through this loop.

We want to jump right from hearing to applying it. And you know what happens? There's a name for this. If you jump from number one to number three there's a name for it.

It's called legalism. It's called seeing a standard in a superficial way and trying to meet it in a superficial way. This was Israel's problem.

Israel saw the law. God said take care of your neighbor. Treat your neighbor just like you want to be treated.

Don't leave an open hole where his animals can fall in. Don't murder him. Don't poke out his eye.

Don't do this and don't do that. Have a good attitude toward your neighbor. Have a good attitude toward God.

Worship the Lord. Bring Him a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Take the firstborn of your flock, the perfect animal, the perfect one-year-old bull, and bring it to the Lord and sacrifice it as an expression of what's in your soul.

What happened in Israel? Right away they said, oh, so all I have to do is take an animal down and sacrifice it? Well, here's an animal. Jump over here and sacrifice it. And it didn't reflect something in the soul.

It didn't reflect appreciation for God and His grace. It became a ritual without reality. God says do

a sacrifice.

I can do that. God says church attendance is part of being a good Christian? Well, I can attend. Bing! I'll make the decision to go down.

I'm there. God says witnessing is a part of the production of the Christian life? Fine. He says witness, I'll witness.

And we don't stop and think about the truth that is involved. We don't stop and study the Scriptures that talk about the heart of man and talk about the responsibility for seeking, the responsibility for respecting the privacy of others, and recognizing the very fact that we can't make this decision number two down here for someone else. We can present the Gospel.

Billy Graham has just done the most incredible job of presenting the Gospel that the world has ever seen. More people heard the Gospel in a single night a week or so ago than have ever heard the Gospel in history. But you know the great thing about Billy Graham's ministry? He goes to a public place.

He goes to the market square and he proclaims the Word of God. Billy Graham does not stick his foot in the door and force his way into someone's life and say, now sit here while I tell you the Gospel and I want you to get down here and believe it and trust it. He puts it out and makes the opportunity available to hear the truth.

But the Word of God teaches us that these three decision points are our responsibility. Nobody can make those decisions for us. We have to do it ourselves.

And if we say no at the point of hearing, there is no human force on earth that can change that mind. And if we try, if we coerce, if we put pressure on someone, if we try to lay a guilt trip on them, if we do things that have a string attached to them, we do something for them and we say, well you return the favor by coming to church with me. What are we doing? We're trying to force that person's hand here at stage one.

And the Bible says we can't do it. Christianity today has disregarded that truth of the Word of God. We are so rightfully concerned about the lost that we have disregarded what the Word of God teaches.

And we can't make that decision to hear for another person. What does God say? You will seek me and find me when? When you search for me with all your heart. It doesn't say you will seek me and find me when someone drags you kicking and screaming into the church.

It doesn't say you will seek me and find me when someone browbeats you or lays a guilt trip on you or coerces you in some fashion to get under the teaching of the Word of God. Each human being has the responsibility to make decision number one to hear. Each human being has the

responsibility to make decision number two to think about, meditate on, assimilate, make the object of faith that seed.

Each human being has the responsibility to go on to step three and put that into application. And we can't short-circuit that system. We can't take over the job of the Holy Spirit and decide that we will now convict people of sin.

Let me make you feel bad about your habits. Let me make you feel bad about your lifestyle. Let me point out the errors of your way.

That's the job of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said what? When the Holy Spirit comes He will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. That's the Holy Spirit's job.

Do we really want to go in and elbow the Holy Spirit out of the way and try to do His job in our human energy and our human viewpoint and our human strength? Do we really think that we know when a person is ready to receive the Word? Do we think that we have the knowledge of what's going on in that person's soul? Probably not. God the Holy Spirit knows and if we are ready if we have been doing that set of decisions ourselves, if we have the Word of God in our soul and we're waiting here at the point of application, we will be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks us about the hope that is in us. Now why would someone ask us about a hope that is in us? It must be visible in some way.

The thing that people should see when they look at us is a great confident expectation. When people look at us, they should see an inner life and an inner peace and an inner joy that attracts them. And we don't have to use coercion.

We don't have to browbeat and bait and switch in one thing or another to try to attract people to the Gospel and attract people to a life of faith. There is no greater advertisement for a relationship with God than a relationship with God. If we ourselves have a genuine life with God, if we're making those three decisions and the Word of God is bearing fruit in our life, people who seek the Lord are going to see it and they're going to want to do the same thing.

God will give us opportunities to minister in a genuine way to people who are seeking and who are ready to follow those same decisions in their own life. That's the production. The production is in our soul.

It's not measured by how many people attended the service or how many people attend Kids Crusade or how many people attend Wednesday night prayer meeting. The measurement is made in the individual soul of each believer. Is there love? Is there joy? Is there peace? Can we measure ourselves by that standard on a daily basis? Even though I'm enduring physical suffering, even though I'm laboring under physical limitations, even though I've got pressures crowding me around on every side, I've got financial pressure, I've got family pressure, I've got circumstantial pressure, I just have a peace in my soul.

I have a joy because I know that this is the sunshine shining in my life to grow my seeds and make production. This is my opportunity to trust the Lord. This is my turn at bat in the plan of God and I'm grateful for it.

I wouldn't want to be back with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat as Teddy Roosevelt said. We're not on the sidelines. God has put us in life and we're here for this brief time and this is our opportunity to bear fruit in our individual soul.

A person like that is attractive. We'll see soon in 1 Samuel the relationship between Jonathan and David. Jonathan didn't say, you know, I'm really short on friends.

I think I'm going to go out and try to recruit me a new friend. You know, the palace is kind of empty these days and I just don't have anybody to really have good rapport with. I'm just going to traipse up and down Israel and find me a good friend.

It wasn't the case at all. Jonathan was a man who made those three decisions and had the fruit of the Word of God in his soul. He went up against the Philistines with nothing but an armor bearer and killed the first twenty and God honored him by bringing an earthquake and driving the rest of them away.

David was a similar man who loved the Lord and trusted him when he faced the lion and the bear and faced Goliath in the field there. And Jonathan and David were attracted to one another and their souls were knit together. Why? Because that fruit was in their soul.

There is an attraction there. There is a peace and a joy and a love that is created by that fruit in our soul that is attractive. That's what each of us as human beings were built to have.

So Jesus' point in teaching us this parable is to ask us the question, what kind of soil are we going to be? If we're a thirty-fold or a sixty-fold believer, what happened? How come we're not a hundred-fold believer? Did we fail up here at the point of hearing? Did we not take advantage of opportunities to hear the teaching of the Word of God that were available? We have three or four opportunities a week here through this church. We have Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday night and there's a Friday night Bible class. Everyone is welcome to attend.

There are great teachers on the radio. There are great teachers in books. There are great lessons for life in the books from the radio Bible class.

There are teachers over at Goliath. There are 59 other churches in Tahlequah. And it doesn't hurt my feelings.

If you find a good teacher and you can learn the Word of God, please go. I thank the Lord for anybody that's teaching the truth of the Word of God that will benefit a believer's soul. If you can find a good teacher, by all means go and hear.

That's step one. You cannot be a hundred-fold believer and not expose yourself to the scattering of the seed. Why do we feel like we don't know the will of God? Why do we feel like our prayer life is ineffective? Why do we get confused under pressure and wonder what the answer is? Why do we go to God in prayer and say, Lord, it seems like I've been praying for this for a long time and nothing's happening.

What's the problem? We say, well, maybe I'm not praying the right prayer. Maybe I'm not holding my mouth right. Maybe I ought to be... What does the Word of God say? If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

My prayer life will be ineffective if I'm not letting the Word of God be a critic of the thoughts and intents of my heart. Now, how can the Word of God step on my toes and show me where I'm wrong if I don't assemble and hear it? If I'm not faithful to expose myself to the scattering of that seed, it's kind of silly to expect a bumper crop without planting any seed or planting only a little seed. So we've got to analyze ourselves.

Paul said, judge yourself. Analyze yourself. See if you are in the faith.

Are we exposing ourselves to the teaching? Is it a priority? Is it more important than other things in life? Once we've heard that teaching, do we take the time to think about it? Is it important to us or did we just go through the motions? We hear it and say, well, that was fine, I agree with it, but I don't really think about it. I don't think, well, so what? What does that mean to me? And then when the sun shines and the pressure is on and it's time to act in an extraordinary way, do we have the courage to do it? Do we have the faith in God to believe His promises and trust His Word? The Bible says, the one who trusts in the Lord will never be put to shame. We're taking that course here in our church.

A lot of churches in our situation that aren't very numerous might engage in a lot of human solutions to that problem. We might go on a big marketing campaign. I attended a church once where they got some marketing people in and they had a seminar on how to do cold calling, how to run through the phone book and call every number in the book.

And if somebody doesn't seem responsive after you've talked for the first 30 seconds, you just hang up and move on to the next. Does that line up with the Word of God? Have we taken the time to stop and think? Have we taken this last 2,000 years of church history and done with it what the Pharisees did with their 1,000 years of having the Mosaic Law and the books of the prophets? Have we developed a form of Christianity that doesn't necessarily correspond with Scripture anymore? Have we fallen for marketing? Have we fallen for strength in numbers? Have we fallen for the idea that it's human energy, it's human strength, it's human conviction, human pressure that gets the job done? We need to expose ourselves to the Word of God. You can scan the New Testament as I have to your heart's content and you will not find any reference to Paul asking a church, how big is your group? Have you lost anyone lately? Have you been out

canvassing your city? Even the synagogues never did this.

The Jewish synagogues never went out and recruited to raise their numbers, but somehow this has been incorporated into our idea of Christianity today. If you're not numerous, you're not faithful. If you're not numerous, you're not doing what God wants you to do.

If you're not numerous, you're not prepared, you're not equipped. Nowhere in the Word of God are numbers a standard. In fact, just the reverse.

Think about Gideon. Think about Jonathan. Think about David.

Think about those periods in Scripture where that principle that Jonathan spoke to his armor bearer, he said, God can save by many or by few. What a great thing to be one of that 300 with Gideon or that one armor bearer with Jonathan who goes in and trusts God for the victory and recognizes that God is still alive and well. God still is active in our community.

God the Holy Spirit is still convicting of sin. He didn't get tired and hand off that job to us. We've got to get back into the Word of God.

We need to expose ourselves to it as often as possible. If we miss a service, if we miss an opportunity to hear the teaching, what did we think was more important? What is it that we thought was so important that we didn't feel like we needed the seed? Do we think we've already gotten all the seed we can hold? We don't need to be replanted. We don't need to be refreshed.

We don't need to be reminded or encouraged. We don't need to be instructed or corrected or rebuked. Are we so old and been in church so long that we don't need that anymore? Probably not.

We will have tribulation in this world. That's the test. It will show us what we're like under pressure.

If we respond with trust and faith in the Word of God, if we wait on the Lord, if we stand still and watch the deliverance of the Lord, we will be bearing that fruit in our souls. And people that have that fruit in their souls are the people that God is going to look to first when there is an opportunity to do the overt things, to invite someone to church, to share the gospel, to do those things that we associate with a life of blessing and production. But doing it this way, we don't short-circuit.

We don't try to jump from number one to number three. We don't think, well, how much do you have to know to share the gospel? I don't need to go to church. I just need to try to get out there and evangelize.

That's not God's plan. That's not God's program. That's not the way Jesus communicates it here in this parable.

We need to analyze ourselves. That's our challenge this morning. And that's our opportunity this morning.

This isn't like a brow-beating and a dressing down and like we're not doing what we're supposed to. This is a great opportunity. The sun is shining here in Tahlequah Bible Church.

We have the seed. We have the opportunity to incorporate it into our thinking, and we have the opportunity to bear much fruit and for our fruit to remain. Let's close now in a word of prayer.

We know that just as the seed is scattered and the opportunity is there for us as believers to respond to that teaching, to incorporate it into our thought life, and to be ready when occasion arises to put it into application, we know that that same principle is true for those who are lost. For someone to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, they have to hear the Word. What does it say in Romans? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? They have to hear the gospel.

And in this day and age, we have the wonderful technologies and the presence of the gospel. The gospel has been broadcast in every language, in every country. It's available in every community.

It's an opportunity to look at that truth and respond to it, to listen to it, to incorporate it into our thinking and say, Yes, I am a sinner. Yes, I do want to have a life of meaning and purpose. I want a relationship with God the Father.

And we can do that simply by trusting in Jesus Christ, by looking at the truth of His sacrifice on the cross. He made us acceptable to God the Father. We are unrighteous.

We cannot meet God's standard no matter how hard we try, but Jesus met that standard. And His sacrifice is available on our behalf. And all we have to do is accept it, to trust it by faith.

Many of us have made that decision. We have responded to that opportunity. And as a result, we have the life of God springing up inside us.

If you've never made that decision this morning, I encourage you to think about Jesus Christ and the expression of love that He made in offering Himself on our behalf. And simply by trusting Him, our salvation is assured. And once we are entered into the family of God, we live by that same faith.

We looked at the work of Christ and trusted in it, and we're saved. Now as believers, we can look at the work of God and trust in it. And our lives can be delivered.

Our lives can be productive and bear fruit and reflect the glory of God. Father, we thank You this morning for the truth of Your Word. We thank You for the ministry of God the Holy Spirit who translates it into terms that we can understand and gives us the ability to remember it and to put it

into application.

We pray that that balance will be present in each of our souls, that God the Holy Spirit will use that sharp sword within us to transform us by the renewing of our minds and to equip us and prepare us for every good work. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.